



European  
University  
Institute

ROBERT  
SCHUMAN  
CENTRE FOR  
ADVANCED  
STUDIES

Issue 2021/05  
February 2021

POLICY

BRIEF



Middle  
East  
Directions

## *How Sirte Became a Hotbed of the Libyan Conflict*

*Omar Al-Hawari*<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

The birthplace and former stronghold of the late Muammar Qadhafi, the coastal city of Sirte, was stigmatised and marginalised following the fall of the regime in October 2011. However, since 2019 it has again become the epicentre of Libya's domestic and international conflict. How can this sudden change in the strategic importance of the city be explained?

Based on numerous interviews with key actors from Sirte and on both warring sides, this paper analyses how the strategic importance of Sirte has evolved since Haftar's LAAF military offensive on Tripoli in April 2019 and how the city has now become central to the Libyan conflict and its resolution through international diplomatic efforts.

### **Introduction**

The city of Sirte, located in the middle of the Libyan littoral and at the western edge of the 'Oil Crescent,' was the theatre of the final battle of the 2011 civil war, but after being 'liberated' by the revolutionary forces in October it faded into the margins of Libya's transition. The city was militarily defeated, socially marginalised and politically excluded. However, since 2019 it has again become the epicentre of Libya's domestic and international conflict. How can this sudden change in the strategic importance of the city be explained?

The birthplace and former stronghold of the late Muammar Qadhafi, Sirte, and its inhabitants were marginalised and stigmatised following the fall of the regime in October 2011. Left devastated after weeks of shelling and street fighting, the city was still regarded by the new authorities as a stronghold of former regime supporters and the symbol of the 'defeated' in the civil war. The local communities had been vanquished militarily and their leadership significantly weakened both socially and politically. They were also excluded

1. Omar Al-Hawari is a telecommunications engineer. He has worked as a researcher with the Libya Initiative at the Middle East Directions Programme of the European University Institute since 2018. His work has focused on social and political dynamics in the city of Sirte. His research interests also include tribal politics, mediation and reconciliation processes.



from participation in the new political order, which they strongly opposed as foreign-imposed and viewed as the cause of the country's destruction.

This environment offered a fertile ground for violent extremist groups, which rapidly converged on and took control of the city.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of 2015, the Islamic State organisation (IS) officially announced its control of the city. Sirte became the capital of IS's 'Tripoli Province' (*wilayat trablus*) without facing opposition from either of the rival governments established in Tripoli and the eastern city of al-Bayda.

Sirte and its inhabitants remained abandoned to their fate until spring 2016. When IS forces attempted to expand westward towards Misrata and Bani Walid, the Government of National Accord (GNA) – established in Tripoli in March 2016 as a result of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) – was forced to react and defend the area. After several months of fighting and with significant international support, the GNA forces finally retook control of Sirte in November 2016. However, despite the heavy price paid by GNA-affiliated forces during the fighting, government support for the city remained very low and the city marginalised. As for the troops affiliated with the General Command of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), they did not take part in the battle, instead confining themselves to maintaining control over the Oil Crescent east of Sirte.

Circumstances started to change when Haftar's LAAF launched its offensive on Tripoli in April 2019. This positioned Sirte along fault lines at the geographical, social and political levels, and its strategic importance for all the parties in the conflict increased dramatically.<sup>3</sup> It took several stages from the final quarter of 2019, when the LAAF demonstrated interest in taking control of Sirte, for the city to become a hotbed of the intra-Libyan conflict and the international one. After surprisingly falling to the LAAF forces in a few hours in January 2020, Sirte has gradually become the conflict's main frontline,

and a key issue in the current military and political negotiations.

## The Surprise Fall of Sirte to the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (January 2020)

The LAAF's interest in controlling Sirte began in September 2019. The city was considered important for its strategic location and proximity to the Oil Crescent, as well as for the supply lines of the LAAF forces, which were vying for control of Tripoli. In September 2019, unidentified drones supporting the LAAF attacked several sensitive sites of the GNA-affiliated Sirte Protection Force (SPF), which had controlled the city since 2015.<sup>4</sup> The operations room of the SPF, its southern and eastern gates, and the headquarters of the Manmade River Authority were subjected to multiple air strikes, which opened the way for a ground attack on 6 January 2020.<sup>5</sup> The offensive resulted in the destruction of the SPF defence lines and its operations and communications centre, and a landslide victory for the LAAF. The city was seized with almost no losses.

The LAAF considered its control over Sirte an important strategic victory which contributed to strengthening its domestic and international position. Militarily, Sirte represented the best fulcrum for an attack on the city of Misrata, the forces of which represented a threat to LAAF forces in southern Tripoli. With the LAAF in Sirte, Misratan forces would have to split to defend either Tripoli or Misrata. Control over Sirte also ensured better supply lines between Benghazi and the Al-Jufra Airbase, located 250 km away from the city, which was used by the LAAF and its international allies to support their military operations to the west. At the economic level, with the fall of Sirte the GNA lost access to the Oil Crescent, which accounts for 80% of Libya's oil exports.

Some groups in Sirte which represented supporters of the former regime and Salafist armed units (the 604<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, the Central Security Force) played an

2. Collombier, Virginie, 'Sirte's Tribes under the Islamic State. From Civil War to Global Jihadism,' in Collombier, Virginie and Roy, Olivier (eds), *Tribes and Global Jihadism*, Hurst, 2017, pp. 153-180.

3. Al-Hawari, Omar, 'The City in the Middle. Fragile Stability and Future Opportunities in Libya's Sirte,' Policy Brief, Middle East Directions, December 2019, <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/65610>.

4. Exclusive statement by the spokesperson for the SPF to Sputnik News, 16 September 2019, [https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab\\_ world/201909161042891180-ي-وج-فصق-ارج-اجي-رج-18-ون-اليتق-م-ل-ع-ال-ارابخ-ال-ا-84526/](https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab_ world/201909161042891180-ي-وج-فصق-ارج-اجي-رج-18-ون-اليتق-م-ل-ع-ال-ارابخ-ال-ا-84526/)

5. "The Libyan army controls the strategic city of Sirte" (in Arabic), The Independent Arabia, 6 January 2020, <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/84526-ي-وج-فصق-ارج-اجي-رج-18-ون-اليتق-م-ل-ع-ال-ارابخ-ال-ا-84526/>



important role in the success of the LAAF's operation. Some figureheads of the former regime participated in the attack on Sirte, such as Major General Salem Deryaq al-Firjani, considered one of the Firjan tribe's most prominent military leader. It is also likely that Salafist leader Abd al-Ati Amhalhal, who travelled to Benghazi in December 2019, played a role in leaking important intelligence regarding the weaknesses of the GNA-affiliated Sirte Protection Force (SPF),<sup>6</sup> of which he was a key figure. Whether for political or social reasons, these groups wagered that the success of the LAAF would expand their influence.

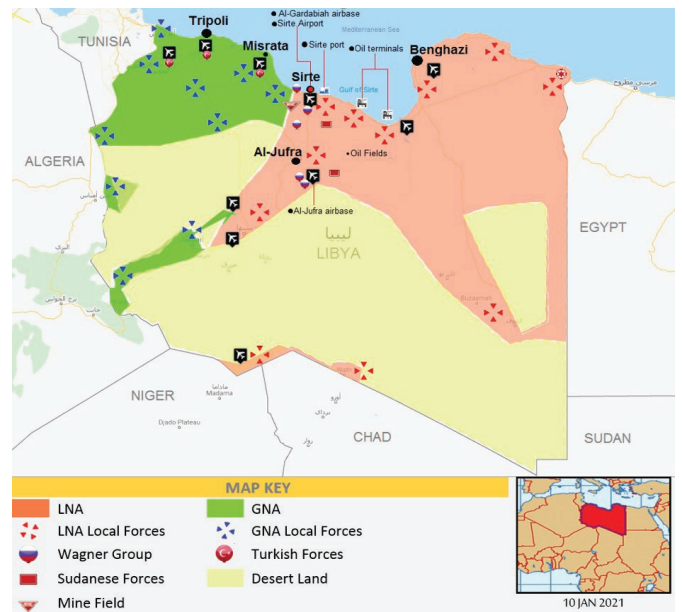
The SPF – which were affiliated with the GNA's Central Military Region and responsible for protecting Sirte – made no effort to maintain control over the city. Over the period from February 2019 to January 2020, most of the SPF fighters and brigades were mobilised to defend Tripoli, as the capital was considered to be of higher political importance. The SPF is comprised of several different brigades from Misrata and has more than 3,000 fighters. In January 2020, despite attempts by some armed groups such as Umm al-Ma'arik Brigade from Sirte to repel LAAF attacks on the Eastern Axis, the withdrawal of the South Axis force of the SPF led to the collapse of its already weak fortifications. This led to the Eastern Axis force being exposed to attacks, forcing it to withdraw believing it was being attacked from within Sirte by supporters of the LAAF.<sup>7</sup> However, the force later realised that the decision to withdraw was taken on an order from the SPF.

The withdrawal of the SPF from Sirte and the lack of military action in the city raised many questions. Despite the availability of information and reports, and a statement by the LAAF on 22 December 2019 regarding its intention to attack Sirte, the GNA Central Military Region failed to provide the SPF with the necessary support.<sup>8</sup> Several sources indicate that the LAAF did not find any military equipment or ammunition in Sirte on its capture. The lack of a proper operations room ready for armed conflict resulted in confusion within the SPF. The force had been performing routine security duties in the city but it was unprepared to repel a military offensive.

6. Al-Hawari, op. cit.  
 7. Author interviews with SPF personnel who participated in the battle, January 2020.  
 8. Video statement from the SPF sit-in protesting the GNA's non-payment of salaries and lack of support for their forces, 5 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXjqG4F8o64>.

It is possible that the withdrawal of the GNA forces from Sirte was a deliberate decision. In contrast to Tripoli and Misrata, the city was not considered a military priority for the GNA in January 2020. The fall of either of the former could mean losing the war. The length of the military supply lines between Sirte and Misrata amounted to 250 km, making the decision to defend Sirte a difficult one, as it could lead to the dispersal of GNA forces and to exposing them to attacks over a vast geographical area, necessitating the use of air power and contributing to weakening other military axes.

The fall of Sirte had a negative impact on the economy of the GNA. It allowed the LAAF to play the oil card. On 17 January 2020, only 12 days into the LAAF's control of the city, LAAF loyalists shut down the export ports located east of Sirte,<sup>9</sup> supporting the LAAF military operations by using oil to put pressure on the GNA. In April 2020 the GNA was forced to implement austerity measures such as cutting salaries funded by the public treasury,<sup>10</sup> while foreign currency rates witnessed a rise of more than 50%, leading to inflation across Libya. This in turn contributed to putting more burdens on the shoulders of the GNA.



*The strategic importance of Sirte and different controlling local and international parties in Libya until December 2020*

9. “The National Army closes the oil ports in Libya” (in Arabic), Middle East Online, 18 January 2020, <https://middle-east-online.com/اي-بي-ل-ي-ف-ظف-ن-ل-ا-ن-ا-وم-ق-ل-غ-ي-ن-ط-ول-ا-ش-ي-ج-ل/>.  
 10. Presidential Council Decision No. 270 of 2020 on reducing the salaries of public employees, 12 April 2020.



## Sirte: A New Frontline (June 2020)

In June, seven months after launching its military offensive, Haftar's LAAF had not yet managed to take control of Tripoli. The major military developments that took place in western Libya and in the capital<sup>11</sup> had a significant impact on the importance that both parties in the conflict placed on Sirte. Both the fall of western cities to GNA forces following increased Turkish support and the withdrawal of the Russian Wagner Group forces<sup>12</sup> supporting the LAAF from southern Tripoli on 6 June 2020 made Sirte a frontline. For the GNA, the city became a defence line for western Libya and a gateway to control the Oil Crescent. For the LAAF and the Wagner forces, it also represented the most important line of defence for the Al-Jufra airbase and the Oil Crescent, which was instrumentalised by the LAAF to pressure the GNA.

After the LAAF forces withdrew from western Libya, the strategy of the Turkish-backed GNA focused on recapturing Sirte. Unexpectedly, a GNA attack on 6 June 2020 was repelled by LAAF-affiliated forces.<sup>13</sup> GNA forces composed of the Sirte and Misrata Brigades haphazardly advanced towards the city, only to be met with aggressive resistance from the Salafist 604<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade and 110<sup>th</sup> Brigade,<sup>14</sup> now both affiliated with the LAAF,<sup>15</sup> and supported by unidentified, most probably foreign,<sup>16</sup> air

cover. The GNA attackers were forced to retreat about 100 km west of Sirte after losing 32 fighters, as opposed to 6 fighters for the LAAF. The air forces that intervened to curb the attack seemed so massive and precise that they were able to cover an area of more than 80 km in length. However, the air support clearly aimed to only threaten the GNA forces rather than destroy them. The attempt by Turkish-backed GNA forces to recapture Sirte constituted an important shift in the importance of the city in the conflict.

The risk that Haftar's forces might collapse represented a threat to the interests of his international allies, mainly Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The strategic and differing interests of these powers are, however, closely linked with the LAAF's continued control of military bases, seaports and the Oil Crescent near Sirte. This was evidenced by the public appearance of the Russian Wagner Group in Sirte on 7 June 2020 and the way its fighters moved towards the frontlines and took full control of Qardabiya Airbase and Sirte Airport, indicating high Russian interest in controlling the city. The Egyptian government also officially announced that it considered Sirte a red line,<sup>17</sup> signalling its readiness to act militarily to protect Egypt's national security in the event that the Turkish-backed GNA forces tried to attack the city. All of this represented an unprecedented increase in the city's importance to the countries involved in the Libyan war.

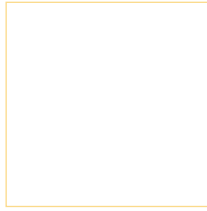
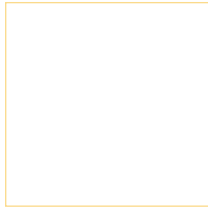
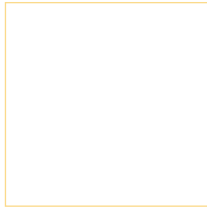
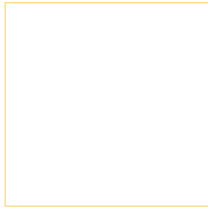
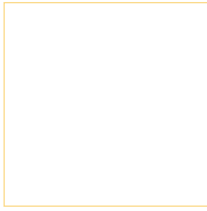
The Wagner forces did not trust the GNA, which still showed interest in capturing Sirte, to hold their advance. As soon as the Russian-backed forces were stationed on the western (Wadi Jarf) and southwestern (Qardabiya base) frontlines on 7 June 2020, they began laying mines, installing air defence systems and erecting berms exceeding 50 km in length on each axis.<sup>18</sup> This made the Turkish-backed GNA recalculate the risk. The widened scope of the military dispute over the Sirte region seemed close to sparking a large-scale conflict in the region with the heavy international presence primarily of the two dominant players, Russia and Turkey.

11. "Quick collapse of Haftar's forces drives them out of the east. GNA promises more" (in Arabic), Arabic Post, 6 January 2020, <https://arabicpost.net/رابطا/2020/06/06/رايانهال/عراسمتمل-رايانهال/عراسمتمل-رايانهال>.
12. The Wagner Group is one of the private military companies supported by the Russian government. It is estimated that there are around 2,000 personnel affiliated with Wagner and supporting the LAAF. Evidence of their presence in Libya has appeared since 2019.
13. "Libyan Army forces repel an attack by the GNA forces in Sirte" (in Arabic), Russia Today, 6 June 2020, [https://arabic.rt.com/middle\\_east/1121831-شيجال-تاوق-دهاش-ايبي-ل-تارس-بي-ف-ق-افول-ةم-وك-ح-تاوق-ل-ام-وج-ه-دصت-بي-بي-ل-ل-ا](https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/1121831-شيجال-تاوق-دهاش-ايبي-ل-تارس-بي-ف-ق-افول-ةم-وك-ح-تاوق-ل-ام-وج-ه-دصت-بي-بي-ل-ل-ا).
14. 110th Brigade: a brigade affiliated with the LAAF, established in December 2017 by Resolution No. 401. It includes a diverse group of civilians and military personnel in its ranks, mostly from the Furjan tribe in Sirte. The public and media often confuse 110th Brigade with another the 210th Brigade. The 210th Brigade was established under the leadership of Colonel Gaddafi Al-Sadai Al-Furjani, who was killed in an airstrike by the GNA forces in Al-Hisha.
15. Author interviews with military commanders of the 110<sup>th</sup> Brigade, June 2020.
16. Author interviews with field commanders of the GNA forces who participated in the offensive, June 2020.

17. Egypt's parliament approves troop deployment to Libya, Aljazeera, 20 July 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/20/egypts-parliament-approves-troop-deployment-to-libya>.
18. "Sirte mines. Suspended murder" (in Arabic), report, Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Human Rights, 13 August 2020, <https://euromedmonitor.org/ar/article/3728-ذيفنل-تاوق-ق-و-ع-م-ل-ت-ق-ل-ت-س-م-اغ-ل-دي-دج-ري-رقت>.







of the initiatives proposed. They hoped that it would help spare the city further armed conflict and contribute to reviving its deteriorating economy.<sup>31</sup> Some of the residents also hoped<sup>32</sup> that the UN mission's increased focus on the city would reduce the violations that had been committed by secular and religious armed groups for nearly 9 years.

*Challenges in the implementation of the security arrangements*

The fact that no influential actors from Sirte attended the 5+5 Commission welcoming ceremony on 10 November 2020 raised many questions regarding the future implementation of the security arrangements. Despite the role played by the Sirte Steering Committee and a few local figures who prepared the Committee's official headquarters,<sup>33</sup> the security forces which attended the ceremony were mostly from outside Sirte. This is unlike what had happened in Ghadames, where the municipal council officially welcomed the members of the JMC.

The Wagner forces' control of Sirte airport impeded its use by the Commission's GNA representatives, who had to land at the Ras Lanuf Airport to the east of Sirte and use a 180 km-long road to reach the city and attend the meeting at the Committee headquarters. These facts raised many questions about the relationship between the Wagner forces and the LAAF, on the one hand, and about the relationship between the LAAF and the loyalist population of Sirte, on the other.

These obstacles did not discourage the members of the Commission from moving forward to hold their

first two-day meeting in Sirte. Its outcomes were to be implemented in two phases. The first phase included the opening of the coastal road linking Sirte to Tripoli, returning the local forces from the two camps to their bases and withdrawing foreign mercenaries supporting the two camps to Tripoli and Benghazi respectively. The second phase would start immediately after the end of the first phase, and it included a complete evacuation of foreign mercenaries from Libya.<sup>34</sup>

Implementation was therefore tied to the extent of the control exerted by the Commission's members over foreign forces. Most of what was agreed during the meetings in Geneva, Ghadames and Sirte was closely related to the need to evacuate foreign forces from Sirte and Al-Jufra: the Russian Wagner forces and the so-called 'Janjaweed' mercenaries, the sole foreign forces present on the frontlines. As such, the success of the first phase hinged on Russia's commitment to secure the withdrawal of the Wagner forces. This was especially crucial since multiple military commanders in the GNA have made it clear that opening the coastal road could only take place following the withdrawal of the Wagner forces from the Jarf and Qubeiba areas.

Implementation of the security arrangements was also directly tied to the behaviour of the LAAF-affiliated forces in Sirte. The LAAF General Command did not seem fully confident of the Russian position vis-à-vis the outcomes of the 5+5 Commission talks. The precedent of the Wagner forces withdrawing from southern Tripoli in June 2020 causing the collapse of the LAAF forces made them unpredictable allies. As a precautionary step, the LAAF began preparing some locations in Sirte to be used as headquarters by loyal brigades in case Russia's agreement with the outcomes of the JMC's work actually leads to the withdrawal of the Wagner forces. For example, the LAAF General Command has started preparing headquarters for the Salafist Tariq Bin Ziyad Brigade in view of its establishment in the city. Additionally, it has also entrusted Sirte's Central Security force, a police institution affiliated with the Salafist 604<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, with protecting the JMC's headquarters during the Commission meeting in Sirte. This strategy aims to guarantee an armed support

31. The closure of the coastal road connecting Sirte with western Libya has had a dramatic impact on the economic situation in the city. Not only does Sirte depend commercially on international ports in the west but public institutions are also in dire need of being reconnected with the GNA to resume public services, including paying salaries and providing medicine, which makes the southern roads extremely dangerous and difficult. The direct and currently closed road between Sirte and Tripoli is only 450 km long but the alternative road from Sirte to Al-Jufra to Bani Walid to Tripoli is more than 1,000 km, not to mention insecurity in some areas such as Shwayrif, where travellers are routinely subjected to armed robbery.

32. Author conversation with young men from Sirte who moved their businesses to Tripoli and Misrata following the deterioration of the security situation in Sirte, November 2020.

33. Preparations in Sirte to host the meeting of the Joint Military Committee, 8 Nov 2020, <https://www.libyaconsultancy.com/news/preparations-in-sirte-to-host-meeting-of-joint-military-committee/>.

34. Sami Zaptia, Libya's 5+5 Joint Military Commission ends first meeting in Sirte and decides to reopen the coastal road and remove foreign fighters, 13 November 2020, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2020/11/13/libyas-55-joint-military-commission-ends-first-meeting-in-sirte-decides-to-reopen-coastal-road/>.



base for the LAAF inside Sirte in the event that a future consensus government moves to the city.

With a view to ensuring the permanent presence of loyal LAAF affiliated brigades, the idea is to make sure that they are taking root and permanent in the city.

## Conclusion

Over the past year Sirte has become key in the conflict in Libya and also key in conflict resolution efforts conducted under the auspices of the United Nations.

The work of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission since autumn 2020 has focused on Sirte and ways to change the situation on the ground in the city and in the region and to make the ceasefire sustainable and lead to a new political agreement.

However, the implementation of the agreements reached in the 5+5 JMC has been heavily dependent upon the goodwill of the LAAF and its foreign allies. Neither the LAAF nor its Wagner allies have shown any sign of evacuating Sirte so far. Most of the local forces are still stationed in their outposts, while Wagner forces maintain their positions around the frontlines at the Qardabiya airbase and at Sirte international airport. As for the other foreign forces present inside Sirte, such as the so-called Sudanese 'Janjaweed,' tensions have begun to escalate between them and the locals due to their involvement in armed robberies and frequent frictions in residential neighbourhoods.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the continued presence of the Russian Wagner forces inside Sirte has strengthened the position of the LAAF in negotiations.

The success of the dialogue supervised by UNSMIL actually depends on the implementation of the agreements reached between the Libyan factions in the 5+5 JMC talks. This is a condition for any significant progress to be achieved in the political and economic tracks of the dialogue.

Most of the GNA representatives in the UNSMIL-led dialogue derive their power from their military strength. Consequently, none of them will support any outcome of the political track that is inconsistent with the military

track in order to avoid losing their support base. This also means bringing the economic track back to ground zero. The LAAF would then have no option but to return to using the oil card to pressure the GNA, which would mean an increase in the chances of a return to armed conflict.

On the other hand, the characteristics of Sirte's social fabric and its links with most components of Libyan society could be invested more to support peace efforts. The city, as a potential buffer zone and a social centre linking eastern and western Libya, could play an important role in managing the security dialogue to unify the security institutions and rebuild them in a more stable and exemplary manner. In addition, the city's geographical location and connection to the Oil Crescent could represent an opportunity to launch a unified security project that promotes stability by addressing one of the main causes of the conflict, the control of oil resources, by reforming the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) away from the political and social conflict.<sup>36</sup>

The city of Sirte, located far from the power centres of the parties in the conflict, could also become the final departure point for the withdrawal of foreign forces and their supplies. The city's international seaport, airport and military bases could be used to withdraw foreign forces under the supervision of a UN monitoring mission according to an announced timetable. Certainly, this would have an important impact on support for the UNSMIL-led political and economic dialogue tracks.

It would also be key to the withdrawal of local forces. Deprived of direct foreign support on the ground, the two parties in the conflict would find it more difficult to stay away from their power bases in Tripoli and Benghazi. Therefore, the evacuation of foreign forces may be a suitable gesture to enhance confidence and facilitate the return of most local forces to their positions.

The success of the UNSMIL-led dialogue to a large extent depends on the withdrawal of foreign military forces from Libya, to be followed by the withdrawal of local forces conducted in parallel with the unification of the security institutions in the city of Sirte. So far, however,

35. The tensions led to the killing of three 'Janjaweed' fighters between September and December 2020 in sporadic clashes with locals. These figures were confirmed by a source at Ibn Sina Hospital in Sirte.

36. One the main disadvantages of the Petroleum Facilities Guard is that it is composed of tribal groups. Most of its members belong to al-Maghraba tribes in eastern Libya, which means they are very likely to be involved in the political conflict.





Moscow has displayed no concrete support for the efforts of the UN mission to stop the ongoing conflict in Sirte. The absence of effective leverage on the Russian side may contribute to a collapse of the truce and a resumption of the conflict, together with a collapse of trust between the Libyan factions and the international community.

Middle East Directions  
Robert Schuman Centre  
for Advanced Studies

European University Institute  
Via Boccaccio, 121  
50133 Florence  
Italy

*Contact:*

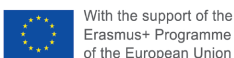
email: [MED@eui.eu](mailto:MED@eui.eu)  
website: [middleeastdirections.eu](http://middleeastdirections.eu)

## Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

*The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, created in 1992 and directed by Professor Brigid Laffan, aims to develop inter-disciplinary and comparative research on the major issues facing the process of European integration, European societies and Europe's place in 21<sup>st</sup> century global politics. The Centre is home to a large post-doctoral programme and hosts major research programmes, projects and data sets, in addition to a range of working groups and ad hoc initiatives. The research agenda is organised around a set of core themes and is continuously evolving, reflecting the changing agenda of European integration, the expanding membership of the European Union, developments in Europe's neighbourhood and the wider world.*

## Middle East Directions

*The MIDDLE EAST DIRECTIONS Programme, created in 2016, is part of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. It has the ambition to become an international reference point for research on the Middle East and North Africa Region, studying socio-political, economic and religious trends and transformations. The programme produces academic outputs such as working papers and e-books. It also liaises with policy makers with a wide range of policy briefs, policy report and analysis.*



Views expressed in this publication reflect the opinion of individual authors and not those of the European University Institute.

© European University Institute, 2021  
Content © Omar Al-Hawari, 2021

doi:10.2870/177834  
ISBN:978-92-9084-960-5  
ISSN:2467-4540