

# Mercenaries in Libya and the Threat to Regional Peace

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(Sinan Gül - Anadolu Agency)

**Libya is at its most stable moment since 2014, the conflict was effectively de-escalated when Libya's warring parties agreed to sign a ceasefire agreement in October 2020. This development facilitated a peace process that, in theory, culminates in general elections scheduled to be held on December 24th, 2021. However, political, institutional and security challenges could complicate the prospect for stability and risk jeopardizing progress made in recent months. The security situation will presumably remain precarious in the coming months due to the continued presence of irregular troops and mercenaries in the country who pose a threat to the stability of Libya and the region.**

## Introduction

In March 2021, Libyan factions achieved an unexpected breakthrough in forming the Government of National Unity (GNU), which was at least tacitly accepted by all the major actors in the country. After years of conflict, this should be seen as a notable step towards rapprochement.

The new government must deal with an array of complex political, economic and security challenges if it is to keep the country together until planned elections in December 2021, which it is hoped will lead to a more stable and permanent civilian authority and significantly advance a permanent solution to the civil war that has raged since 2015.

Providing security could be the most pressing challenge for the unity government. Libya's new Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh [said](#) that he plans on unifying Libya's state institutions, including the military. However, others stress the importance of the role of the United Nations and the major powers in sponsoring the new government, stabilising the ceasefire, and removing militias and mercenaries.

Security and stability would encourage Libyans to take part in the process of reconciliation and to support paths of reconstruction and development. However, the presence of mercenaries poses a great security challenge and continues to inhibit progress toward meeting the December 2021 election timeline.

Under the UN-brokered ceasefire deal signed in October last year, foreign troops and mercenaries were mandated to pull out of Libya within three months. According to [the UN](#), there were 20,000 foreign forces and mercenaries in Libya at the end of 2020, and no withdrawals have been observed since.

Ján Kubiš, the UN special envoy for Libya, [warned](#) the UN Security Council that progress on the key issue of the withdrawal of mercenaries and foreign fighters from Libya

has stalled and their continued presence is a threat not only to Libya but to the North African region as a whole.

## The current political and military landscape

After six years of civil war, Libya's warring factions agreed to a ceasefire in October 2020, which has facilitated a peace process that, in theory, ends in general elections scheduled to be held on December 24th, 2021. Despite this positive outcome, the country remains an arena for external players and their proxies.

The planned elections are part of an UN-backed settlement process led by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and follow the ceasefire deal, which came on the heels of the defeat of a fourteen-month offensive led by the Khalifa Haftar that aimed at taking over the capital, Tripoli, from the UN-backed GNA.

Resolving the constitutional and legal basis for the elections is crucial. Currently, there is a lack of unity between the House of Representatives (HoR) and High Council of State (HCS) on the constitutional framework for elections, which could ultimately undermine the process. In this respect, the High National Election Commission (HNEC) [has given a tight deadline](#) to the rival parties to clarify the legal foundations of the elections.

[One key question](#) is whether to hold a referendum on a draft constitution prior to the elections or pass a temporary law and postpone broader constitutional questions. Another focuses on whether to hold direct presidential and parliamentary elections at the same time or allow the elected parliament to select a president. Furthermore, questions about candidate eligibility, such as whether they can have multiple citizenships, must also be addressed.



German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, Rosemary DiCarlo (R), Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs of the United Nations and Libyan Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush hold a press conference within the Second Berlin Conference on Libya, in Berlin, Germany on June 23, 2021. (Thomas Imo/photothek.de/Pool - Anadolu Agency)

On June 23, Germany and the UN [hosted](#) a follow up to the January 2020 Berlin Peace Conference on Libya. The UN sponsored conference renewed commitments to holding elections in December this year. According to the [final declaration of this conference](#), the departure of foreign fighters must be implemented in full and without further delay. All parties should abstain from activities that aggravate the conflict, including financing military capabilities or recruiting foreign fighters and mercenaries. The Libyan foreign minister also [said](#) that "Hopefully within coming days, mercenaries from both sides (are) going to be withdrawing and I think this is going to be encouraging".

## Security Challenges

Over the last ten years, the unstable security situation in Libya has been exacerbated by the continued failure of rival political parties to reconcile. The polarisation in Libyan politics and the following incapacity to consolidate rival militias into a unified, professional national armed force has created a security vacuum in the country.

Today, Libya seems to be on the path towards stability thanks to the ongoing UN-led peace process. However, despite the end of military operations, following the ceasefire agreement there are still many irregular troops and mercenaries in the country who pose a threat to the stability of Libya and the region.

"Above all, mercenaries speak to the weaknesses of the Libyan state and the various factions attempting to control it. The last thing the situation in Libya needs is another variable like mercenaries to complicate an already complex situation defined by weak institutions and fragile political coalitions". Dr Jacob Mundy, Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Colgate University, told TRT World Research Centre.

Mundy further observed that "in so far as mercenaries and other kinds of irregular foreign fighters serve the interests of foreign governments that sponsor them, they represent the ongoing militarisation of Libya and its political problems by outside actors whose interests are not necessarily in a peaceful, stable country. One could easily imagine that foreign fighters who become disowned or suddenly unemployed by their sponsors, with no way to return home, would have little choice but to rely on the very skills that brought them to the country: warfighting. We have more or less seen this with Darfuri and Tebu mercenaries that float from conflict to conflict, but now with the added element of Syrian mercenaries there's a potential for them to find their way into pre-existing groups like Daesh or Al-Qaida in North Africa, groups that could use a fresh injection of talent and human capital".

Wolfgang Puztai, Security & Policy Analyst Director, Perim Associate, told TRT World Research Centre, that: "Mercenaries and irregular troops as such are not so much a threat to stability as long as they are disciplined and firmly embedded in a chain of command. This is more of a problem wherever there is no proper control of the mercenaries, which is especially the case in southern Libya where mercenary groups operate frequently on their own".

Improving security is a key priority for the GNU along with attempts to improve political and socioeconomic conditions. To this end, Libya's new Prime Minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, has [stated](#) that he plans on unifying Libya's state institutions, including the military.

In this regard, the UN is facilitating the Joint Military Committee (JMC), also known as the 5+5 Commission, composed of five representatives each from the two major opposing parties in the Libyan conflict: the previous UN-backed GNA administration in Tripoli and forces aligned with Khalifa Haftar. The JMC was established after the [Berlin conference](#) in 2020 and tasked with uniting the country's disparate military institutions and determining what militias would become part of the army and which groups would be excluded.

The intent is to provide for the continuation of the ceasefire arrangement and the formation of a unified military. However, so far, the only notable accomplishment of the committee has been to agree on a permanent truce following pressure by the UN.

The success of the reconciliation process depends on the implementation of the agreements reached between the Libyan parties in the 5+5 talks. This is a condition for any meaningful improvements to be achieved in the security and economic tracks of the negotiations. For instance, as part of the deal, the Mediterranean coastal highway extending between Sirte in Central Libya and Misrata in western Libya, was [re-opened](#) to reunite the population centres in the east and west after two years of closure.

## Presence of mercenaries

Mercenaries have been heavily involved in illicit, destabilising activities in a number of countries including in Libya. A by-product of the civil war, the increasing involvement of foreign powers and the continuing insecurity and presence of mercenaries are detrimental to Libya's security and economy.

In a speech to parliament in March, Libya's Prime Minister [affirmed](#) that "The mercenaries are a stab in our back they must leave. Our sovereignty is violated by their presence." The presence of external players, refusing to withdraw their mercenaries from Libya, underlines the risk for a return to military conflict.

Libya ranks as the largest [oil economy](#) by proven reserves in Africa and one of the world's wealthiest economies by ratio of oil reserves to population size. As hydrocarbons are the principal source of economic growth in the country, economic activities have been extremely impacted by the constant conflicts around oil infrastructure. This weakness has been steadily ruining the country's economy since the overthrow of the Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

In this respect, Libya's division at both the political and security levels have effectively led to an open struggle for its oil resources. As a result, even foreign forces have been able to blockade oil ports and fields. For example, In June 2020, armed fighters associated with Wagner, a paramilitary company with reported ties to the Kremlin, [seized](#) control of two of Libya's largest oil facilities, El-Sharara, and its most prominent oil-exporting port.

According to Jacob Mundy, "Using foreign fighters to control oil infrastructures is a risky proposition. As we've seen repeatedly in Libya since 2011, it's very easy for a small number of actors to sabotage Libya's petroleum production, whether at the sites of extraction, the long pipelines, or at the refineries, storage tanks, and export terminals. All of these points are vulnerable to sabotage, and Libyan actors have readily stopped oil production over issues of economic and political marginalisation. Now just imagine foreign actors doing the same, but for geopolitical reasons".

Recently, United Nations chief Antonio Guterres has [said](#) foreign fighters and mercenaries remain in Libya in breach of a truce agreement last year, calling for their departure and an end to violations of the UN arms embargo.

The U.N. [estimated](#) in December that there were at least 20,000 foreign fighters and mercenaries in Libya, including Russians, Syrians, Sudanese and Chadians. However, recently, UN Security Council diplomats [said](#) that there were more than 20,000, including 13,000 Syrians and 11,000 Sudanese.

For Puszta, "As long as the military situation is as unstable as it is right now, calls for the departure of 'all foreign forces and mercenaries' are entirely unrealistic. There is a huge distrust and both sides feel that they need their foreign supporters in order to counter the other. The consequence is that credible international supervision of the ceasefire is a precondition for the withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries, including Turkish military forces and Russian mercenaries as well as other mercenaries like Syrians, Sudanese, and Chadians".

In Jacob's opinion, "The foreign powers that want to have a stake in Libya's future, above all Russia and Turkey, need these foreign mercenaries to maintain their hold on the country in the face of the weakness of the political

and military coalitions they support. Obviously, one will not withdraw its foreign fighters until the other one does so first, and only then when Ankara and Moscow feel that their interests will be guaranteed. With Russia's veto on the UNSC, there's no way to put equal pressure on all parties to withdraw foreign troops, and there's no moral credibility when it comes to the United States on this issue either, considering its presence in Syria for example. The European Union is equally compromised by French involvement in Libya".

Towards the end of 2019, Turkey began to increase its level of engagement with the UN-backed GNA by sending military trainers, planners, armed drones. Some unconfirmed media [reports](#) indicated that Turkish-backed Syrian fighters were in Libya to support the GNA push back an offensive from Haftar's LNA. Recently, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan [reportedly](#) expressed to his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron his desire for foreign mercenaries and militias operating on Libyan soil to leave the country.

Similarly in February, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan [stated](#) that Turkey would consider pulling out its forces in Libya if other external troops left first. Ankara has complained about the presence of Russian Wagner mercenaries in support of the eastern forces, which were also supported by the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and France.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu recently, [stated](#) that "There are many foreign fighters and mercenaries in Libya. We agree that they must leave. It does not serve Libya's interests, however, to cease much-needed support, such as military training and advice, which is delivered on the basis of a treaty between two sovereign nations. It would be wrong for third parties to meddle in such bilateral agreements".

The international community's demand that all foreign forces and mercenaries leave Libya, as per the April 16 [UN Security Council resolution 2570](#), should be qualified.

Karim Mezran, Senior Fellow, Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, [commented](#) that "In the specific case of Turkey, its forces were called in by the legitimate government in Tripoli a call that was unanswered by other countries to defend it from a rogue attack by mostly foreign irregular forces operating under Haftar's orders. So far, the Turks have done a good job in quietly helping restructure the Libyan army and police forces, and they are playing a reassuring role with the otherwise riotous Tripoli militias. All of this is reinforced by the latest events in Benghazi, which saw [Haftar's militias refusing](#) to allow the prime minister's security team to land unless Dbeibeh was willing to go to Haftar's headquarters and pay homage to his authority, according to a high-level Libyan source who



Turkish National Defense Minister Hulusi Akar (C) speaks during his visit to Libya Task Group Command in Tripoli, Libya on June 13, 2021. (Arif Akdoğar - Anadolu Agency)

asked to remain anonymous. Instead, Dbeibeh cancelled the trip. This incident proves the importance of keeping Turkish forces in support of the legitimate UN-backed government to deter Haftar's eventual rogue actions".

More recently, there have been numerous media reports comparing Turkish forces on the ground in Libya with mercenaries belonging to the Wagner group. However, Turkish forces are there upon an official invitation by an internationally recognised government of Libya, therefore, the Turkish presence cannot be viewed in the same light as other armed groups currently operating in the country.

As part of the cease-fire agreement and the [Berlin Conference](#), the withdrawal of foreign forces does not appear to apply to the Turkish military presence in Libya. The Turkish military could [remain](#) in the country as long as a bilateral military agreement between Ankara and Tripoli is active. Given that Libya's new government [maintained the agreements](#) in order to keep support from Turkey in terms of receiving military resources and training with the aim of transforming Tripoli-allied militias into a standing army.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu [said](#) that "Turkish forces were in Libya as part of a training agreement reached with a previous Libya administration. There are those who equate our legal presence with the foreign mercenary groups that fight in this country for money".

Moreover, the Turkish Defense Minister, Hulusi Akar, recently [stated](#) that "Turkey is not a foreign force and will

continue to support Libya in the name of 500-year-old history between the two countries". He [said](#) that "Turkey would continue to provide assistance and training as well as advisory support to Libyan Army forces so they can reach global standards, adding that Ankara's aim is for Libya to remain united, secure and stable and that Haftar and his allies are the problems in Libya"

In April 2019, Khalifa Haftar and his self-declared 'Libyan National Army' (LNA), moved to take the capital Tripoli from the U.N.- backed GNA, the previous administration. The war [displaced](#) over 200,000 people and witnessed some of the bloodiest military battles the country has experienced in years.

In the face of Haftar's assault, the GNA requested military support from the United States, Britain, Italy, Algeria and Turkey. In practical terms, it would appear as though only Turkey responded with tangible assistance. Ankara has stepped up its attempts to provide significant military aid to the GNA, including armed drones and air defence systems, which have shifted the balance on the ground.

Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu [said](#) that "Only Turkey replied in the affirmative to this call. Turkey's support for Libya's previous UN-backed GNA under a November 2019 deal on security and military cooperation helped prevent a civil war and human tragedy".

In this sense, [Turkey's determination](#) to be more involved in Libya has created a new momentum for peace and given some life to the nearly dead UN-led political agreement.



(Mohammed Elshaiky - Anadolu Agency)

## Haftar's position and his ties with mercenaries

For the past six years, some external players have used mercenaries, along with local armed groups to pursue their agendas. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Russia and France have long backed Haftar and his LNA to shore up his hold on the oil-rich east. The level of assistance given by foreign states to Haftar's LNA has been crucial to Haftar's capacity to restructure his forces and exert control over them.

Tim Eaton, a Senior Research Fellow at Chatham House, [commented](#) that "Haftar has relied upon the resources and ally networks of his external backers to fund armed groups to bolster his forces. The contribution of mercenaries has enabled the LNA to conduct its campaigns beyond eastern Libya, where it has struggled to project force, an indication of the limits of Haftar's command and control of his sprawling eastern-based forces. This is also likely a testament to fears of the consequences of leaving a vacuum in his strongholds by deploying large contingents of his most loyal forces outside the region".

According to Wolfgang Puzstai "the UAE, Egypt, France and Russia did not so much back Haftar as a person but used him as a tool or partner to pursue their own national interests. Currently, for them there are - at least in part - also other means to do so (i.e., cooperation with the GNU). As a consequence, Haftar is less important for them, but quite some significance remains, especially as the LNA still controls about two-thirds of the country. He is an example of relevance for counterterrorism in Libya's south. His agreement is also needed for any kind of efforts to consolidate the ceasefire, as he still enjoys the loyalty of the core of the LNA".

Despite Haftar's loss of internal and external support since his military defeat last year, it is expected that he will remain an important player in the military realm. For instance, Haftar recently organised a military pride in Benghazi to mark the seventh anniversary of the so-called Dignity Operation launched under the pretext of fighting terrorism. As part of this parade, he gave [a speech saying that](#) "the war on Tripoli was right and that they are ready to return to war if what he called "the militias did not adhere to the political settlement."

While comparatively weaker since April 2019, he still retains enough power to disrupt current peace agreements on account of the UAE's crucial assistance.

The UAE has purportedly continued to support Haftar militarily and financially after his failure. According to some media [reports](#), Emirati military cargo planes transported large quantities of military material, included Israeli-made "Heron" drones to the Al-Jura military base. Moreover, as stated in a Pentagon [report](#), the UAE is helping to finance the Russian mercenary group Wagner in Libya. The UAE's continued support for Haftar indicates that despite his defeat he is still a notable player in eastern Libya. Abu Dhabi appears keen to maintain Haftar at the helm of the eastern-based military coalition until a suitable alternative candidate appears.

In this respect, recently, Haftar's spokesperson, Ahmed Mismari [said](#) that "the war is not yet over; we only gave a chance to the political dialogue".

According to a CNN [report](#), a Western diplomat stated that "Haftar needed a continued conflict in Libya to retain relevance. He becomes irrelevant overnight if the conflict finishes. And if it does not finish on his terms he becomes vulnerable to war crimes allegations etc".

For Mundy, "Credible reports seem to indicate that there was a serious falling out between Haftar and Russia, particularly in the aftermath of the LNA's humiliating withdrawal from Tripolitania. One assumes that Egypt, the UAE, and France have also had to reevaluate their postures towards Libya given the failure of Haftar to impose a military solution with their backing. So Haftar has gone from being considered the solution to the problem of Libya to being considered part but only a part of the solution".

It is likely that Haftar will challenge the political process until his demands are considered. [Reportedly](#), Haftar intends to run in a presidential election in December. After his failure to seize the capital by force, he may seek to achieve politically what he could not militarily. However, the chairman of Libya's High Council of State (HCS), Khalid al-Mishri, [said](#) that Haftar lacks the legal pre-requisites to get him on the ballots in December. According to [an article](#) from the draft constitution, those with dual citizenship cannot be candidates for the presidency. Given that Haftar holds dual citizenship, this would exclude him from running. In response, Haftar's spokesman Ahmed Al-Mismari [said](#) that the "December elections must be held without preconditions and all people without exception can run for an election", further indication that Haftar wants to run for election.

Haftar also wants to access oil revenues. He urgently needs to get his hands on regular financial resources to maintain the unity of his LNA and its allies, including mercenaries. Gaining access to these oil funds has been at the heart of Haftar's plans to control eastern Libya. Despite his control of the majority of Libya's key oil infrastructure, he does not have access to the funds that are housed at the Central

Bank of Libya (CBL), nor does he have the reins of the National Oil Corporation (NOC).

It's imperative to point out that in January 2020, eastern tribes and militias supported by the LNA [halted](#) exports from five key oil terminals, which severely cut the country's crude production, in an effort to choke the previous administration's revenue. Haftar other critics claim that inequality is the norm when it comes to revenue distribution in the country. They argue that Libya's oil revenues are not distributed fairly over the three historical regions, Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan.

As a result, Libya's eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR), which backs Haftar's LNA, recently rejected the GNU's budget plan. [Reportedly](#), the delay of accepting the budget is based purely on the basis of carving out a separate budget for Haftar's LNA. It implies that if his demands are not considered then he could try to disrupt the government's work and inhibit the upcoming elections.

### Wagner mercenaries

Wagner Group is a private military company reportedly linked to the Kremlin. Its head, Yevgeny Prigozhin, was [seen](#) in a video alongside Haftar during an official meeting in Moscow in October 2018. According to a UN [report](#), hundreds of mercenaries from the Wagner Group have been operating in Libya since September 2019. Russia has also [supplied](#) Haftar's militias with anti-tank missiles and laser-guided artillery.

Wolfram Lacher, Africa and Middle East Senior Associate at SWP [commented](#) that "The Russian mercenaries are vital. To a lesser extent, the same can be said for his Syrian and

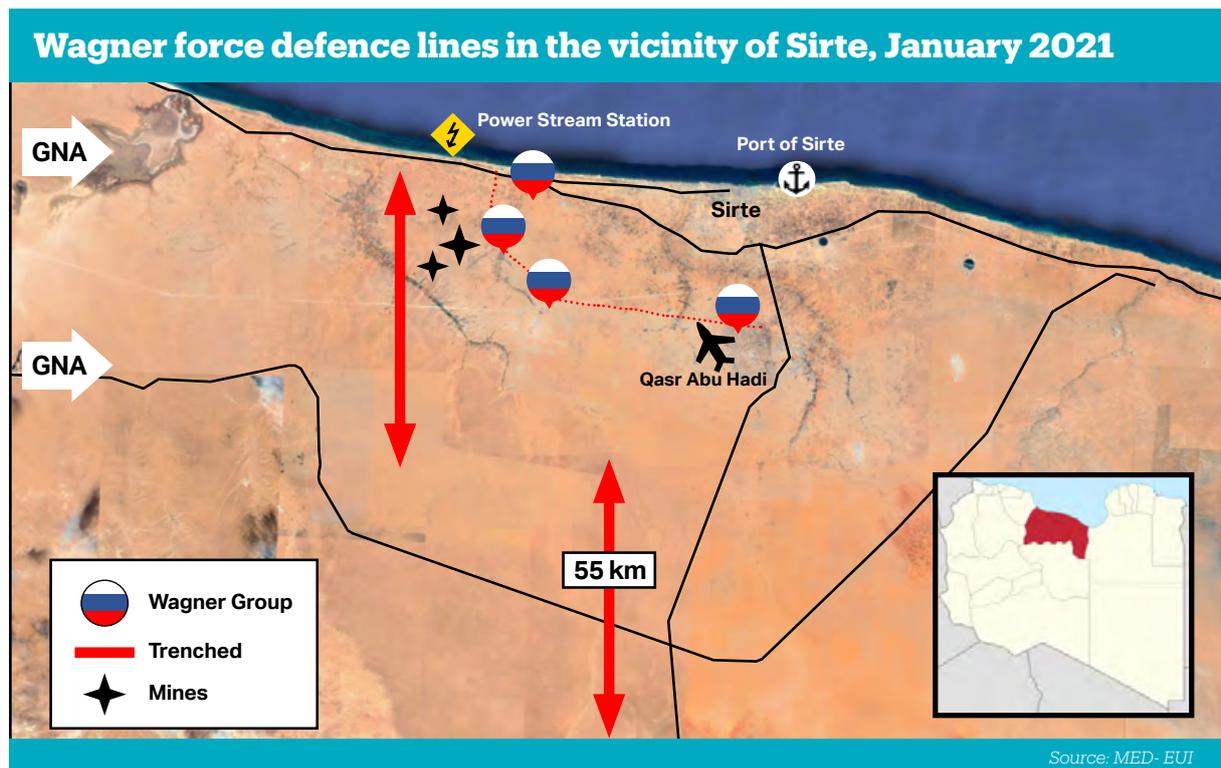
Sudanese fighters. In the absence of an alternative foreign security umbrella, a Russian withdrawal would threaten Haftar's influence in southern and central Libya and could even provoke the collapse of his power structure".

[Reportedly](#), since June 2020, Wagner mercenaries have increased the defences between Sirte and Jufra over dozens of kilometres (bunds, anti-tank ditches and mines) and have done the same north of Fezzan to stop any potential assault by internationally recognised GNU forces.

Furthermore, according to some media [reports](#), Wagner mercenaries are pressuring tribes in southern Libya to turn against the GNU and support Haftar. The pressure comes with a threat that Wagner fighters will turn their weapons on the tribes on the pretence of fighting the Daesh if they refuse to side with Haftar.

Sirte and Jufra reportedly host a number of mercenaries including Wagner's fighters. Sirte is crucial for its critical position and closeness to the Oil Crescent, as well as for the supply lines of Haftar's LNA, which were vying for control of the capital, Tripoli. The city has significant economic value as a gateway to Libya's oil crescent region, consisting of vital ports such as al-Zuweyatinah, Ra's Lanuf, Marsa al Brega, and as-Sidr, which reportedly supplies 60% of [Libya's oil](#) exports.

Syria has also [been used as a launchpad](#) to support Wagner activities in Libya, where Wagner reportedly has recruited mercenaries from Assad controlled areas such as [Deir el-Zour](#). It's believed that 3,000 Syrian mercenaries are presently in Libya to support Haftar forces in Sirte and Jufra. [Reportedly](#), the recruitment of these warriors has led Wagner and funded by the UAE.



The Spokesman for the Sirte Al-Jufra Operations Room, Al-Hadi Darah, [said](#) that “There are around three thousand Syrian mercenaries stationed at the Benina Air Base, in addition to a new batch of 1500 Sudanese mercenaries who arrived in April 2021”.

### ***Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries***

During the eight-month civil war that ousted former Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, many Sudanese militias [came to Libya](#) to acquire weapons under the guise of protecting a failing regime. Pro-Gaddafi forces handed out weapons to such mercenaries before the end of the conflict. These weapons then mushroomed across the Sahel.

Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries in the Libyan conflict have [increased](#) when Khalifa Haftar began his assault to seize the capital, Tripoli, in April 2019. Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries have benefited from fighting in Libya by accumulating economic wealth, improving their military capabilities.

According to a UN [report](#), the UAE has played a significant role in bringing hundreds of fighters from Sudan’s Darfur region to Libya in order to support Haftar’s LNA. The UAE has [direct control](#) of two important militia groups under Haftar’s LNA, the Sudanese-heavy 128th Brigade and the [Tariq bin Ziyad Battalion](#). [Reportedly](#), the UAE has direct contact with some senior Sudanese mercenaries in Haftar’s camp and gives them operational assistance to boost the LNA.

Libya remains one of the most serious concerns for regional states including Algeria, Tunisia, Mali, Sudan and Chad. Owing to its geographic centrality in the region, the enduring instability in Libya directly impacts the security of its neighbours, with the conflict already having led to numerous security and political issues in neighbouring countries.

For example, Chad’s President Idriss Deby, who ruled his country for more than 30 years, was [killed](#) on 20 April 2021 following clashes with rebels belonging to a group calling itself Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), which

is based across the northern frontier with Libya where they collected money, arms, and front line experience as guns-for-hire. As a result, they [built up an impressive arsenal](#) through their involvement in the Libyan conflict.

According to UNSC’s report, since 2019, the FACT [fought](#) alongside Haftar’s LNA along with Wagner forces at the Jufra airbase and gaining access to advanced weaponry, some of which was [allegedly](#) provided by the UAE.

Recently, Chad’s deputy foreign minister [warned](#) the U.N. Security Council that mercenaries from Libya are passing over into the Sahel and undermining the progress made in fighting terrorism by five West African states (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Mauritania), which could drive the region into violence that would be difficult to manage.

Similarly, UN special envoy for Libya, Ján Kubiš, [warned](#) that the presence and activities of mercenaries and armed groups are a serious threat not just to Libya’s security, but to the region as a whole, pointing out that recent, disturbing developments in Chad present as an indication of the relationship between the security condition in Libya and stability in the region.

### ***Suffering and hardship***

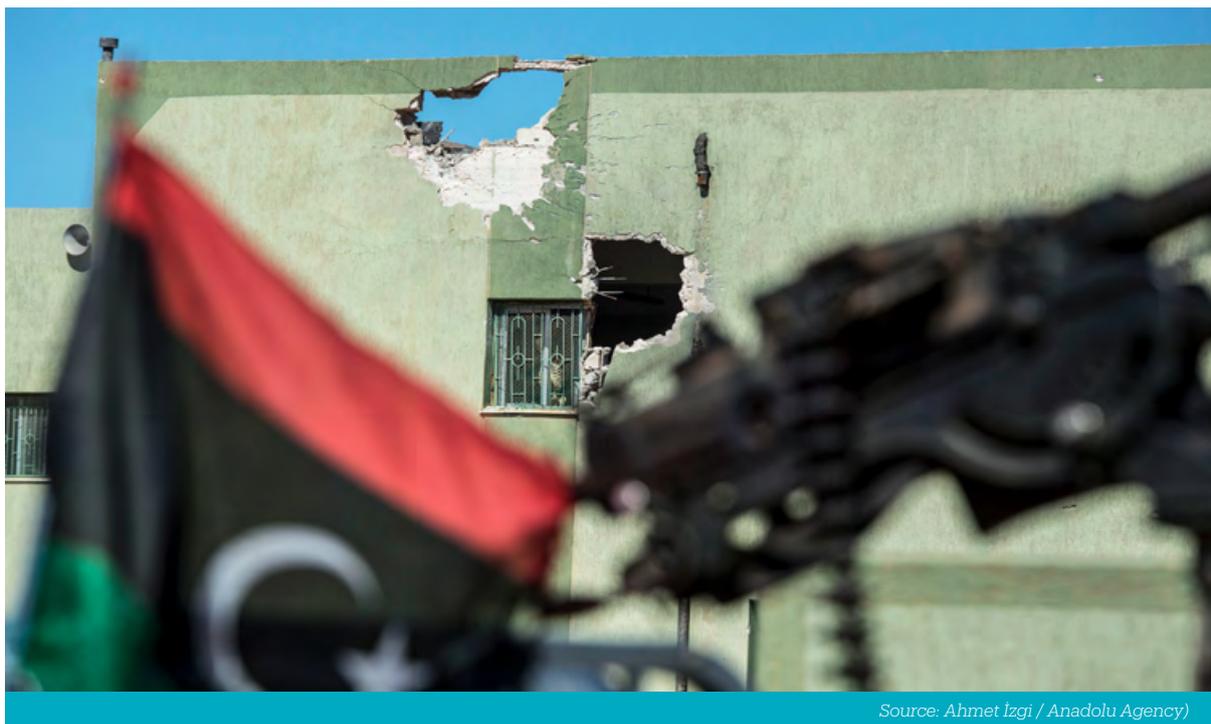
Libyan people have been the primary victim of the violence over the last ten years. The Libyan conflict has heavy, direct and long-lasting impacts, particularly on civilians.

The present lack of an adequate national army leaves Libya vulnerable to exploitation from various militia groups, including radical groups and foreign fighters. Therefore, there is an immediate need for a comprehensive security reform programme, including specific measures for the demilitarisation and reintegration of militias under a single national leadership.

In Pusztai’s opinion, “Unification of the armed forces is entirely unrealistic in the near future. Unsurprisingly, there is a huge distrust and the atrocities committed by both sides are still very much alive. I don’t know any example from a civil-war torn country where the belligerent parties were reconciled, and their fighting units unified only one year after major fighting was over”.



Source: Hazem Turkia / Anadolu Agency



Source: Ahmet İzgi / Anadolu Agency)

Despite the ceasefire agreement, the military forces available to both Tripoli and the LNA can still be mobilised on short notice. For example, Haftar's [LNA recently said it took control](#) of the southern Essen border crossing with Algeria, declaring the territory a military zone. This is the first military movement of its kind by LNA since the signing of a ceasefire agreement in October 2020.

In this context, the country needs to be prepared for the parliamentary and presidential elections planned for 24 December 2021. Thus, providing security is a major uphill task for the unity government to maintain the level of security for people to be able to freely cast their vote.

Furthermore, Libyan parties are also divided over what constitutional basis to use for the elections. Thus, it is significant to have a confirmed, explicit legitimate and constitutional structure for the presidential and parliamentary polls.

According to Jacob Mundy, "Apart from the likely continued presence of foreign forces in Libya in December, there remains questions about whether or not Libya will have a "constitutional basis" in place before the vote. Even more contentious than the composition of Libya's interim authorities has been the question of the constitution. Now a constitutional basis doesn't require a constitution, but if Libyans are able to agree on such a basis ahead of the vote, that will be a good indicator. However, if that basis becomes highly politicised and partisan, or subject to serious accusations of corruption like the current government, that could lead many Libyans to boycott the vote, leading to a situation like 2014 where a vote took place but was poorly attended and resulted in a weakly legitimated government".

## Conclusion

Libya's political landscape has shifted considerably since last October when the two warring factions signed an official ceasefire agreement, triggering a peace process designed to culminate in elections in December. After years of deadlock, this outcome should be seen as representing tangible progress, however, significant obstacles remain.

The security situation in Libya will likely remain uncertain primarily due to the presence of foreign mercenaries and the lack of unified military force. Without having a united military institution, armed groups and mercenaries still have enough power to disrupt current peace agreements and delay the planned elections in December.

In this regard, the UN could provide further assistance to support the GNU by taking a firm stance against any violation of the agreement and by ensuring that those who obstruct the political process face sanctioning. Furthermore, international actors must coordinate their approach to facilitate the UN's efforts in order to help the current government unify military institutions and ensure foreign mercenaries withdraw from the country.

Otherwise, the presence of foreign fighters and mercenaries in the country will continue to present major trouble not only in Libya also for the whole region. Despite the settlement process, weapons continue to flow into Libya. Until external players sincerely commit to a peace agreement in Libya, prospects for unity and stability remain extremely limited.