



# How Libya's Fezzan Became Europe's New Border

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## *Executive Summary*

European policymakers increasingly are looking at the Fezzan, Libya's vast and scarcely populated south west, as their frontier against sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees traveling the Central Mediterranean route to Europe. In 2016, over 160,000 took this route from Libya on makeshift boats; most had entered through this region, which connects the country's southern border with its coast. Several European countries, chiefly Italy, hope that stabilising the situation in the Fezzan and reviving its economy will help curb migrant flows. The idea has merit, but this will be no easy task and cannot succeed without also addressing the broader crises gripping the country. Any European effort to address governance, economic and security problems in the Fezzan should be coordinated with the internationally recognised government and linked to wider, nationwide initiatives to tackle issues that plague the country as a whole.

The Fezzan suffers from multiple problems, most of which are not of its own making. The region's licit economy is depressed, but the national economic and financial institutions that could help revive it are largely paralysed. By contrast, the illicit economy is booming. The Fezzan sits at a regional crossroads, linking southern Libya to the Sahel and sub-Saharan migrant routes to northern Libya and onto Europe.

While the region is richly endowed with natural resources, it suffers from the absence of a central authority able to impose order. Incentives for smuggling of all types – people, oil, gold, weapons, drugs – far outstrip those for making money through legal means. Ethnic and tribal tensions, magnified by the political vacuum and economic competition, have been exploited by rival factions competing to control the country. External forces – regional powers, foreign mercenaries and transnational jihadist groups – have also meddled, joining local conflicts or using the south as a transit zone. Stabilising the Fezzan in the midst of such a storm will be difficult, but it has been neglected far too long, to the detriment of its residents, its neighbours and Europe alike.

The ongoing fight between Libya's rival military coalitions is perhaps the biggest challenge. The UN-backed Presidency Council and its Government of National Accord (GNA), headed by Prime Minister Faiez Serraj in Tripoli, has little standing and few local allies in the Fezzan. By contrast, factions aligned with General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) and the eastern government based in al-Bayda enjoy greater influence, as do factions that oppose both Haftar and Serraj. Deadly fighting between these various forces has increased since early 2017 and covert foreign military support to them seems likely to rise. The spread of these national rivalries into the south has been accelerated by tensions among tribes, which have fought five successive local wars since 2011. Despite ceasefires, the risk of further escalation remains high, in part because of the failure to deliver material compensation promised during past negotiations as well as delays implementing reconstruction plans.

Stabilising the Fezzan is urgent, and not just to constrain migration. Without addressing the governance, economic and security issues in the south, Libya's

broader political and military normalisation will be impossible. While this requires long-term investments, Libyan authorities and European governments can take immediate steps to smooth relations among southern tribes and improve living conditions – measures that, in due course, could reduce the incentive for people smuggling. For instance, foreign donors could work with Libya's recognised government to energise agricultural projects in the south that have fallen into disrepair. Oil companies operating in the Fezzan and Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) also have their share of responsibility; they should seek to increase local employment and invest more in local social development projects.

A more inclusive dialogue focusing on security is also needed. Efforts to gather representatives of different communities around a table to date have included mainly tribal leaders and civil society activists. That is not enough. Talks should include military commanders and the leaders of local armed groups in a first step toward a nationwide security dialogue. As elsewhere in Libya, the question of how to structure and staff legitimate and genuinely national security forces, from army to police to border guards, is central.

Some outsiders, especially some European states, might be tempted to circumvent such a dialogue in search of a quicker military solution. That would be ill-advised: any attempt to impose a solution through military force alone would likely fuel further instability. In particular, recruiting local strongmen or cultivating alliances with specific militias risks exacerbating pre-existing conflicts. Moreover, the enormous profits derived from the black market almost certainly would surpass whatever cash outsiders can dole out to purchase loyalty.

Finally, none of these steps will have lasting effect unless and until there is greater alignment among international stakeholders. Within Europe, this requires greater cooperation between France and Italy, the two EU countries that, each for its own reasons, are focused on the Fezzan. Similarly, the EU, the U.S. and other countries should seek to lower tensions among Gulf Arab states or at least limit their impact on Libya at a time when Egypt and the United Arab Emirates are backing Haftar while Qatar and Turkey support his rivals.

Overall, Libya's neighbours, regional leaders further afield and international powers should make greater efforts to converge on a shared set of principles to address a Libyan peace process that is increasingly adrift, rather than narrowly prioritise their immediate interests. In the Fezzan as elsewhere in Libya, this would serve at least to avoid worsening an already bad situation and provide guidelines for restoring some semblance of a state – a goal that ultimately all should see as being in the country's, as well as the region's, best interests.

**Brussels/Tripoli/Sebha, 31 July 2017**

# How Libya's Fezzan Became Europe's New Border

## I. Introduction

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Libya's south west, a region known as the Fezzan, has become a focus of policy-makers eager to stem the flow of migrants to Europe. More than 160,000 migrants and refugees, primarily sub-Saharan Africans, left Libya to reach Italy in 2016, numbers that are expected to increase by 20 per cent in 2017. Most enter Libya through its southern border and then use local smuggling networks to reach the coast, where they embark on makeshift boats to Europe.<sup>1</sup> After trying unsuccessfully to interdict these boats as they cross the Mediterranean, European policymakers are now seeking to intervene directly in the Fezzan through economic investment programs and security cooperation with local forces.

This approach is important but will prove no less challenging. The Fezzan, a chronically unstable region, is largely uncharted territory for all but a few outsiders. UN and EU officials have focused most of their resources and attention on the national Libyan conflict or on political and military developments in the country's north west and east. Without a clear understanding of the Fezzan, attempts to intervene there almost certainly are bound to fail. This report, which examines tribal and ethnic rifts, ongoing conflicts and economic hardships in the Fezzan, is a contribution to that effort. It is based on fieldwork in Libya's south west in March and April 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive assessment of migration trends is available in the report by Altai Consulting, IMPACT and UNHCR, *Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges*, July 2017. According to the Italian interior ministry, 181,000 people embarked on the Central Mediterranean route in 2016, with at least 90 per cent coming from Libya. By 30 June 2017, almost 80,000 people had reached Italy from Libya, an 18 per cent increase from 2016. In July 2017, however, the number of arrivals in Italy via sea diminished to less than 50 per cent of the previous month. Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Rome, May-June 2017; *Statistical dashboard of 30 June 2017*, Italian interior ministry; *Statistical dashboard of 26 July 2017*, Italian interior ministry.

## II. The Fezzan

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Libya's south west historically has been a transit zone between sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean coast. Cross-border trade remains prominent today, though smuggling now has surpassed licit trade with the erosion of what little state authority previously existed. The region, which remained under the control of pro-Qadhafi forces until relatively late, did not experience significant violence during the 2011 war. Over time, competition over smuggling routes, resentment over unequal access to citizenship rights and easy access to the enormous stockpiles of weapons left in Qadhafi-era arms depots have contributed to sudden bouts of fighting among local groups. Competition over the region's strategic sites and riches continues to fuel conflict.

### A. Geography

The Fezzan is mainly desert with a handful of cultivated valleys and small oases scattered within hundreds of kilometres of sand.<sup>2</sup> The area is rich in crude oil, generating approximately 400,000 barrels per day, or one quarter of Libya's production, and natural gas. Since 2014, artisanal miners have extracted gold in the region without government oversight.

Sebha, with 200,000 inhabitants, is the region's administrative capital and the main hub for trafficking. The rest of the population (approximately 300,000 people) live in oasis towns. Towns in the Jufra area (Waddan, Sawknah, Hun) are the northern entry point to the Fezzan, connecting it to Sirte and Misrata in north western Libya and Ras Lanuf and Brega to the north east. Slightly further south, Brak al-Shati and its adjoining valley (*wadi al-shati*) lie at another important crossroads linking the Fezzan to the mountains south of Tripoli. Rival military factions have fought since 2015 for control of the Jufra and Brak areas, whose location makes them the gateway to southern Libya.

South west of Sebha, a rocky plateau known as the Messack rims the Wadi Hayat, one of the region's few cultivated strips of land. Most of this area's trade routes to the south west have been shut since Algerian authorities closed their border following the January 2014 attack on the In Amenas gas complex, which was carried out by jihadists crossing from Libya.<sup>3</sup> In January 2017, Chadian authorities also closed off

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Mc Gregor, "The Strategic Topography of Southern Libya", CTC Sentinel, May 2016, vol. 9, no. 5, pp. 21-26.

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear how much border traffic there is along the Algeria-Libya border. A guard said, "Not even a fly goes through". Crisis Group interview, Tuareg military, Obari, 1 April 2017. A local activist said that occasionally a handful of migrants come through the Algerian border as well, "but really few compared to what comes through Toummo [the border post with Niger]". He compared Algerian forces securing the border to electricity poles: "You have them every few hundred metres". Crisis Group interview, Tuareg activist, Obari, 26 March 2017. Some international security experts, however, said that the border to Algeria maintains a certain degree of porosity: "the smugglers that are allowed to operate on the Algerian border are those who collude with Algerian security officials". Crisis Group interview, Western security expert, London, April 2017.

their border to Libya but they have since allowed limited trade under pressure from residents in northern Chad.<sup>4</sup>

No such restrictions exist along the border with Niger. This remains Libya's most porous border, rife with smuggling and trafficking. Most migrants enter Libya from a desert road that connects Madama in Niger (where French forces are stationed) to Toummo (in Libya) and onward to Wigh, Qatrun and Sebha.<sup>5</sup> Trade of illicit items, like weapons and drugs, goes through the Salvador Pass, which links Niger, Algeria and Libya. As a local resident explained, "Drugs and other illicit stuff goes through Salvador, but not human trafficking because for human traffickers it is easier to go from Agadez to Madama [both in Niger] and then to Toummo because security forces in Niger don't stop them. But they would stop drug traders".<sup>6</sup> On the Libyan side of the border, few have an interest in stopping traffickers – or would dare to do so. This is either because local security forces are complicit in the human trafficking or because traffickers outgun them.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Chadian authorities claimed they closed the border for fear that terrorists fleeing the former Islamic State (ISIS) stronghold of Sirte could seek refuge in Chad's northern region. However, according to an international expert, "the real reason for the border closure seems to be fear that Chadian opposition fighters in Libya would re-enter Chad". Crisis Group interview, Paris, May 2017. For decades, Libya has been home to thousands of Chadian nationals, chiefly Tebu from the Dazagada clan (also known as Garaoun) who constituted Chad's largest rebel group (the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development, UFDD). Today, the group with reportedly the most fighters in Libya is the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT). Other Chadian armed groups in Libya include the UFDD, the Union of Resistance Forces (UFR) and Arab groups such as the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development-Fundamental (UFDD-F) and the Front for the Salvation of the Republic (FSR). Jérôme Tubiana and Claudio Gramizzi, "Tubu Trouble: State and Statelessness in the Chad-Sudan-Libya Triangle", Small Arms Survey, HSBA working paper 43, June 2017, pp. 144-149.

<sup>5</sup> The French forces in Madama, Niger, are part of Operation Barkhane, an ongoing military operation to combat militant groups and insurgents in the Sahel. Crisis Group interviews, residents, Obari, Murzuq, Sebha, March-April 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Drug trafficking in this area mainly involves hashish (cannabis resin) from Morocco on its way to Egypt via southern Libya. Since 2016, authorities in Niger, pressured and funded by the EU, have cracked down on people smuggling networks in Agadez. According to EU officials, this has had some success as reported inflows from Niger decreased in the last quarter of 2016. Crisis Group interview, EU official, Marrakesh, April 2016. See also "Libya 2016. Migration Profiles & Trends", International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Report, 2017. This success may have been short-lived; Tebu activists in Libya said that as of March 2017 business was "very good". Some also reported that smugglers can easily bribe Niger security forces, who once a week provide protection to a convoy of vehicles, including those carrying migrants, travelling from Agadez to Madama. Crisis Group interviews, Tebu activists and journalist, Murzuq, April 2017.

<sup>7</sup> "That area is too dangerous even for us. There are all sorts of traffickers that go through there. We can go there if we are part of a larger patrol convoy of say 20-30 cars and other units from elsewhere join us. But for normal patrols, when we are only two or three cars – no way. We don't want to be outnumbered and have problems". Crisis Group interview, Tuareg member of the Third Force, a Misratan-led security force operating in the Fezzan (from February 2014 to June 2017), Obari, 1 April 2017.

## B. *People*

The Fezzan is home to less than 10 per cent of Libya's population (about 500,000 people), but its residents are both ethnically diverse and politically fractured. There are Arab tribes: some are large and powerful, like Awlad Suleiman (which is also in Niger) and the Qadhadhfa (wealthy and, in the past, politically privileged because they were Qadhafi's own tribe); some are smaller, though intellectually or religiously influential, like the Hodairi, and others who boast a descent from the Prophet Muhammad (*ashraf*).

There are also non-Arab minority ethnic groups, like the Tebu, Tuareg and Fezzana (*ahali*). The Tebu are an ethnic group comprising different tribes found in northern Chad, parts of Niger and in southern Libya. The Tuareg are a historically nomadic Amazigh (Berber) people who straddle the borderlands of the Western Sahara from Libya to southern Algeria and Mali. Most Tuareg have Libyan citizenship, but around 20,000 families arrived in Libya in the 1980s. Many joined Qadhafi's security forces, though they did not get full citizenship rights. The Fezzana are an entirely arabised local community. All three of these groups are Sunni Muslim. Since 2011, thousands of other people from neighbouring countries have also moved to Libya's south (often posing as Libyans), further complicating the social landscape.

The Fezzana and some smaller tribes have managed to remain neutral, partly because they are uninvolved in cross-border trafficking. Among the others, however, political rifts and competition for control of smuggling routes have contributed to tensions.



### III. Triumph of the Illegal Economy

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The Fezzan is rich in natural resources: it has vast reserves of crude oil and natural gas, some deposits of gold and large underground aquifers. Smuggling, which has grown exponentially since 2011, dominates the local economy today, however. “Smuggling here is a job. It is not a crime”, said a university lecturer.<sup>8</sup> Libya's deep economic recession, which has caused cash shortages, severe inflation and a soaring black market exchange rate, has encouraged illicit activity, including among the public sector employees who make up most of the formal workforce both in Fezzan and Libya as a whole.<sup>9</sup> The trafficking of people, fuel and gold is widespread and highly visible, though drugs and weapons also pass through the region surreptitiously.

#### A. *People Smuggling*

The majority of the illegal migrants enter Libya from Niger or Chad; smaller numbers cross over from Algeria. However they enter the country, most migrants (at least over the past year) transit through Sebha.<sup>10</sup> People smuggling through Libya generates annual revenues estimated to range between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion.<sup>11</sup> Smuggling routes are divided into segments controlled by different groups. The Tebu control the southernmost portion, used by the bulk of migrants, from the border with Niger to Sebha. The Tuareg dominate the route from the Algerian border to Sebha. The next leg of the trip, from Sebha to Shweref, is in the hands of Magarha traffickers. Beyond that, still other tribes take over.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Crisis Group interview, Mohamed Abidi, local politician and university lecturer, Obari, 27 March 2017. Locals estimate that if under Qadhafi 40 per cent of the local economy was based on smuggling, mainly of subsidised goods like wheat, fuel and fertilisers resold in the countries to Libya's south, now illegal trading of commodities and migrants accounts for about 90 per cent. Crisis Group interviews, Sebha and Obari residents, Sebha, Obari, March-April 2017.

<sup>9</sup> The official exchange rate of the Libyan dinar (LYD) to the U.S. dollar (\$) in 2017 is 1.38lyd/\$. However, since 2015 it has been virtually impossible to exchange at official prices because of foreign currency shortages in banks. This has pushed the black market exchange rate above 8lyd/\$. This is what the vast majority of Libyans now use. For this reason, in this report we refer to the current black market exchange rate of the LYD, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>10</sup> Some migrants, especially those from Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin, Sudan and Chad, are seasonal workers seeking employment in Libyan businesses or farms, including in the south. Others coming from farther away (especially Nigerians but also Gambians, Cameroonians and Ghanaians) head north seeking to embark on boats and reach Europe. Until early 2016, traffickers transporting migrants entering from Chad used to travel north to Ajdabiya and from there west toward Tripoli. But lack of security in Sirte (under ISIS control for most of 2015-16) and the LNA's takeover of the Oil Crescent area in September 2016 forced traffickers to cross farther west, either to Sebha or to Shweref.

<sup>11</sup> There are no reliable statistics on this trade. This estimate is based on consultations with informed Libyans and European officials. Crisis Group interviews, Tripoli and Brussels, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Crisis Group interview, representative of a Libyan NGO, Sebha, 27 March 2017. All those consulted by Crisis Group agreed that until Sebha the business is in the hands of the Tebu, but there are different versions of the alleged division of labour north of Sebha. According to a Sebha resident, “from Sebha to Shweref, it is the Magharha and the Warfalla; from Shweref to Bani Walid, the Magharha; from Bani Walid [or rather a nearby waypoint in Nisma] to Tripoli, it is Warfallah and Awlad Bu Seif”. Crisis Group interview, Sebha, March 2017.

A Tebu journalist explained that people smuggling can be extremely profitable and requires little start-up capital:

If you are young and own nothing you can work as a driver and earn about LYD1,000-1,500 (\$125-190 at the black market exchange rate) for every trip from border to Sebha. You do this once a week, and *voilà*, in one month you make more than LYD4,000 (\$500), which is more than four times the monthly salary of a policeman. Not bad. But after a while, you want to do the trade independently and no longer just be a driver. That is because if you own and drive your own car in one trip you make up to LYD30,000 (\$3,750). Considering that a car costs you about LYD80,000 (\$10,000) you see it is very easy to start the business and it provides a quick return on investment.<sup>13</sup>

The promise of immediate cash is so alluring that many young Tebu have given up their studies.<sup>14</sup> Tebu NGOs are already ringing alarm bells about the long-term effects:

I am afraid we are at a point of no return for the Tebu youth: many high school students take drugs like Tramadol [an opioid painkiller popular with militiamen], which is cheap, and few go on to study at university. Many are now happy with [people] smuggling.<sup>15</sup>

Because the trade generates such high profits and supports so many people, the tribes involved are unlikely to give it up, even if offered alternative sources of employment.

## B. *Fuel Smuggling*

Fuel smuggling, which was also a mainstay of the south's economy under Qadhafi, has expanded exponentially since 2011. Nationwide, fuel trafficking generates annual revenues valued at approximately \$2 billion. While there are no regional figures, it is reasonable to estimate that about one fifth of these illegal sales take place in the south.<sup>16</sup>

Fuel is heavily subsidised in Libya, costing only LYD0.15 per litre – \$0.12 at the official exchange rate but less than \$0.02 at the black market rate used by smugglers. Since Libya's southern neighbours pay approximately \$1 per litre, there are huge profits in smuggling and reselling the fuel. Petrol station owners control this trade.

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<sup>13</sup> Crisis Group interview, Murzuq, 29 March 2017. He added that only the young and physically fit can do the job of "keeping 25-30 equally young and fit migrants packed in the back of a pick-up". Others tend to work in the induced economy providing support and goods, like vehicles, food and water, for the actual smugglers, or in the gold business.

<sup>14</sup> Crisis Group interview, member of a Tebu youth group, Murzuq, 29 March 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Crisis Group interview, head of the National Oil Corporation (NOC) Mustafa Sanallah, Tripoli, April 2017. Libya's NOC imports around \$3 billion worth of refined fuel every year, which it then subsidises. Most of this is smuggled outside the country either by land to Tunisia, via ships to other parts of the Mediterranean or by land to countries south of Libya. The NOC has tasked a committee within the Brega Oil Company to investigate how much is smuggled through Sebha, but it has not reached any conclusions yet.

According to a Sebha resident, “They take truckloads of fuel from the storage tanks in Sebha, but instead of taking it to the petrol station and distributing it to the people, they take it directly to smuggling routes”.<sup>17</sup> There is also some smaller-scale smuggling of fuel, via passenger cars and trucks.<sup>18</sup>

### C. *Artisanal Gold Mining*

Artisanal gold mining has become a booming industry since 2013 when deposits were discovered on rocky plateaus of the Libyan desert bordering Chad.<sup>19</sup> The exact locations of makeshift mining settlements are difficult to pin down, but those involved in the trade said that the town of Murzuq is the main hub of this informal industry, providing services and goods to gold-rich areas along the border with Chad and Niger.<sup>20</sup> An estimated 70 per cent of the population of Murzuq works in this field (directly or in support roles and trade). At one point, about 15kg of gold (worth locally about \$400,000) were being extracted daily.<sup>21</sup>

For the most part, the Tebu (Libyan and Chadian) control the industry because they “brought in cheap Sudanese workers, who already have experience extracting gold”.<sup>22</sup> Entering the gold business requires an initial capital outlay, but sources in Murzuq describe it as accessible for the Tebu, the only people capable of navigating the desert in this area. Some Tuaregs also are involved but need a Tebu partner to cross into the area close to the Niger-Chad border.<sup>23</sup>

Mining here is entirely in the hands of the miners or their local supervisors. The internationally recognised Libyan government exercises no oversight over the prospecting, nor does it derive any revenues. None of Libya's three governments has ever attempted to crack down on the mining, though authorities in neighbouring Chad, Niger and Algeria have attempted to do so in the gold-rich areas within their own countries.

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<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sebha, 28 March 2017. Photos that Libya's National Oil Corporation shared with Crisis Group in July 2017 show fuel trucks crossing the desert.

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interview, local resident, Sebha, 28 March 2017.

<sup>19</sup> A resident of Murzuq said because of the depletion of surface gold “the trade is a bit more sophisticated and those involved need bulldozers to dig down and use chemicals to extract the gold”. Crisis Group interview, Murzuq, 30 March 2017. On artisanal gold mining in Chad, Niger and Libya, see Tubiana and Gramizzi, “[Tubu Trouble](#)”, op. cit., pp. 75-101.

<sup>20</sup> Referring to the budding gold industry, a Libyan Tuareg said, “It is a big business at Jebel Aweinet and along the border with Niger. There is also some on the Tuareg side of Niger, but it is an extremely difficult area to access. You can't go with cars and you need to hike there so few people go there”. Crisis Group interview, Tuareg resident, Obari, 26 March 2017.

<sup>21</sup> A gold merchant in Sebha said, “At the beginning about 13-15kg of gold a day was passing through Sebha. Now little is sold here in Sebha. What is extracted is sold directly in Qatrun and then on from there. Traders from Benghazi, Tripoli and even from Dubai go to Qatrun to buy gold. It is extremely profitable, especially since the price of gold is now very high”. He said that the price was LYD220 (\$27.5) per gram for 24 carat gold, compared to near \$40 per gram at global prices in July 2017. Crisis Group interview, Sebha, March 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tebu resident, Murzuq, March 2017.

<sup>23</sup> “Anyone can go to the gold-rich area and start digging. Some digs are kilometres apart. You just need the cars, the right equipment and the logistics support. People in the gold mines need everything from tents to air conditioning to water, fuel and food so there is also a parallel economy servicing the gold miners”. Crisis Group interview, Tebu journalist, Murzuq, 30 March 2017.

#### D. *Vanishing Legal Economy*

The deadly fighting in recent years, the gradual breakdown of government authority and the rise of pervasive smuggling have had a devastating impact on what remains of the legal economy in the south, based mainly on agriculture and the oil.

##### 1. Agriculture

Most of the state-owned agricultural projects south of Sebha lie in complete disrepair. Even those further north or east grow only a fraction of their former crops.<sup>24</sup> Until 2011, there were thousands of hectares of state-owned farms in the Fezzan, developed in the 1980s along with Qadhafi's Great Man-made River Project. These farms used fresh underground water and American centre-pivot irrigation technology to grow cereals and support livestock, part of a government policy to ensure food self-sufficiency. Seen from above, the irrigated lands appeared as perfectly round dark circles, a kilometre in diameter, amid an amber coloured desert. Today most of the circles are dry.<sup>25</sup>

The former head of one of the largest state-owned farms in the Obari area, the Maqnusa agricultural project, explained:

In 2010 Maqnusa used to generate LYD30 million [\$25 million according the official exchange rate in 2010] a year. At the time, we had 250 employees; 120 crop circles; 6,000ha of cultivated land; 15,000 heads of sheep; 500 cows and 300 camels. Now – in 2017 – we only have 300ha of cultivated land and 1,000 sheep.<sup>26</sup>

Other farms in the area are in an even worse state.<sup>27</sup> Employees said that lack of security was the main problem: most of the equipment was stolen, as were the electricity generators used to irrigate during power shortages. Insecurity and the occasional outburst of violence prevented employees from working at night. Another problem was the lack of funding from Tripoli: these state-owned farms are under the administrative oversight of the agriculture ministry and require state-subsidised products like fertilisers, but budgetary bottlenecks have held up needed funds. The Development Authority for the Fezzan Region (*hayyat tanmiyat manteqat fezzan*) has submitted a funding request for more than LYD400 million (\$290 million at the official exchange rate, \$50 million at the black market rate) from the internationally recognised government to relaunch agricultural projects in the south. Many doubt the money will materialise given budgetary restrictions imposed by the Central Bank of Libya.

There is widespread support for the idea of restarting agricultural production in the south; the current high prices for agricultural produce (mostly imported and

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<sup>24</sup> Crisis Group interviews, farmers, managers, residents, Sebha, Obari, Murzuq, March-April 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Group observations, Maqnusa and Irawen farms, April 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group interview, former director of the Maqnusa agricultural project, Obari, 27 March 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Disa is destroyed and producing no crops; Bargush, which in 2010 generated revenue of LYD 20 million (\$17 million at official 2010 exchange rate) a year, is down to 3 per cent of its pre-2011 production; Irawen is down to 25 per cent. Crisis Group interview, Obari, 27 March 2017.

expensive because of the worsening exchange rate) should make farming highly profitable.<sup>28</sup> But there is no consensus on how to do so. Some find the model of state-owned farms unappealing and support privatisation.<sup>29</sup> Privately owned farms in the area, which have flourished in recent years, seem less affected by pillaging than state-owned farms, perhaps because their owners, who live nearby, take more interest in defending them. Others, however, oppose the parcelling of land into private hands, arguing that it would generate cost inefficiencies. They suggest focusing instead on large-scale industrial farming with processing capabilities.<sup>30</sup>

One thing is certain: Libyan authorities and international development agencies keen to help the Fezzan need to invest more thought and resources in the agricultural sector, which should not be left in its current state of disrepair. This means providing, along with financial credit, greater security and feasibility studies into marketing and distribution channels.

## 2. Oil industry

The Fezzan's potential to pump more than 400,000 barrels of crude oil per day plus huge reserves of natural gas (for the most part exported to Italy via the underwater Greenstream gas pipeline to Sicily), makes the oil industry central to recovery in the south west and Libya as a whole.<sup>31</sup> Most of this production has been offline for the past two years because an armed group further north closed the crude oil pipeline connecting the fields to export terminals.<sup>32</sup> Even after the pipeline reopened in early 2017, Tebu guards at one site (al-Feel) continued to block production for several months. They permitted it to restart only when the National Oil Corporation (NOC) started discussions about local development projects with area residents.<sup>33</sup> Even when the fields are fully productive, however, the revenues generated do not benefit the local population directly. Many resent what they perceive as "our wealth feeding northerners".<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A farmer said, "With current prices for fruit and vegetable very high, it is possible to make good profits". One kilo of onion costs LYD 7 (\$0.9 at black market rate; about \$5 at the official rate); 1 kilo of tomatoes is LYD 5 (\$0.65 at the black market rate; \$3.5 at the official rate). Crisis Group interview, Wadi Hayat, March 2017.

<sup>29</sup> "It would be possible to relaunch the agricultural projects but they need to be private. The young generation wants to work in agriculture but as a private entrepreneur". Crisis Group interview, farmer, Wadi Hayat, March 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Crisis Group interview, Obari municipal council member, Obari, 27 March 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Libya has proven crude oil reserves of 48 billion barrels (38 per cent of Africa's reserves and 2.9 per cent of the world's), the largest in Africa and among the ten largest globally; it has proven natural gas reserves of 55 trillion cubic feet. "Country Analysis Brief: Libya", U.S. Energy Information Administration, 25 November 2014. The Murzuq and Gaddames Oil and Gas basins are believed to have considerable reserves. On Libya's oil and gas industry and the problems affecting it since 2011, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°165, *The Prize: Fighting for Libya's Oil Wealth*, 3 December 2015.

<sup>32</sup> An armed group in Zintan closed the Reyaina valve on the pipeline in November 2014 and reopened it in early 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Tebu activists and NOC officials, Tripoli, April 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interview, Obari resident, 27 March 2017. He also resented the fact that the housing for oil sector workers is excellent, while his nearby town lies in shambles: "the grounds of the oil

The oil fields employ few locals; most of the workforce rotates in and out on special flights from the north arranged by the operating oil companies.<sup>35</sup> Communities living near the Sharara and Feel oil fields complain there is little interaction with local residents. “There is no development in the town close to the fields, no education opportunities for us”, said a Tuareg from Obari, noting that “even the person in charge of watering the plants in the Sharara oil field is flown in from the north”.<sup>36</sup> Under Libyan law, oil companies are supposed to invest in local social development projects, but they rarely adhere to this provision either in the south or elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> To help stabilise the local economy and soothe local tensions, oil companies, in conjunction with the NOC, should do more both to engage and employ local workers and to invest in local development.

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companies are beautiful, even have flowers, and are managed well. Why can't it be the same elsewhere?”

<sup>35</sup> See Crisis Group Commentary, “Traversing the Tribal Patchwork of Libya's South West”, 12 June 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Crisis Group interview, Obari, 26 March 2017.

<sup>37</sup> When in early July the head of the NOC, Mustafa Sanallah, visited the Sharara oil field, many residents reportedly asked him when their villages would start to see the benefit of the country's rising oil production. Sanallah replied, “You've been very patient”, before adding: “You need to be patient a little longer”. “Backing of workers, communities key to Libya's oil revival”, Reuters, 20 July 2017.

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## IV. A Precarious Security Environment

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Since 2011, security in southern Libya has deteriorated. Criminal gangs and smuggling rackets are now firmly established. Amid rising criminality, inter-tribal fighting and easy access to weapons, local police forces are effectively non-operational. There is neither a functioning prison nor a detention centre for illegal migrants in Sebha.<sup>38</sup> The same is true in Obari and Ghat.<sup>39</sup> Even the approximately 18,000 military officers from the south trained in the Qadhafi-era are largely inactive. Most have grown weary of the feuds in the area and have refused to resume active service until “the situation becomes clearer”.<sup>40</sup>

This lawlessness prevails despite the deployment of various military contingents, officially tasked with restoring peace and order, to the south from other parts of the country.<sup>41</sup> The rationale for deploying these forces, including, at different times, troops from western Libya, Misrata and the east, was that without them “fighting between local groups and among tribes will flare up”.<sup>42</sup> Security kept on deteriorating, however, as local wars continued.

### A. *Lingering Communal Conflicts*

Since the Qadhafi regime's fall in 2011, five local conflicts, each driven by unique factors, have caused hundreds of fatalities.<sup>43</sup> There are three main axes of rivalry:

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<sup>38</sup> According to a member of the Sebha municipal council, local courts only work on personal status cases (family law), as there are no police or judicial police to support the work of prosecutors. He also confirmed that the city's detention centre for illegal migrants, built in the Qadhafi era, was not operating because it was under the control of what he called a “Chadian armed group”. Crisis Group interview, Sebha, March 2017. This situation has persisted since at least 2015, when another member of the municipal council gave a similar picture of the city. Crisis Group interviews, member of the Sebha municipal council, Sebha, March 2015; local residents, Sebha, May-June 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Crisis Group interviews, residents, Murzuq, Obari, March 2017. In Murzuq there is a prison but it is controlled by a Salafi religious group and not by the judicial police. On the state of the holding centres under the authority of the Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM) across the south, see also *Mixed Migration Trends in Libya*, op. cit., pp. 109-121.

<sup>40</sup> Crisis Group interview, non-aligned military officer, Sebha, 28 March 2017. A member of Sebha's municipal council shared similar views on the inactivity of the Qadhafi-era security forces. Crisis Group interview, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

<sup>41</sup> These include, in chronological order: Amazigh (Berber) units from the Nefusa Mountains, brigades from Zintan, Benghazi-based Saiqa Special Forces, the coalition of anti-Qadhafi fighters known as the Libya Shield Forces, Misratan forces known as the Third Force, and more recently, forces operating under the banner of the Libyan National Army (LNA).

<sup>42</sup> Crisis Group interview, member of Sebha municipal council, Sebha, 29 March 2017. Most of these forces from the north or east came in alliance with local armed groups, either to support one local faction over another or to act as a deterrence force (or the former disguised as the latter). Other considerations – such as the need to control the Qadhafi-era weapons depots around Sebha, keep supporters of the former regime at bay, or control smuggling routes and the highly lucrative oil fields – also factored in.

<sup>43</sup> For more details on these local conflicts, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°130, *Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts*, 14 September 2012; Rebecca Murray, “Libya's Southern Rivalries”, Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 10 December 2014; Frederic Wehrey, “Insecurity and Governance Challenges in Southern Libya”, Carnegie

- ❑ The Tebu vs. Awlad Suleiman conflict: This erupted with extreme violence in 2012 and again in 2014. Both tribes emerged as victors following the regime's 2011 collapse but turned against each other as they started competing over access to state funds and state-subsidised goods. They have also been involved in smuggling to neighbouring countries.<sup>44</sup>
- ❑ The Qadhadhfa vs. Awlad Suleiman conflict: Fighting in Sebha in 2014 and again in 2016 pitted losers against winners of the 2011 war.<sup>45</sup> Such tensions persist among other tribes (and indeed the former regime's green flag is visible across the Wadi Hayat and in Ghat), but for the most part the pro- and anti-Qadhafi divide of 2011 has been replaced by pro- or anti-LNA (the Haftar-led Libyan National Army) allegiances.
- ❑ The Tebu vs. Tuareg conflict: Violence erupted in Obari and in Sebha in 2014-2015 over national-level political and military rifts, external funding and the inflow of foreign fighters. Barely a month after the emergence of two rival Libyan governments and parliaments in August 2014, the Tebu and Tuareg went from being close allies (united in 2012-13 in their quest for minority and linguistic rights against what they both perceived as dominant Arab exclusivism) to foes.<sup>46</sup> The government in eastern Libya backed the Tebu and urged them to seize control of Obari, a southern town that both claimed had become a hotbed for jihadists.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, the Tripoli-based government and allied Misratan military forces in the south backed the Tuareg, who consider Obari historically theirs.<sup>48</sup> The fighting spilled sporadically over to Sebha, and continued in Obari until early 2016. The conflict also had an economic dimension as members of the two tribes competed over control of smuggling routes to Niger.<sup>49</sup>

Most of these conflicts ended without a clear winner. As of July 2017, there is no active conflict between these groups and some argue that "tensions are no longer on the front burner and tribes of the south no longer want war".<sup>50</sup> Not all agree; some said that ceasefire agreements remain precarious and chances of revived

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Endowment for International Peace, 30 March 2017; Rebecca Murray, "Southern Libya Destabilized: The Case of Obari", Small Arms Survey SANA briefing paper, April 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Crisis Group interview, Hodairi tribal elder, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

<sup>45</sup> The Qadhadhfa remained supporters of the former regime even after the death of Qadhafi, reportedly even aiding the efforts of former regime officials stationed in Niger. Crisis Group interview, Tebu activist, Tripoli 2014. During the 2011 war, the Awlad Suleiman ended up backing anti-Qadhafi forces, though previously they had also been strong allies of the regime.

<sup>46</sup> Relations between the two communities were also defined by a century-old treaty known as the Midi-Midi (Friendship) Treaty (1894), which regulated their respective areas of influence.

<sup>47</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Tebu civil society activists and military commanders, Tunis, Tripoli, 2015-2016.

<sup>48</sup> The Misratan military forces in the south denied backing the Tuareg and maintained they were a neutral force intervening at the request of the government in Tripoli. Crisis Group interview, Jamal Treiki, commander of the Third Force, Sebha, March 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Tellingly, what sparked the war in Obari was a gunfight for control of a petrol station in the town in early September 2014, after which the Tebu sought to take over its main military bases. Physical control over petrol stations is often a first step in the fuel-smuggling business. Crisis Group interviews, Tebu and Tuareg activists, Tripoli, Sebha, Obari, 2015-2016.

<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tuareg civil society activist, Obari, 28 March 2017.



fighting high.<sup>51</sup> One reason is that most of those involved in the conflicts expect monetary compensations (*diyya*, blood money) for families of killed tribesmen. Qatar still has not disbursed these payments to the Tebu and Tuareg, which it had agreed to bankroll in late 2015 to pressure the two factions into stopping the war in Obari.<sup>52</sup> An influential Tuareg from Obari stated:

The peace now is only on paper. The agreement is in your dreams. The truth is that there is no real *sulh* (reconciliation). Seventy houses of Tuareg families here were destroyed and are still in ruins. If there is no compensation, there could be return to war. Everybody here still has weapons.<sup>53</sup>

The slow pace of reconstruction of the war-torn town, where the local university has been closed for three years and several schools still show scars of war, adds to these problems.

Similar dynamics triggered by expectations of payments also affect reconciliation efforts between the Awlad Suleiman and the Tebu. Representatives of both sides convened in Rome in March 2017 under the aegis of the Italian interior ministry and the Presidency Council (represented at the talks by Abdelsalam Kajman from the Brak al-Shati area).<sup>54</sup> The Libyan participants assumed that Italy would provide monetary compensation for casualties of the Tebu vs Awlad Suleiman conflict, as Qatar had promised to do in the Tebu-Tuareg negotiations, and as government of former Prime Minister Ali Zeidan had done in 2014 following the first Tebu-Awlad Suleiman conflict in 2012. But in Rome the issue of who would pay (and whether anyone would pay) appears to have sparked problems from the outset and continues to cause resentment and misunderstanding, mainly among the Tebu.<sup>55</sup>

This is not to say that peace requires monetary compensation. In fact, some tribal leaders suggest it would be better for all communities to give up these “rights

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<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Tebu, Tuareg, Arab activists, Misratan security forces, Obari and Sebha, March-April 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Following several months of negotiations backed by Qatar in November 2015, the two sides agreed to lay down their weapons and accepted the presence of a neutral military force (from the Hasawna tribe) in Obari. A cornerstone of the agreement negotiated in Doha was that Qatar promised monetary compensation for the families of the 500 or so fighters killed on each side. Crisis Group interviews, Tuareg and Tebu activists, Tripoli, 2016-2017 and Obari, March 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tuareg elder, Obari, 27 March 2017. The reason for the delay in the payments is unclear.

<sup>54</sup> Crisis Group interviews, participants in talks, Tunis and Rome, April-June 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Several participants in the March 2017 Rome talks reported that the Tebu went there assuming that all involved, including the Italian hosts, had agreed on compensation. “But the Italians apparently had no prior knowledge of this and were furious when the issue came up during the first day of the meeting”, said a participant. A Tebu sheikh insisted on payments in the second Rome meeting in June 2017, but a younger member of the Tebu delegation downplayed the request and said Tebus “understood that Italian or the Europeans could not pay *diyya*” but would be “fine if instead of direct payments to the family they agreed on preferential employment opportunities for brothers or sisters of those who died in the war”. Crisis Group interview, Rome, June 2017. Until now EU officials have not shown any intention to fund such compensation schemes. Crisis Group interviews, Brussels, May-June 2017.

for their dead”.<sup>56</sup> Others argue that the problems are elsewhere and that ceasefire agreements cannot hold because they are negotiated by tribal elders who lack leverage over their youth.<sup>57</sup> Many of the foreign tribesmen from neighbouring Chad or Niger who fight in southern Libya also feel little obligation to abide by agreements negotiated by Libyan tribal elders.<sup>58</sup> The international community should neither overestimate the durability of ceasefire arrangements nor underestimate lingering tensions and those fuelled by external actors.

### B. *East-West Battlefield in the South*

Since the political crisis that divided the country in 2014, the south has become a battlefield for nationwide rivalries opposing Misratan forces aligned with the GNA on one side and the Libyan National Army (LNA) loyal to the eastern government on the other.

A Misratan military contingent (called the Third Force, *al-Quwa al-Thaletha*) arrived in Sebha in February 2014 at the request of local notables and with an official mandate from the (then united) government in Tripoli. It was sent to stop the war between the Awlad Suleiman and the Tebu and, more broadly, help secure the south. This well-equipped force became the main military contingent in Sebha from 2014 to mid-2017. With more than 4,000 men on its payroll, the Third Force controlled the city's main military airbase at Tamanhindt and brought into its fold some local armed groups that operated as the Eighth Force (*al-Quwa al-Thamina*). For some time, the Third Force also had men stationed in Germa and in the Sharara oil field farther west.<sup>59</sup>

But after three years and the deterioration of the security situation in Sebha, many local residents became weary of Misrata's presence. A Sebha military officer not aligned to any group said:

Misrata came in 2014 to help and people here were fine with it because they thought that Misrata would stop the fighting, curb crime and reduce illegal migration. But they did nothing of this. In fact they made relations between

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<sup>56</sup> As an elder of the Hodairi tribe, which is not involved in any dispute, put it: “The problem of the Rome agreement is that the Tebu have 37 *qabail* [sub-tribes], they are not one cohesive tribe; the Awlad Suleiman are composed of 7 *buyut* [houses]. Did those representatives who went to Rome represent all these 7 *buyut* and 37 *qabail*? First you need to have an agreement between all members of the tribe that they agree to give up their claim for *diya*. Most people are happy with the agreement but did they give up rights of the *ahl al-dham* [blood avengers]? The agreement means nothing if they did not”. Crisis Group interview, Sebha, 30 March 2017.

<sup>57</sup> “Leaders of the tribes want peace, but the problem is the youth. Many want revenge and many still have weapons. Young Qadhahfa and young Awlad Suleiman still have weapons and do not listen to their *ayyan* [elders]”. Crisis Group interview, elder of the Hodairi tribe, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Commenting on the divisions within tribes, a Sebha notable said, “Eighty per cent of the Tebu in Tuyuri [a district of Sebha] are not from Libya. Eighty per cent of the Tuareg are not Libyan. Most of those carrying weapons in the south are not even Libyan”. Crisis Group interview, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Thanks to alliances with local groups built over the next three years, the Third Force commander said they also played a role as far as Wigh airbase, on the border with Niger. Crisis Group interview, Jamal Treiki, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

groups even worse because they divided people and tribes – some were with Misrata, others against it. So people started to think that they were better off without them.<sup>60</sup>

Growing local dissatisfaction toward Misrata played into Haftar's hands, particularly as he imposed himself as the GNA's most formidable opponent by 2016.<sup>61</sup> His southern forces included the LNA contingent stationed in Brak al-Shati under Mohamed Ben Nayel and the Greater Sirte Operations Room (GSOR, *urfat amaliyat sirt al-kubra*), an LNA outfit stationed further north, in Ras Lanuf and Zella.<sup>62</sup>

The Brak al-Shati contingent, after cooperating briefly with the Misratans in mid-2016, became the most vocal proponent of Misrata leaving Sebha and, more specifically, the Tamanhindt airbase.<sup>63</sup> By doing so, they gained support of Sebha notables who also started clamouring for Misrata's withdrawal. In early 2017, Ben Nayel's men began attacking the Third Force in Tamanhindt with heavy artillery.

The aim of the Greater Sirte Operations Room was to capture the strategic Jufra airbase, which was under the control of Misrata and other forces aligned with the Tripoli-based government. These included the anti-Haftar group known as the Benghazi Defence Brigade (BDB), mostly composed of fighters from Benghazi driven out by the LNA. Since 2016, the BDB had been using Jufra, at the crossroads between southern and northern Libya, as a logistical base to attack LNA positions in the east.<sup>64</sup>

Following a rapid escalation of violence in May-June 2017, prompted by an attack on Brak al-Shati airbase by the BDB and pro-Misrata forces, LNA-aligned forces took over both Tamanhindt and the Jufra airbase; by June 2017 Misrata's Third

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<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sebha, 28 March 2017. A Sebha resident said that members of the Third Force colluded with local groups involved in smuggling, especially fuel smuggling. Crisis Group interview, Sebha, 30 March 2017. Even those locals who support Misrata's role as a deterrent in the south admit that the Third Force did not meet expectations. However, they warn that without Misrata tribal fighting could resume. "I don't want to criticise Misrata. When they came, they were appointed by the General National Congress [the former Tripoli-based parliament, GNC] and stopped the war. Their presence here also helped keep the old regime at bay and stopped them from taking power here. But they were supposed to secure all the area from Brak al-Shati to the border, and that they did not achieve. Maybe Misrata has interests here. But if they leave, there is the risk of a return of fighting". Crisis Group interview, member of Sebha municipal council, 29 March 2017.

<sup>61</sup> On the relations between Haftar and the internationally recognised government of Faiez Serraj, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°170, *The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset*, 4 November 2016 and Crisis Group Commentary, "Libya: No Political Deal Yet", 11 May 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Mohamed Ben Nayel is a Qadhafi-era military officer from the Magarha tribe with a history of opposing Misratan forces. Local supporters of the LNA claim that Ben Nayel's men turned against the Third Force, after cooperating with them at the Brak al-Shati base in mid-2016, because the Misratans allegedly backed local individuals with ties to al-Qaeda. Crisis Group interview, resident of Brak Shati, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Crisis Group interview, army colonel from Shweref area, Tripoli, 25 March 2017.

<sup>64</sup> The BDB took part in at least two offensives on the LNA-controlled crude oil export terminals around Ras Lanuf in 2016. See Crisis Group Commentary, "Oil Zone Fighting Threatens Libya with Economic Collapse", 14 December 2016.

Force withdrew entirely from the south.<sup>65</sup> Since Misrata's withdrawal, there has been only one, rapidly quelled, episode of fighting in Sebha.<sup>66</sup> Jamal Treiki, the head of the Third Force, and others warned of a possible flare up in the south or even ISIS attacks should Misrata be forced to leave.<sup>67</sup>

Though attacks by ISIS affiliates have increased between Sirte and Sebha in recent months, locals apparently most fear rising crime.<sup>68</sup> As a Sebha resident said:

There is no police here, no units fighting against crime. Sebha is full of criminals and lots of drugs come through here. If things don't get better, they can only get worse. [...] Someone can attack you just to steal a phone. I am not afraid of escalation of fighting between tribes because at the end of the day *ayyan* (tribal leaders) can stop that. But they have no control over crime. That is more dangerous.<sup>69</sup>

Other issues of concern are the rapidly shifting alliances among and within tribes. Both are recurring sources of instability in the south and could remain so even after recent dramatic changes in the balance of power on the ground.

### C. *Fluid and Fragmented Loyalties*

The tribes and ethnic groups of the Fezzan are not monolithic entities.<sup>70</sup> The Tuareg, for example, are internally divided along military lines. At any given moment, some members might fight in the name of forces aligned with the Tripoli-based government, others on behalf of Haftar and still others would be neutral. A similar pattern occurred with the Tebu, whose commanders are on both sides of the military divide, as well as with the Arab tribes.

Among the Tuareg, these divisions were the result of threats by the different Tripoli governments to cut the salaries of all military personnel without a national ID number (*raqm watani*). While the IDs were introduced in Libya in 2013 to control public payrolls, many Tuareg – including some employed as professional

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<sup>65</sup> On 18 May 2017, forces allied to the Third Force and nominally loyal to the GNA attacked Brak al-Shati airbase, killing between 80 and 130 LNA members (sources differ on the actual number). This allegedly was in retaliation for LNA attacks on Tamanhindt airbase. In late May, because of the public outcry (including from within Misrata), Misratan forces and their local allies withdrew from Tamanhindt, leaving it in the hands of LNA-aligned local units. Soon thereafter, in a surprise 3 June offensive, LNA forces coming from the east took over Jufra airbase. This last operation took place with the support of the Egyptian air force. "East Libyan forces take desert airbase as they push west", Reuters, 3 June 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Some Tebu and Awlad Suleiman clashed in Sebha in early June 2017.

<sup>67</sup> In late March 2017, before the Third Force withdrew from Sebha, Treiki had said, "If we leave, everything here will explode. There will be a war like in 2014 – and tribal fighting [*harb ahliya*] will resume. There is still will for revenge, plus there are still mercenaries around. ISIS could also consolidate". Crisis Group interview, Jamal Treiki, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

<sup>68</sup> On 7 May 2017, ISIS affiliates claimed an attack against Misratan forces near the Loud agricultural project, 100km south west of Sirte; on 14 May, they seized fuel tanks in the same area.

<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group interview, former military officer, Sebha, 28 March 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Tribes and ethnic groups appear as monolithic in their military alignments because commanders tend to hold sway primarily on their kinsmen, so for convenience analysts and journalists tend to generalise.

military by Qadhafi – did not possess a number nor could they obtain one since they did not meet the requirement of being a full Libyan citizen.<sup>71</sup> An activist said:

It started in 2013 when Osama Juweili of Zintan was defence minister. The only way for those who saw their salaries cut off to resume being paid was to join the Zintani forces. In that case, a Tuareg would be given a national ID number and a salary. *Fajr Libya* [Libya Dawn, the Misrata-led military coalition that clashed with Zintani forces in Tripoli in July-August, sparking the divide between rival governments and parliaments] did the same: they gave a national ID and salary if you joined them. Since *Karama* [the Haftar-led Operation Dignity to seize control of Benghazi launched in May 2014] started, Haftar has given LYD3,000 a month [\$2,170 at the official exchange rate, but around \$375 at the 2017 black market exchange rate] to whoever agreed to fight with *Karama* forces in Benghazi.<sup>72</sup>

Some Tuareg say they find power struggles within the capital confusing; they feel manipulated by the country's various military factions. Speaking in April 2017, a Tuareg, who before 2011 worked as a desert tourist guide and since the war has been employed by various military forces operating in the Obari area, acknowledged:

We don't really understand what is happening or what will happen. In 2011 when the revolution started, I joined an anti-Qadhafi force of *thuwwar* (revolutionaries). Then Zintan came and said that the force I had been working with was al-Qaeda. So I left them and joined Zintan as part of the Petroleum Facilities Guards. Then Zintan left without warning us [in November 2014] and Misrata came here. So I joined the Misratan force. Now we are with the Third Force. But then people say that Haftar is getting strong and his people say that Misrata is not legal. You see, we don't really know what to do.<sup>73</sup>

Amid this confusion, another Tuareg force is emerging in the south under the leadership of a Qadhafi-era general, Ali Kanna, who says he is neutral in the national conflict and aspires to a unified army.<sup>74</sup> In early 2017, however, Kanna tilted toward the Misratans, leaving open the question of how he will position himself in the long run should the LNA's standing in the south rise further.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Some 20,000 Tuareg families have been living in Libya for years but do not have full citizenship – administratively they only have *raqm idari* (administrative number) and not a *raqm watani* (national ID number). “This means that they do not have the right to hold a passport, they have no right to vote, nor do they stand a chance of receiving health care abroad, or of being granted a government scholarship to study outside of the country, like every other normal Libyan”. Crisis Group interview, Ibrahim Tazaghrit, Tuareg activist, Obari, 25 March 2017. The lack of full citizenship is a reason why so many Tuareg are employed in the military.

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tuareg leader, Tripoli, 23 March 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tuareg member of the Third Force, Sharara, 1 April 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Tuareg civil society activist and Tuareg tribal leader, Obari and Sebha, March 2017.

<sup>75</sup> The head of the Third Force in Sebha praised the Tuareg general: “Ali Kanna and Ben Nayel had a big row in Brak al-Shati and they are not on good terms”. Crisis Group interview, Jamal Treiki, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

The Tebu have also experienced shifting loyalties and internal divisions.<sup>76</sup> In 2012, during the first Tebu-Awlad Suleiman war, they aligned with Misrata while the Awlad Suleiman opposed it. In 2014, the alignments were reversed: the three main Awlad Suleiman armed groups in Sebha (*katiba reda*, *ahrar fezzan* and *shuhada sebha*) cooperated with Misrata while the Tebu were backed by the LNA, Zintani armed groups and by factions close to the old regime. Throughout the political and military crisis of 2014-2015 and the Tebu-Tuareg conflict, the Tebu largely remained in the LNA camp. By the end of 2016, as reconciliation talks with the Tuareg matured and relations with Zintan soured, the Tebu-LNA alliance broke down. Several Tebu commanders distanced themselves from the LNA because of Haftar's perceived pro-Arab bias.<sup>77</sup> In 2017, the Tebu split: some units remained aligned with the LNA, others supported Misrata. The same applied to the Awlad Suleiman.<sup>78</sup> Misrata's recent withdrawal from the south signals a major change in the balance of power and is likely to trigger further realignments in the south.

Another wild card is the presence of foreign fighters recruited by both the Misratan-backed coalition and the LNA, as well as their respective local allies. The origin and exact numbers of these fighters remain murky although most appear to be Chadian and Sudanese; local sources offer differing accounts regarding who fights for whom, with some groups switching sides. In mid-2017, fighters with opposition armed groups from northern Chad – mainly from the FACT (Front for Change and Concord in Chad) – appeared to be fighting alongside the pro-Misrata coalition whereas Sudanese and Darfuri groups (eg, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and SL/Mini Minawi) were on the LNA side.<sup>79</sup> There were also allegations

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<sup>76</sup> Crisis Group interviews, residents, military officers, Misratan politicians, Tebu activists, Tunis, Sebha and Obari, 2015-2017.

<sup>77</sup> At that point, some key Tebu commanders like Hassan Musa and Abu Bakr Suqi shifted toward Misrata. A Tebu activist explained the shift away from the LNA in 2016 as follows: "After a year we understood that we were being used by both Libya Dawn and those of Operation Dignity, and that the war between them was the true reason for the Obari war. Initially we were with Dignity, but then we realised that we did not like the way Haftar worked. He wanted military rule; supported militarily other groups – like the Zway [in Kufra] and Magharha [in Brak al-Shati] – and less so the Tebu. For this reason some people turned to Misrata/Tripoli". Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, March 2017. LNA's decision to change its Arabic name to the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (*al-quwwat al-musallaha al-arabiya al-libiya*) in early 2016 contributed to the rifts. On the fluid loyalties of the Tebu, see also Tubiana and Gramizzi, "Tubu Trouble", op. cit., pp. 120-121.

<sup>78</sup> According to Sebha residents, in March 2017 members of Reda armed group were aligned with the LNA while those of Ahrrar Fezzan remained with Misrata. Crisis Group interviews, Sebha, March-April 2017.

<sup>79</sup> According to a foreign analyst, Haftar initially used recruits from Chad. However, since a late 2015 meeting during which Idriss Deby allegedly voiced concern over this, Haftar has appeared to be using exclusively Sudanese fighters, "especially Mini Minawi fighters, because of their relative geographical proximity to LNA-controlled areas". Crisis Group interview, May 2017. For a complete list of Chadian opposition armed groups in Libya, see footnote 4. The 2017 UN Panel of Experts report supports such claims. Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011), S/2017/466, 1 June 2017. The Third Force commander denied that they were supporting or using foreign fighters. Crisis Group interview, Jamal Treiki, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

of *janjawid* [Sudanese Arab] fighters in Libya, though it was unclear whose side they were on.<sup>80</sup>

A recently published report, which discussed reasons for the Misrata-led coalition's recruitment of Chadian fighters, offers the following rationale:

Their Libyan hosts' initial aim was to prevent these Chadian forces from being recruited as mercenaries by their adversaries in Tobruk. Another aim was to encourage Haftar's Chadian recruits to switch sides, then to use them as mercenaries against Haftar or ISIS. The aim of the 'third force' was also to use these troops to put pressure on [Chad's President Idris] Déby and to distance him from Haftar.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Crisis Group interview, May 2017. The confusion also reflects the fact that Libyans tend to use the derogatory term *janjawid* as a synonym for mercenary.

<sup>81</sup> Tubiana and Gramizzi, "Tubu Trouble", op. cit., p. 145. A Tuareg elder, whose views possibly are shaped by his anti-Tebu bias, said, "Chad was pushing them [Chadian opposition groups] across the border into Libya in order to create *za-za* (mess) in the south of Libya and keep them busy there rather than in Chad. So you shouldn't be surprised if tomorrow there is war here, even if today everything appears fine. One cannot tell if Chad will continue supporting these people in the future". Crisis Group interview, Sebha, 29 March 2017.

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## V. No GNA, Few Internationals in the South

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The internationally recognised government in Tripoli remains disengaged and lacks influence in the Fezzan. The EU, most EU member states, and international organisations have at best a limited presence on the ground; only Italy is trying to implement a stabilisation plan for the south.

### A. No Central State

State authorities in Tripoli historically have enjoyed less direct influence in the Fezzan than elsewhere in the country. Yet their presence has never been as marginal as today. An Arab tribesman from Wadi Hayat said, “Serraj is completely uninfluential here. About 60 per cent of the local population supports Haftar”.<sup>82</sup>

The GNA's two main rivals fare somewhat better. Since 2014, Khalifa Ghwell's Tripoli-based, unrecognised government and LNA forces, who recognise the east-based government as legitimate, have reached out to local communities and co-opted their support. “Haftar and LNA envoys came here and distributed vehicles and spoke to local military groups. Ghwell also did the same,” said a Tebu, an account confirmed by Arab tribal members.<sup>83</sup> As recently as April 2017, representatives of both Ghwell and Haftar – but not Serraj – were present in the town of Murzuq, for example. A local resident explained:

Murzuq has two heads of police, one appointed by the Ghwell government (a Tebu) and the other by Haftar and the eastern government (a Fezzana). Both operate from the *mudiriya* (police station), and have offices side by side. The two don't fight each other. They each give their orders to the police force. But the police force is actually the same – so *de facto* these men are taking orders from two heads of police. There is nobody appointed by the Presidency Council here, in the whole of Murzuq.<sup>84</sup>

GNA supporters acknowledge their lack of influence in the south, which the Presidency Council attributes to its inability to access and dispose of funds for southern institutions.<sup>85</sup>

The Presidency Council also lost ground militarily. Its main ally in the Fezzan, the Misratan Third Force, withdrew from Sebha's Tamanhint military base in late May 2017; its departure weakened the council's local allies. Advancing LNA forces expelled the Benghazi Defence Brigade (BDB), an unofficial military coalition stationed in Jufra and backed by al-Mahdi al-Barghati, the Serraj-appointed defence

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<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interview, Obari, 1 April 2017. According to many, even the two Presidency Council (PC) members from the south, Abdulsalam Kajman (from Brak al-Shati) and Ahmed Hamza (from Traghan), have little influence there. Crisis Group interviews, residents and local notables, Murzuq, Obari, Sebha, March-April 2017. The PC included another representative from the south, the Tuareg Musa al-Koni, but he resigned in January 2017.

<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tebu resident, Murzuq, 30 March 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tebu journalist, Murzuq, 1 April 2017. Apparently, the elected mayor of Murzuq sits in Tripoli.

<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group interview, adviser to Faiez Serraj, Malta, May 2017.



minister, in June 2017. This has given LNA-aligned military groups the upper hand, at least for now.

### B. *The International Community in the South*

Aware of the fragility of the Tripoli-based government and its lack of operating capacity across the Fezzan and in the border area, the EU and member states until recently brushed off Libya's south as "a region where we simply do not have an institutional partner and therefore where we cannot operate".<sup>86</sup> As a result, European efforts to curb migrant flows until recently had focused mainly on stopping smugglers in international waters off Libya's north-west coast and in Niger.

Established in late 2014, the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED), also known as Operation Sophia, tried to disrupt human smuggling and trafficking networks between Libya and Europe while saving lives at sea.<sup>87</sup> Notwithstanding these and other efforts – such as training coastguards, facilitating voluntary repatriation flights and enhancing UN agencies' migrant-related activities – migrant flows from Libya to Europe continued to increase.<sup>88</sup> Efforts to stop people from entering Libya through Niger also have fallen short of expectations. Despite EU support for authorities in Niger and a government-led crackdown on smugglers in Agadez in 2016, which briefly reduced entries, by mid-2017 the number of migrants entering Libya via the Niger border rose again.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Crisis Group interview, member of the European Parliament, Reggio Emilia, Italy, May 2017.

<sup>87</sup> EUNAVFOR MED was launched on 22 June 2015 as a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operation to disrupt smuggling in the southern Central Mediterranean. On 28 September 2015, the EU agreed to start the active phase of the operation against human smugglers, renamed Operation Sophia after a baby born aboard one of the mission's ships. The boats operate in international waters off the coast of Libya, gathering information, rescuing migrants and refugees and destroying boats used by smugglers. On 20 June 2016, the Council reinforced the mandate, adding training for the Libyan coastguard and navy and helping implement the UN arms embargo. On 25 July 2017, it extended the mandate until 31 December 2018. While it has succeeded in its rescue mission, the operation has not reduced the overall flow of migrants using the Central Mediterranean route or the number of deaths at sea, which rose from 2,876 in 2015 to 4,581 in 2016 and stood at more than 2,000 halfway through 2017. On 26 July 2017, Prime Minister Faiez Serraj submitted an official request for the deployment of Italian vessels in Libyan territorial waters to assist the Libyan government with anti-smuggling operations.

<sup>88</sup> Several problems explain this. One is the limited capacity of the Libyan coastguard, some elements of which are suspected of colluding with smugglers. Another is that, ironically, Operation Sophia ships and non-governmental sea rescue organisations have facilitated migrants' passage to Europe. A Libyan NGO worker said, "You no longer need to make the whole journey to Lampedusa [the Italian island 160 nautical miles from Tripoli]; all you need to do now is head toward one of the foreign ships stationed in international waters just 12 miles off the coast of Zawiya [a town west of Tripoli]". Migrants are brought to Italy when they are rescued by an international vessel. Once there, they are rarely repatriated and never returned to Libya. Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, April 2017. Some EU and Libyan security officials accuse foreign NGOs operating at sea of "colluding" with smugglers, an accusation the NGOs reject. Crisis Group interviews, EU officials, Tunis, March 2017; Libyan security officials, Tripoli, March 2017. See also Ayrn Baker, "Don't blame rescue-at-sea organizations for migrants coming to Europe", *Time*, 22 December 2016.

<sup>89</sup> In May 2015 Niger passed an anti-smuggling law that provided the legal framework for judges and police to take action against smugglers. The EU backed these efforts and in 2015 Niger became a beneficiary of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, set up to address migration from the

In early 2017, with attempts to stem migration off Libya's coastline or from northern Niger faltering, European policymakers shifted gears and decided to tackle the problem also from southern Libya.<sup>90</sup> Some of Serraj's international backers – particularly Italy, the European country most directly affected by Libya's migrant flows, and Germany – appear keen to take the lead.<sup>91</sup>

But they do not know where to begin. For the past several years, most international organisations and Western countries have eschewed work in southern Libya. The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) team, the EU delegation to Libya and most embassies (all of which had moved from Tripoli to Tunis by early 2015) admitted they barely followed dynamics in the south, focusing instead on the national political crisis and the east-west military divide.<sup>92</sup> The exceptions are the French military (which was interested in southern Libya as part of Operation Barkhane) and neighbouring states – Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia – that need to secure their borders and monitor the flow of people and fighters. As mentioned, Qatar was also involved in mediating peace talks in the Obari conflict.

In April 2017, the EU allocated €90 million (\$105 million) for development aid to Libya as part of the North of Africa Window of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, some of which is due to be spent on projects in the south.<sup>93</sup> EU officials said additional funds could be earmarked for such projects, though Libyans are

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Sahel and Lake Chad regions, the Horn of Africa and North Africa. The EU also helped to train internal security forces in the central Niger city of Agadez through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Sahel Niger mission (EUCAP Sahel Niger). By late 2016, security officers in Niger had seized 95 vehicles and arrested 102 smugglers as well as nine police officers for migration-related corruption. This apparently disrupted smuggling networks somewhat in Agadez, forcing them to operate more clandestinely. By March 2017, however, a Tebu living close to the border said that the measures put in place caused friction between residents of northern Niger and the government, but did not stop migrants, adding, “the business [of people smuggling] has never been so good”. Crisis Group interview, Murzuq, 31 March 2017. See Omar Saley, “Niger's migrant smuggling hub empties after EU crackdown”, Reuters, 31 January 2017; *Mixed Migration Trends in Libya*, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>90</sup> This is in addition to other EU efforts to support the G5 Sahel Joint Force and its CSDP missions in Mali and the Sahel as foreseen by the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on 19 June 2017. Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on Mali and the Sahel, 19 June 2017.

<sup>91</sup> The current focus of attention appears limited to the Niger-Libya border area, which is migrants' principal access route, and the city of Sebha, which is the main hub for migrants entering from the Niger border or from Sudan via Kufra (in south-eastern Libya). German-Italian talks about a military mission appear to focus on the Niger side of the Libyan border. “Germany, Italy float EU mission to stop migrants in southern Libya”, Deutsche Welle, 14 May 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior UN and EU officials, Tunis, Marrakesh, April-May 2017. There were practical reasons for not engaging with the south. The closure of Sebha airport for many months in a row, the volatile security landscape and the closure of most hotels since early 2014, all made it difficult to even visit the area.

<sup>93</sup> The European Commission allocated these funds in April 2017 to protect migrants and improve migration management in Libya. The program is implemented by five main partners: International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ). See “EU Trust Fund for Africa adopts €90 million programme on protection of migrants and improved migration management in Libya”, press release, European Commission, 12 April 2017.

sceptical.<sup>94</sup> Many questioned whether the UN agencies that will receive these funds can do much in the south. A Libyan diplomat said:

They allocated these funds without asking themselves what they can do. There is a simple problem of access: how are these organisations going to roll out their projects in the south if they lack implementation capability and access?<sup>95</sup>

Difficulties operating in the Fezzan will continue to be a key impediment. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) has local staff in Obari and Sebha, working on the rehabilitation of local hospitals, schools and sanitation, but this appears to be more the exception than the rule.<sup>96</sup> Several international NGOs engage in reconciliation projects in the south yet these initiatives tend to occur outside of Libya. A number of UN agencies are trying to implement development projects across southern Libya but they operate mainly through local partners or the Libyan Red Crescent.<sup>97</sup> Most foreign NGOs that were considering starting operations in Sebha gave up because of security concerns.<sup>98</sup> Even the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which has a presence in Sebha, has had trouble operating since it likened the treatment of migrants there to the slave trade.<sup>99</sup>

Despite these constraints, Italy, which is eager to become more active in the Fezzan, is promoting its own stabilisation project. Since early 2017, a government-funded NGO has convened meetings with stakeholders from southern Libya for an ambitious project titled “A plan for peace, stability and security in the south of Libya”.<sup>100</sup> Its aim is to confront “illegal immigration, illicit traffics and terrorism” and it includes a tribal reconciliation program; cultural and medical hubs; an economic project to create industrial centres; and local anti-illegal smuggling police units with members recruited from groups currently involved in human trafficking.

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<sup>94</sup> An EU official said that due to political pressure from member states facing elections this year, there is willingness to invest this money and monitor its use, but the EU lacks a strong presence on the ground, especially in Libya. Crisis Group interview, Brussels, June 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Crisis Group interview, Brussels, July 2017.

<sup>96</sup> This formed part of the UNDP-supported Stabilization Facility for Libya launched in April 2016, which aims to help the Government of National Accord implement development projects in Libya.

<sup>97</sup> Local groups include the Sheikh Taher al-Zawi organisation, a Zawiya-based Libyan organisation with branches across the south west. Crisis Group interview, Serraj Hodairi, Sebha branch manager of the Sheikh Taher al-Zawi organisation, Sebha, 29 March 2017. For a complete list of local civil society organisations, see *Mixed Migration Trends in Libya*, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>98</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) sent an exploratory mission to Sebha in late 2016, but to date, for logistical and security reasons, operations have not yet started. Crisis Group interview, MSF representative, Tripoli, April 2017.

<sup>99</sup> “IOM really exaggerated when it called what was happening in Sebha slave trade. People here got furious and threatened to kick out their staff. Now they really have trouble operating in the south”, said a member of a local NGO. Crisis Group interview, Tripoli, April 2017. “IOM learns of ‘slave market’ conditions endangering migrants in North Africa”, press release, International Organization for Migration, 11 April 2017. Another challenge for the IOM is the fact that there are no voluntary repatriation flights of illegal migrants from southern Libya. They depart only from Tripoli.

<sup>100</sup> Document on file with Crisis Group obtained from Italian NGO Ara Pacis, June 2017. Crisis Group interview, Maria Nicoletta Gaida, Ara Pacis, Rome, 2 June 2017.

Initial costs are estimated at €90 million for which Italy is seeking EU funding.<sup>101</sup> The idea, an EU official familiar with the project said, is that “if you want to peel away people from the human trafficking business you need to co-opt them and to do so you must buy them over”.<sup>102</sup>

Many expressed doubts about the project, however. Some tribal leaders who attended the Rome talks questioned the “cultural hubs”, telling their hosts they did not need their former colonial masters “to help the tribes preserve their cultural identities”.<sup>103</sup> Some Italian analysts fear that trying to co-opt local tribes into anti-smuggling local police units without parallel efforts to address Libya’s macroeconomic problems will not reduce the number of migrants, just increase the price they must pay to smugglers.<sup>104</sup> Questions likewise surround the proposed industrial projects, which include glass and marble factories, whose products will be difficult to market in the sparsely populated south and hard to deliver to wider markets further north because of insecurity on the roads.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> On 4 July 2017, the European Commission proposed an Action Plan “to support Italy, reduce pressure and increase solidarity”. The measures proposed are supposed to form the basis for discussions on immediate action to support Italy and reduce flows of migrants. This includes working with Libyan authorities and strengthening control along Libya’s southern border. Press release, European Commission, 4 July 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Crisis Group interview, Brussels, June 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Crisis Group interview, attendee of Ara Pacis talks, Rome, June 2017.

<sup>104</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Italian analysts and journalists, Rome and London, June 2017.

<sup>105</sup> An Italian diplomat took issue with the criticism: “It is too easy to criticise what we are doing or proposing. We are the only one doing anything. None of the other EU countries knows anything or is doing anything for Libya”. Crisis Group interview, Brussels, June 2017.

## **VI. Policy Implications and Conclusion**

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Libyan authorities, the EU and European governments can take steps to improve conditions in the region, which over time can discourage the people smuggling that is Europe's paramount concern.

### *A. Security*

Initiatives to end the tribal wars that have killed thousands in the Fezzan over the past five years have failed thus far to build a solid peace. Despite ongoing ceasefire arrangements and dialogue between groups once at war, lingering tensions remain, some deepened by these very efforts to end the fighting. Qatar's failure to deliver the monetary compensation promised during its mediation efforts, for example, has become a potential trigger for renewed violence. Given uncertainty over what Qatar will do – particularly given its isolation from other powers seeking to project influence in Libya, especially Egypt and the United Arab Emirates – expectations need to be adjusted in subsequent negotiations. Efforts still underway, such as negotiations between the Tebu and the Awlad Suleiman, should avoid empty promises. Monetary compensation may not be the most effective way to engineer a settlement; it may be wiser to focus on concrete issues – such as security, freedom of movement and access to services such as hospitals and universities – that affect people's everyday lives.

More importantly, there needs to be rethinking about how to address Libya's security challenges, with an eye to the south. Narrow, local talks among tribal representatives and civil society activists are not enough. These should be accompanied by negotiations specifically aimed first at bringing together military commanders and leaders of armed groups operating in the south and then integrated into a wider national security dialogue. Stabilisation of the south will depend largely on the outcome of competition between military groups nominally aligned to the internationally recognised government in Tripoli and those belonging to the military coalition under General Haftar. Crisis Group previously urged a national dialogue to address this rift, but it has yet to materialise. Instead, conversations on security so far have focused on creation of a secure zone in and around Tripoli. This is vital but insufficient; it will do little for the rest of the country, including the south.

Restoring an effective, integrated national army with a clear chain of command is crucial both nationally and in the south, where Arab, Tebu and Tuareg officers all aspire to positions of influence. Ordinary citizens, meanwhile, crave a legitimate armed force that can impose a modicum of order.

Beyond the military, other security functions – ordinary policing, securing oil and gas facilities, border guards, etc. – should be addressed both in any southern strategy and in the wider national security dialogue that remains, for now, largely unstructured. UNSMIL, pursuant to its mandate, should take the lead in constructing and conducting this security dialogue and ensuring inclusion of the south and of its concerns. As a preliminary step, and as it prepares to return to a permanent presence in Libya after a prolonged absence, UNSMIL should deploy to the area.

The different political and strategic agendas that drive various European countries also need greater coordination. Today, France and Italy have taken the

most active approach toward the south, each motivated by separate and at times competing priorities. Paris is concerned about the Sahel's strategic stability not only because it has troops deployed there but also because it is an area of privileged French influence in Africa. Rome has energy interests in Libya (including in the natural gas extracted in the south) and is concerned primarily about the flow of migrants that land on its shores. The two countries have lent political and at times military backing to rival sides in the Libyan conflict (with France giving LNA forces covert military support in 2016) even as they both nominally support the UN-led diplomatic process.<sup>106</sup> Tensions between Rome and Paris over their respective roadmaps for Libya's stabilisation could spill over to the south and undermine stabilisation efforts.

Europe as a whole is motivated by the migration question, and often appears to be seeking the kind of partnerships it has implemented with countries such as Turkey, designed to prevent refugees and migrants from reaching the continent. In Libya, this is not feasible: the internationally recognised government has little implementing capability, especially in the Fezzan, where forces opposed to the Tripoli government have the upper hand. Instead, it would be wiser to exert greater diplomatic pressure on Libya's meddling neighbours (particularly Egypt and the UAE, whose military action and aid in support of Haftar have been most disruptive), while avoiding the temptation to pick winners in local or national conflicts. At the same time, Europe should provide greater support to UN efforts to resolve the Libyan conflict, stabilise the national economy and create a negotiation track for armed actors aimed at creating a more integrated security sector.<sup>107</sup>

## B. *Economic Alternatives*

Without security, it will be hard to build the economy; without economic alternatives, it will be difficult to curb trafficking, including of migrants; and as long as trafficking continues, Fezzan residents will have incentives to resist efforts to impose security. This vicious cycle has left European officials both seized with the urgency of reducing migrant flows on the Central Mediterranean route and deeply pessimistic that anything meaningful can be done.

That pessimism has stymied even modest, but useful initial steps. In the long term, an end to the Libyan conflict would create opportunities that will lure many back into the licit economy while absorbing migrant labour from sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere, as was the case before 2011. Libya has massive potential wealth and a long backlog of major infrastructure and reconstruction projects. In the short to medium term, even as the conflict endures, some measures are both possible and advisable:

First, economic or social development projects require careful feasibility studies, especially given the EU's and member states' lack of experience or contacts with the Fezzan. The agricultural sector is especially worth exploring: farming is not highly reliant on high-tech equipment, which is difficult to maintain and secure, and it can quickly bring food and employment to the local population. As Crisis

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<sup>106</sup> Crisis Group Report, *The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset*, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Group observed in the south, privately owned and secured farms have continued to function, even amid the current disorder, because owners have a stake in protecting them. In contrast, low paid employees fled the now largely defunct state-owned farms when conditions deteriorated. Further studies are necessary to determine whether the better solution would be privatisation, cooperative ownership structures or another form of collective organisation. In the meantime, the EU and others should encourage and, if necessary, help the UN-recognised government to improve its agricultural sector, which also would enhance its standing among the Libyan people.

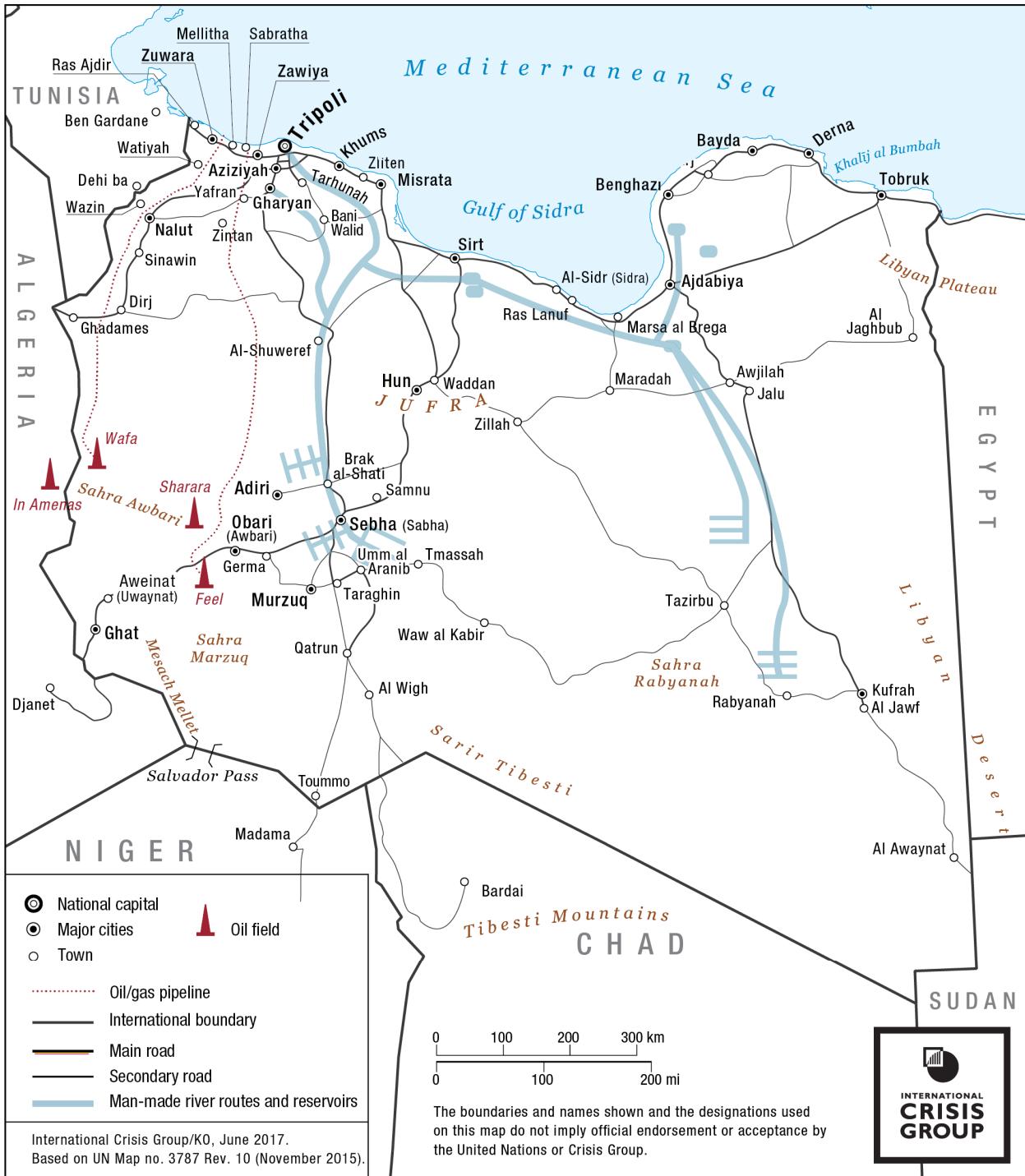
Second, UN agencies, in coordination with the internationally recognised government and local municipal authorities should seek to reopen Sebha airport, facilitate negotiations among local security factions to secure it and carry out the minor infrastructural work necessary to enable commercial flights to Obari. This would help decrease the Fezzan's sense of isolation.

Third, national and international oil companies – notably around Murzuq and Obari, the two locations where they have facilities – should implement small-scale development projects in cooperation with local civil society. According to Libyan law, oil companies are supposed to invest in communities and promote social development projects, but they do not. Legal obligations aside, it would be smart business to lower community resentment. In April 2017, promises by managers of Libya's NOC to invest in Murzuq persuaded local guards in al-Feel, an oilfield operated by Italy's ENI, to lift their blockade on production. The NOC should deliver on its promises to avoid new problems and it should reach out to other communities in oil-rich areas. Maintaining good relations with civil society groups is all the more important in the current atmosphere of insecurity, where a single militia leader can block production in hopes of a pay-off. When a community has an interest in ensuring that does not happen it can pressure local militias to back off.

These would all be modest beginnings, but the international community has much ground to make up in Libya's south.

**Brussels/Tripoli/Sebha, 31 July 2017**

Appendix A: Map of Libya





## Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in ten other locations: Bishkek, Bogota, Dakar, Kabul, Islamabad, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Sanaa, Tblisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Defence, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, German Federal Foreign Office, Global Affairs Canada, Irish Aid, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Crisis Group also holds relationships with the following foundations: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Henry Luce Foundation, Humanity United, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Oak Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Ploughshares Fund, Robert Bosch Stiftung, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

**July 2017**

## Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on the Middle East and North Africa since 2014

### Special Reports

*Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

*Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

*Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid*, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

### Israel/Palestine

*The Next Round in Gaza*, Middle East Report N°149, 25 March 2014 (also available in Arabic).

*Gaza and Israel: New Obstacles, New Solutions*, Middle East Briefing N°39, 14 July 2014.

*Bringing Back the Palestinian Refugee Question*, Middle East Report N°156, 9 October 2014 (also available in Arabic).

*Toward a Lasting Ceasefire in Gaza*, Middle East Briefing N°42, 23 October 2014 (also available in Arabic).

*The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade*, Middle East Report N°159, 30 June 2015 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*No Exit? Gaza & Israel Between Wars*, Middle East Report N°162, 26 August 2015 (also available in Arabic).

*How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade*, Middle East Briefing N°48, 7 April 2016 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*Israel/Palestine: Parameters for a Two-State Settlement*, Middle East Report N°172, 28 November 2016 (also available in Arabic).

### Iraq/Syria/Lebanon

*Iraq: Falluja's Faustian Bargain*, Middle East Report N°150, 28 April 2014 (also available in Arabic).

*Flight of Icarus? The PYD's Precarious Rise in Syria*, Middle East Report N°151, 8 May 2014 (also available in Arabic).

*Lebanon's Hizbollah Turns Eastward to Syria*, Middle East Report N°153, 27 May 2014 (also available in Arabic).

*Iraq's Jihadi Jack-in-the-Box*, Middle East Briefing N°38, 20 June 2014.

*Rigged Cars and Barrel Bombs: Aleppo and the State of the Syrian War*, Middle East Report N°155, 9 September 2014 (also available in Arabic).

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