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Egyptian Role in Libya Determinants and Tracks

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Introduction

The first half of 2020 witnessed a major shift in the nature of military battles between the forces of the legitimate Government of National Accord (GNA) and the militias of Khalifa Haftar in the western region, especially with regard to military control of territories, in favor of the internationally-recognized government, supported by Turkey.

During the past period, the GNA forces superbly applied the three stages of war tactics within a short period; as they gradually moved from the stage of attrition (strategic defense) to the stage of balance (offensive/defensive strategic balance), up to the stage of decisiveness (strategic offense), which is currently ongoing in the Libyan West. Based on the GNA statements, it is clear that the GNA is seriously seeking to control the Sirte and Al-Jafra regions in the first place, and then move to extend its influence and exercise its competencies as a government on all Libyan territory.

The Egyptian regime has not been far from these events. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has been supporting Haftar since the latter's launch of the so-called "Operation Dignity" in May 2014. In response to these developments, Al-Sisi immediately massed his air force and special forces in Egypt's Western Military Zone (WMZ) near the Egyptian-Libyan border on Saturday, June 20, 2020, and in a televised speech, he urged army officers to be ready, in anticipation of any combat tasks assigned to them inside or outside Egyptian borders, adding that the transgression of Sirte and al-Jafra by the GNA forces is considered a "red line". This was interpreted by some as a hint from Sisi that the Egyptian army might intervene militarily in Libya in the future, if the GNA forces attacked and took control of Sirte and Al-Jafra¹.

Based on these developments, this paper reviews the key determinants of Egyptian policy-making on Libya, and the interests and concerns of the al-Sisi regime in this context. It also reviews the most prominent figures and bodies that make that policy, and the forms of support that Egypt is currently

¹ Al-Sisi inspects the Western Military Zone ..., Youm7, 20 June 2020, accessed 23 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

providing to Khalifa Haftar. The paper then addresses the way in which key regional and international parties influence this policy, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Russian Federation and the United States, as well as France, Germany and Italy. The study also provides an analysis of various likely scenarios and an outlook of the Egyptian policy on the Libyan file during the coming period, especially the prospects for military intervention by the Egyptian army.

First: Key determinants governing the Egyptian role in Libya

There are several determinants that govern Egyptian policy towards Libya: some of which have been in place since the beginning of Sisi's support for Khalifa Haftar in 2014; including determinants that have recently occurred based on development of events in the Libyan interior, in light of the Turkish intervention in the Libyan arena. There are also determinants related to the two countries, regardless of their ruling regimes, which will not be addressed by this study. However, the paper mainly deals with the determinants governing the role of Egypt under the Sisi government at the present time, as it reflects the interests and concerns of the Egyptian regime regarding the Libyan file.

1) Confronting political Islam and Arab revolutions:

Al-Sisi's policy towards Libya comes in the context of boosting the pillars of his regime, in terms of ensuring that Islamists do not reach or participate in power in Libya; where he views them as a real threat to his regime. In addition, from the early moments of his control over Egypt, Sisi has been working to abort the Arab Spring revolutions in the region, an orientation that Al-Sisi shares with the Emirati regime led by Mohammed bin Zayed and the Saudi regime led by Mohammed bin Salman.

2) Egyptian national security, "regime security"

Libya is considered a strategic depth for Egypt due to its geographic location adjacent to Egypt's strategic western border. Therefore, any state of instability inside Libyan territories is considered a direct threat to the Egyptian national security.

In general, the situation in Libya would concern any ruling regime in Egypt, regardless of its backgrounds and orientations; and therefore any regime in Egypt would support and maintain stability within the complete Libyan territory, for the interest of the Egyptian national security.

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On the other hand, undemocratic countries often confuse between the country's national security and the security of the ruling regime, and between state institutions and ruler's persona. Therefore, the use of the term "national security" extensively in such countries only indicates measures that would ensure the ruler's survival in power and protect his authority in government even if this leads to the collapse of the State or poses threats to its survival factors, as happens in many Arab countries².

Al-Sisi views Libya from this perspective, by deliberately confusing between Egyptian national security and the security of his regime, which is one of the most important determinants of the current Egyptian policy towards the situation in Libya. The Sisi regime views the Libyan territories as an environment that embraces armed streams that may threaten the security of his regime in the event Haftar cannot control the entire Libyan territory or even the eastern region only – especially since Hisham Ashmawi and Emad Abdel Hamid, two former Egyptian army officers that led armed insurgency against the regime, had stayed in the Libyan city of Derna for years.

Therefore, Al-Sisi does not seem to be giving up the Haftar project in Libya, even if the latter cannot fully control the Libyan territory. At that point, Sisi is not likely to mind dividing Libya in order to maintain the security of his regime although the true requirements of Egyptian national security, the complete Libyan territories must be united under a central leadership. However, if the Haftar project fails in Libya, Sisi will prioritize the security of his regime at the expense of the interest of the Egyptian national security.

3) Supporting the military ruler, not the democratic institutions:

One of the main determinants that pushed al-Sisi to support Khalifa Haftar in Libya is his adoption of the policy of the "autocratic military ruler" rather than democratic institutions (or even the military institution). From the early moments of his rule, Al-Sisi has sought to establish the rule of the strong military individual, not the rule of institutions that require participation of a number of institutions in governance and decision-making. Therefore, Al-Sisi wants to establish the same model within the

² Egyptian National Security: Conflict in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean, Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, 6 February 2020, ([URL](#)).

Libyan State, in order to facilitate his control and direction in a way that can serve the required orientations without risking to face any obstacles from democratic institutions.

4)Facilitating access to petroleum products:

One of the most important determinants that drive Al-Sisi to support Khalifa Haftar is to secure access to Libyan petroleum products on a continued basis and at preferential prices.

Therefore, there are several dimensions related to the Libyan oil that cannot be overlooked when talking about the Sisi regime's policy towards the Libyan crisis and the interests it seeks to achieve there, including:

First: Ensuring that Egypt's needs for oil are provided at preferential prices, where Egypt seeks to get rid of the repeated Saudi threats to cut or suspend oil supplies, and on the other hand to achieve economic gains from importing high-quality Libyan oil at prices lower than global prices. In this regard, it seems that there is more than one indicator that supports this Egyptian trend, including comments of Abdel Razzaq Al-Nadhouri, described as "chief of staff" of Haftar's militias, in 2016 that Libyan oil is at Egypt's service. Also, when the state-owned Saudi energy company, Aramco, suspended oil supplies to Egypt in early October 2016, Libya announced that it was ready to provide all Egypt's oil needs, and MP Ziyad Deghaim announced that the Tobruk parliament asked its affiliate (pro-Haftar) government to supply Egypt with necessary oil shipments free of charge³ – given that the Haftar militias control the four most important ports that handle petroleum products (Sidra, Ras Lanuf, Zueitina and Brega) in the oil crescent region in eastern Libya.

Second: Egypt is looking forward to participation in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Libyan oil and gas infrastructure; in other words, entry of Egyptian oil companies operating in the field of designing, implementing, and maintaining projects in the reconstruction of Libyan oil sector. Suffice it to point out that Libya needs about \$60 billion in order to restore production capabilities and operating efficiency of the oil sector, and here you can imagine the economic gains that Egypt can derive from participating in the reconstruction of the infrastructure of the Libyan oil sector.

³ Egyptian National Security: Conflict in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean, Op. Cit.

5) The concept of conflict with Turkey rather than cooperation

Among the determinants that have recently prompted the Egyptian regime to further engage in the Libyan file and insist on heavily maintaining intervention, is the signing of a Libyan-Turkish security agreement that allowed the Turkish side to directly enter the Libyan arena to support the legitimate government in Tripoli, through supply of weapons and training, as well as (limited) Turkish forces... etc. In addition, the agreement included demarcation of the maritime borders between Turkey and Libya, represented by the legitimate government in Tripoli, led by Fayez al-Sarraj (N.B. its opposition to this agreement is less, but the Egyptian government supports the Greek side in its position rejecting the Turkish-Libyan agreement rather than opposing it in principle).

The Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi regime is part of the Saudi-Emirati alliance which primarily aims to confront the Turkish-Qatari alliance in the region, which the Egyptian regime and its allies consider it a threat to their regional strategic interests. Therefore, this axis seeks to confront the Turkish role in all arenas, such as in the Horn of Africa, for instance. Also, some believe that one of the reasons behind restoration of relations between Egypt and Hamas in the Gaza Strip was the Egyptian fear of the expansion of Turkish influence inside the Gaza Strip.

This concept comes as a substitute for joint cooperation with Turkey that is more likely to fulfill Egypt's interests. For example, the terms of the Turkish-Libyan agreement on demarcation of maritime borders are in favor of Egypt, where it allows restoring a significant amount of Egypt's economic waters and strengthens its negotiating position in front of Greece in the demarcation of joint maritime borders. On the other hand, Egypt has rejected the Turkish-Libyan agreement on demarcation of maritime borders due to the Greek position, to appease Greece, given the tripartite coordination between Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus on this file, in addition to rejection of the security agreement between GNA and Turkey, that the Egyptian regime views as a direct threat to its existence.

6) The Mediterranean dimension

The Mediterranean dimension is a significant determinant in the Egyptian regime's handling of the Libyan crisis: as it is related to building a naval and military force in the Egyptian West and expansion of Egyptian influence in the Mediterranean waters, especially with the new geopolitical situation in the Eastern Mediterranean region imposed by gas discoveries and the resulting coalitions and conflicts in the region.

7) The functional role

The Egyptian military intervention in Libya comes partly for the functional role played by Egypt under Sisi in the international security strategies in the region. The Egyptian regime plays this role within the framework of the function of the *Client State* as known in international relations, where the State that plays a functional role provides services to major international parties in exchange for extending protection, services, or economic benefits. The ruling military regime in Egypt is betting on the importance of the Egyptian role, specifically the Egyptian army, regardless of compliance or conflict with the Egyptian national interests, in a way that guarantees continued support and cooperation of international parties to achieve stability and survival of the regime; and in this sense, it is, for example, compatible with the French and Russian goals in Libya and plays roles within the framework of achieving these goals, serving the interests of the allies and those of the regime at the same time.

Second: Egypt & management of the Libyan file

Since the launch of the so-called "Operation Dignity" announced by Khalifa Haftar in May of 2014, with Egyptian-Saudi support, the Egyptian regime has managed the Libyan file through institutions and individuals that set out policies to deal with this file.

After Khalifa Haftar announced this operation in May 2014, the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (GIS), headed by Major General Mohamed Farid Tohami, at that time, was in charge of management of the Libyan file. Tohami in person supervised management of this file which had been initially considered as a security issue that falls within the GIS functions and powers. Major General Abbas Kamel, the director of Sisi's office at the time, General Mahmoud Hegazi, the former chief of staff of the Egyptian Army, and Major General Mohamed El-Keshky, the former assistant minister for defense and international relations were assigned to support Major General Tohami in managing the file, with direct coordination with Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, who was laying out the guidelines for policies towards the Libyan file in coordination with Mohammed bin Zayed.

After the dismissal of Major General Mohamed Farid Tohami from his post as GIS director and appointment of Major General Khaled Fawzi in his place, Fawzi assumed management of the Libyan file, with the assistance of the aforementioned members (Kamel, Hegazi, and El-Keshki), in direct coordination with Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi.

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In August 2016, Sisi formed a special committee to manage the Libyan file and appointed his in-law and former chief of staff Lt. General Mahmoud Hegazi, with all powers and complete independence, to address the Libyan file with all its security, military and political aspects, in coordination with the presidency only⁴.

Hegazi met with all parties related to the crisis during his chairmanship of the committee. He held several meetings with Khalifa Haftar in Cairo⁵ and visited him in Bani Ghazi in May 2017. He also met Fayez al-Sarraj, the GNA prime minister in Cairo. He also met with Aqilah Saleh, the "Speaker of the House of Representatives in Tobruk"⁶, and held several meetings with a number of Libyan officials, politicians and businessmen⁷.

There were declared objectives for the Egyptian committee concerned with the Libyan file, confirmed by official statements of the Egyptian State. Among these objectives⁸ were:

1- Conducting mediation between Libyan political parties and leaders in attempt to reach a political solution to the crisis in the Libyan State.

2- Unification of the Libyan military institution. This was the most important objective that Egypt sought since the formation of this committee. Egypt was keen to unify the Libyan military institution under the leadership of Khalifa Haftar, and accordingly more than one meeting was held in Cairo to achieve this goal, but all these efforts did not succeed. Egypt wanted to put the Libyan military institution under the command and control of Haftar so that he would have the power to control the entire Libyan territory; as according to the plans of Egypt and its regional allies, in case of failure of the political efforts to resolve the crisis, Haftar would stage a real military coup, similar to what Sisi

⁴ Why Sisi assigned his in-law, the chief of staff, to manage the Libyan file, Arabi21, ([URL](#)).

⁵ Al-Sarraj to meet with Egyptian officials concerned with Libyan affairs tomorrow, Youm7, ([URL](#)).

⁶ Saleh meets with Lt. Gen. Mahmoud Hegazy in Cairo, Al-Marsad, ([URL](#)).

⁷ Lt. Gen. M. Hegazy meets with Libyan Supreme Council member and his accompanying delegation, video, ([URL](#)).

⁸ Statement of Egyptian Committee on Libya, chaired by Lt. General Mahmoud Hegazy..., State Information Service, ([URL](#)).

did in Egypt. On the other hand, the regime in Egypt was keen that the military institution would be led by Haftar to legitimize the military support provided by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates to him.

After the dismissal of Lt. General Mahmoud Hegazi from his post as chief of staff of the Egyptian army in October 2017, Major General Staff Mohamed El-Keshki assumed chairmanship of the committee, in direct coordination with the presidential institution, where he sought to maintain the basic goal that the Egyptian State had stated for the committee, that is to include the military militias and forces in one unified entity as a military institution. A few days after he took over the management of the committee, El-Keshki met (on Saturday 4 November 2017) with Libyan officers to reach an agreement on unifying the Libyan forces in one army and determine its relationship with the civil authority in Libya⁹.

During the period in which Major General El-Keshki was in charge of the Libyan file, efforts were focused on the military side rather than the political side of the issue, as Haftar was at the time stronger on the ground, and accordingly Egypt and the UAE were seeking to further extend Haftar's military influence within Libyan territory.

After Major General El-Keshki was removed from service in June 2019, and Sisi controlled the General Intelligence Service after appointing Maj. General Abbas Kamel as GIS director, the General Intelligence Service took over the Libyan file completely in direct coordination with Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi and Sisi's crisis advisor, Lt. General Mahmoud Hegazi, and Major General Omar Nazmi was assigned to be in charge of the Libyan file. Thus, the team that draws Egyptian policies towards the Libyan file currently include:

- 1- Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, as "President of the Republic, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces".
- 2- Major General Abbas Kamel, director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service.
- 3- Major General Staff Khaled Megawir, director of the Military Intelligence.

⁹ Cairo meetings end with an agreement to unify the Libyan military institution, Asharq Al-Awsat, ([URL](#)).

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- 4- General Mahmoud Hegazi, Al-Sisi's crisis advisor.
- 5- Major General Omar Nazmi, who is in charge of the Libyan file at the General Intelligence Service, (where he has reportedly been staying inside the Libyan territories for long periods since the recent events, to prepare reports and follow up the situation accurately.
- 6- Sameh Shoukry, Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- 7- General Mohamed Zaki, Minister of Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces.
- 8- Lt. General Mohamed Farid Hegazi, Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces.
9. Lt. General Ali Fahmy, Commander of the Air Defense Forces.
- 10 – Lt. General Mohamed Abbas, Commander of the Air Force.
- 11- Lt. General Ahmed Khaled, Commander of the Navy.
- 12- Lt. General Osama Askar, Head of the Armed Forces Operations Authority.
- 13- Maj. General Staff Sherif Moawad, the current commander of the Western Military Zone.

Third: Egyptian support for Khalifa Haftar

Since Khalifa Haftar launched what he called "Operation Dignity" in mid-2014 in Libya, the extent of military cooperation and rapprochement between Egypt and militias affiliated to Haftar has become evident, with diversity of Egyptian support, ranging from training and supply of weapons to entry of Egyptian forces to Libya for participation in military operations on the ground, in addition to carrying out air strikes with the participation of the UAE forces inside the Libyan territories in the eastern, western and southern regions.

In March 2015, a UN report revealed that Egypt and the UAE smuggled arms to Libya, accusing the militias led by Khalifa Haftar of complicating the political transition and increasing security problems in the country.

The lengthy report spoke about arms smuggling, not only including the transfer of ammunition and weapons, but also the transfer of Egyptian combat aircraft to Libya as well. Regarding violations of the UN arms embargo, the report said that the UAE illegally exported weapons to Libya, including transfer of military equipment to the eastern city of Tobruk in late 2014. The report also confirmed transfer of warplanes owned by Egypt to the Libyan Air Force after deliberately hiding their appearance and original identity. The report also indicated that Egypt provided military support to Haftar's "Operation Dignity" and the dissolved Parliament in Tobruk¹⁰.

According to informed military sources from the Egyptian and Libyan sides, the Egyptian army has been transporting Egyptian-made and Emirati-made military equipment, including heavy and light equipment, to Khalifa Haftar's militias, since May 2014. Sometimes this equipment was transported by air and sometimes by land from the Egyptian western military zone adjacent to the Libyan-Egyptian border. One of the tasks of the commanders of the Egyptian western military zone was to secure and facilitate the process of transferring military equipment to Libyan territory. Among the most prominent leaders who assumed the tasks of transporting military equipment to Libya during the period from 2014 to 2020 were:

- 1- Lt. Gen. Mahmoud Hegazi, Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Army, former head of the committee responsible for the Libyan file, and Sisi's current crisis advisor.
- 2- Major General Mohamed El-Keshki, former assistant minister of defense for international relations, and former head of the committee concerned with the former Libyan file.
- 3- Major General Omar Nazmi, who is currently in charge of the Libyan file at the General Intelligence Service.
- 4- Maj. General Staff Mohamed al-Masry, former commander of the western military zone, and former chief of operations of the armed forces.
- 5- Major General Staff Wahid Ezzat, the former western military zone commander.

¹⁰ UN report: Egypt and UAE smuggled weapons to Libya, Al-Jazeera Net, 6 March 2015, ([URL](#)).

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- 6- Major General Staff Sharif Bishara, the former western military zone commander and current head of Nasser military academy.
- 7- Major General Staff Salah Saraya, the present commander of the western military zone.
- 8- Major-General Staff Mohamed Said al-Assar, former head of the Armament Authority and current Minister of Military Production.
- 9- Major General Staff Abdel Mohsen Mousa, former head of the Armament Authority.
- 10- Major General Staff Tariq Saad Zaghloul, head of the Armament Authority.
- 11- Maj. General Staff Sherif Moawad, the current commander of the Western Military Zone.¹¹

The Egyptian army trains members of the Khalifa Haftar militias on a continued basis at the Mohamed Naguib military base, located in the strategic northern zone of the Egyptian State; and according to private sources, the military course for a combatant in the Khalifa Haftar militias at the Mohammed Najib military base ranges from 30 to 45 days.

During the past few days and months, Sisi has been working in coordination and arrangement with the UAE to smuggle military supplies with large quantities for Khalifa Haftar militias to prepare them for the upcoming battles, following the losses that these militias have recently suffered. During April 2020, an Egyptian helicopter crashed in the Egyptian western city of Siwa, and private military sources reported to the Egyptian Institute for Studies that it was on its way to Libyan territory for the transfer of military aid to the Haftar militias¹². The sources also reported that the Egyptian army is currently transporting Egyptian and Emirati-made military equipment to Libyan territory via the Egyptian-Libyan border.

In confirmation of the comments of Al-Taher Gharbia, a field commander in the Misurata forces, in February 2020, that there are Egyptian soldiers inside Libyan territory participating in military

¹¹ Egypt's Support of Khalifa Haftar: Forms and Motives, Egyptian Institute for Studies, Mahmoud Gamal, 24 January 2020, accessed 2 July 2020, ([URL](#))

¹² Egypt: Reports that 4 pilots were killed in a helicopter crash near the border with Libya, ([URL](#)).

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operations, which the Egyptian regime always denies over the media, private sources reported to EIS that some Egyptian officers and soldiers affiliated to Group 129-thunderbolt "B. 13", that are basically stationed in Alexandria, the northern Egyptian strategic range, crossed the Egyptian-Libyan border into Libyan territory during the past few months to provide some form of military support to the Khalifa Haftar's militias.

A few years ago, the Egyptian armed forces supervised some military operations in the eastern battles for achievement of Haftar's full control there, with support from Egyptian special forces. Before Haftar's militias had seized Derna, Aqilah Saleh confirmed in a statement that the Egyptian army would participate in the operations. Saleh stated on 12 February 2018 in an interview with an Egyptian pro-regime newspaper that the Libyan city of Derna, located in eastern Libya, "would soon be liberated in coordination with the Egyptian authorities", adding that this military operation is of interest to Egypt so that terrorist groups could not flee to Egyptian territory due to presence of extremists in Derna¹³.

Regarding the Egyptian army's participation in the battles that took place in the vicinity of the Libyan capital, Tripoli, the Egyptian air forces carried out operations of reconnaissance and monitoring of targets there; and according to private sources, the Egyptian warplanes actually launched air strikes on some targets in the vicinity of Tripoli airport, along with Emirati warplanes. The direct intervention by the Egyptian air forces in the recent battles around Tripoli confirms what was stated by Mustafa al-Mujie, the spokesman for the GNA-led Operation Volcano of Rage, a few days ago that "The Egyptian army has been present there from the first day of the attack on Tripoli".

During June 2020, as quoted from military sources, combat warplanes, troop transport aircraft, and special forces were extensively stationed in the western military zone, as well as extensive transfer of ammunition "for operations, not for training" there; and the Egyptian military intelligence held meetings with Libyan tribal elders in eastern Libya, in order to coordinate their training and armament, as Sisi stated in his speech during his visit near Libyan border on Saturday 20 June 2020. Sources have also reported that the Rafale aircraft that appeared over the city of Sirte on Wednesday, 10

¹³ Interview with Libyan Parliament Speaker Aqilah Salih, Youm7, 12 Feb. 2018, ([URL](#)).

June 2020, and France denied that it belonged to its Air Force, in fact, it was affiliated to the Egyptian Air Force, and was conducting reconnaissance operations there¹⁴.

Fourth: Regional and international factors affecting Egyptian policy towards Libya

Since he assumed power as “president” in May 2014, Sisi has aspired to impose himself as a major player that cannot be ignored in the region. The situation in Libya was appropriate to achieve Sisi’s end through performing functional roles there, given the importance of Libya to the security of his regime on the one hand, and the ambitions of some Western countries such as France and Italy, in addition to Russia, to achieve their interests in Libya, on the other. Therefore, Sisi sought to strengthen his relations with these countries and play roles inside Libya that could serve his interests and theirs at the same time. Following is a review of the key actors in Libya and their relation to the functional role played by the Egyptian regime there:

1)Egypt and the Saudi-Emirati axis

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have sought to nip the Arab Spring revolutions from the first moment of their outbreak, and since the launch of the so-called “Operation Dignity” by Haftar in Libya, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have taken a supportive stance. Needless to say, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh that consider the Muslim Brotherhood their main enemy in the region, are on top of the countries that assisted Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in his military coup in July 2013. Therefore, Al-Sisi followed them in rapprochement with Khalifa Haftar and supporting his militia to avoid losing his regional allies.

In addition, Al-Sisi seeks to achieve common goals in Libya, in attempt to achieve his and his allies’ interests at the same time, given that the UAE-Saudi-Egyptian agendas on the Libyan file are close to a great extent. Therefore, Sisi implements his agenda in Libya with Saudi Emirati support and benefits from both sides, to achieve the security of his regime, and receive financial and military assistance that he receives based on implementation of some tasks in several files he is working on

¹⁴ French Ministry of Defense: The planes that were spotted over Libyan city of Sirte are not affiliated with us, Arab Defense Forum, 10 June 2020, accessed 23 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

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along with his allies in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, most arms purchase that the Egyptian navy and air forces have fulfilled over the past years, for example, were funded by Saudi Arabia and the UAE in return for carrying out several tasks, including the implementation of their agenda in the Libyan interior.

Given these considerations, the impact of the UAE, in particular, and Saudi Arabia have a great influence on the Egyptian decision with respect to Libya, where the Egyptian regime apparently surrenders to their dictates in the end. For example, Egypt reportedly did not support Haftar's recent operation against Tripoli that started last year, as the Egyptian regime believed that the opportunities to achieve successes in such operation are few and may weaken its position and that of allies in the Libyan file in general. However, the UAE was pushing for the attack and encouraged Haftar to carry it out, which forced Egypt to provide Haftar with all kinds of support as shown above, despite its belief that this operation has paved the way and justified the explicit Turkish presence in Libya.

2)Egypt, Russia and the Libyan file

After relations between Egypt and the United States had strained in the wake of the July 3, 2013 coup, the Sisi regime sought rapprochement with the Russian Federation, which at the time was seeking to establish its influence in the Middle East. The Egyptian regime actually concluded several partnerships, agreements, and understandings with Russia in various fields: military, security, and political.

Meanwhile, Russia was present in the Middle East region, specifically it was strongly present in the Syrian scene, as it was a major factor in preserving Bashar al-Assad's regime from collapse. After development of the situation in Libya, Russia contributed to supporting Khalifa Haftar in coordination with the Egyptian and Emirati regimes. Russia has now become one of the most important international actors on the ground in Libya, albeit informally unlike its presence in Syria, mainly through Wagner's mercenaries, a company closely related to Russian President Putin. Moscow supported the Haftar militia with weapons, especially aircraft and anti-aircraft air defense systems, "Pantsir".

Through the Libyan war, Russia seeks to reinforce the power of a strong regional ally (Haftar), and thereby enhance its influence in the Middle East. There are many similarities between Bashar Al-

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Assad and Khalifa Haftar, as both claim that they face extremism, which prompted Russia to coordinate with the Egyptian and Emirati sides to achieve some common goals with them, most prominently, as Egypt and the UAE claim, fighting “extremism” and supporting a strong man capable of controlling the situation in Libya. The goals that Russia was seeking to achieve by helping Haftar and strengthening his military position on the shores of the Mediterranean, include enabling Moscow to be present near the coasts of Europe as well as boosting its presence in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Egyptian regime deals with the Russians in the Libyan file with a win-win strategy by achieving gains for the regime and allies at the same time, most prominently securing the interests of the Egyptian regime by enabling the Haftar project within Libyan lands, by making advantage of the Russian military intervention on the one hand, and achieving Russia’s strategic goals inside the Libyan territories on the other, as they both share goals in several files in the Middle East region, most notably the Libyan file. The Egyptian regime’s attitude towards Russia also comes as a kind of giving back to Moscow in exchange for the Russian military, political, security and economic support for Sisi during the past years¹⁵.

The Egyptian-Russian rapprochement continued even after the departure of the Obama administration, which disturbs the American side. With restoration of US-Egyptian strategic relations to the levels that had been before, soon after departure of the Obama administration and the advent of the Trump administration, the US finds no justification for maintaining Sisi’s rapprochement with Russia.

While the US administration wants Sisi and Haftar to end their relationship with Russia, the Egyptian regime feels frustrated by the American position that welcomed Turkish intervention in Libya and at the same time rejected the Russian role there. Consequently, the United States may veto any UNSC draft resolution against Turkish intervention in Libya, contrary to the interest of Haftar and Sisi who adopt rapprochement with Russia. However, Russian support for Haftar's militias has been growing,

¹⁵ Egypt: The Hidden Dimensions of Russian Weapon Deals, Egyptian Institute of Studies, ([URL](#)).

whether last year when Haftar started his attack on Tripoli, or even for the time being after the GNA regained control of the majority of the Libyan West.

3)Egypt, France and the Libyan file

France has geopolitical and security interests in Libya represented in restoring stability and consolidating control over its traditional sphere of influence in the Sahel-Sahara region, as Libyan instability resulting from the “chaos of militias” reflected in loss of control over the borders with Libya extending for more than 4,500 kilometers, which led to facilitating the transfer of weapons between the borders. France considers that this has led to strengthening and rise of “terrorist groups” in the Sahara region, and that the “Boko Haram” group exploited the Libyan crisis to smuggle weapons.¹⁶

France’s interest in Libya, that is adjacent to its ancient colonies, such as Chad, Algeria, and Niger, is due to this security dimension, as Paris seeks to combat terrorism by securing the southern Libyan region, and at the same time securing its military base of Madama which is located in Niger’s far north, adjacent to the southern borders of Libya, with the aim of cutting off any military supplies coming from the south of Libya to armed groups in Mali, with which France has been fighting military battles since 2013. This has led France since the beginning of the Libyan crisis to search for a partner for preserving its security and economic interests inside Libya. At the time, Sisi was seeking rapprochement with different countries to gain legitimacy for his regime on the one hand, and to obtain support from different countries to implement his agenda in Libya on the other hand.¹⁷

Economic interests

In addition to its security interests, Paris has economic interests as well, first in its desire to participate in the reconstruction process, estimated at \$200 billion over ten years. France is also seeking to obtain a large share in Libyan investments in the post-war period.

¹⁶ France in Libya: Renewed historical role and future of influence, Barq Center for Studies, ([URL](#)).

¹⁷ Why France and Italy care about Libya? The secrets of the conflict over Tripoli, and Haftar the biggest beneficiary, Arab Post, ([URL](#)).

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Paris also aims to be one of the suppliers of French weapon to the Libyan army after stability (for marketing its arms).

On the other hand, Paris believes that it must obtain a share of the legacy of the Libyan war, including a share of the country's wealth of oil, gas and minerals. France also wants to secure the continuous gas route from Niger to Algeria to Europe, as well as the trade exchange route for Europe passing through North Africa. With the beginning of 2017, Libya has guaranteed commitments from some of the largest energy companies in the world, including the French "Total" company, that signed three new contracts and pumped investments worth \$450 million in Libyan fields, which led to an increase in Libyan oil exports to 1.19 million barrels per day¹⁸.

Map of the French military presence

Since 2012, France has intensified its military presence in the Sahel region to protect its vital and security interests there, establishing several military bases including the N'Djamena base in Chad, Niamey in Niger, Gao in northern Mali, and a special forces base in Burkina Faso.

In 2014, France started building the "Madama" base in the far north of Niger, near the border with southern Libya, where it was provided with a military airport as a starting point towards Libyan territory.

Hence, what mainly matters to France in southern Libya is to control the smuggling outlets there, for confronting arms and drug smuggling networks and illegal immigration, and to dry up the sources of funding for militant groups that penetrate deep into Africa through southern Libya. In addition, Paris seeks to acquire massive investments in oil and energy, mineral extraction and raw materials in southern Libya, as one of the important sources of the Libyan economy in the event of being dominated by France, under the pretext of war on terrorism and fight against illegal migration and smuggling¹⁹.

¹⁸ Political, economic and military.. What are the interests of France in Libya ?, Sasa Post. ([URL](#)).

¹⁹ What does France want from Libya? Geopolitical contexts to support Haftar, Al-Estiqalal, ([URL](#)).

French policy in the Libyan file and its intersection with the Egyptian regime

France seeks to focus on preserving its influence and interests in in any way; Therefore, it harnesses all its political, diplomatic and military potentials to secure its share in case of occurrence of any comprehensive political consensus on the Libyan file. Although Paris had earlier announced recognition of the Al-Sarraj government, hosted him with Haftar at the Elysee, and showed its support for a political solution to the crisis, it did not hesitate to support Haftar militarily to enable him to control Libya thinking that he is more capable to preserve French security, military and economic interests in Libya. In addition, France has allies from European and Arab countries and seeks to gain their support to strengthen its position in the Libyan arena and preserve its interests whether a final Libyan solution was reached or not. Also, Paris does not intend to give up its interests in favor of its opponents, especially in the new front, where a Turkish role emerged, taking into account the historical context of conflicts between France and the Ottoman Empire over the Sahel and Sahara region in the Libyan arena²⁰.

France has also made efforts on the political track, sponsoring several initiatives, which makes it a major actor in Libya.

There is a great intersection between France and the Egyptian regime, as both of them support Haftar and seek to enable him to control the whole territory of Libya. Also, the increasing influence of Turkey in Libya represents a major problem for both, in addition to the growing relations between the Sisi regime and France in the wake of the military coup in Egypt in 2013. Therefore, we find close convergence in the positions of the two countries regarding the latest developments in Libya.

4)Egypt, Italy and the Libyan file

Libya has been under Italian colonialism for years; and after liberation, Libya remained a focus of Italian attention, even during the rule of President Muammar Gaddafi. After the February 2011 revolution, Italy was careful not to lose its concessions and influence in Libya for several reasons:

²⁰ Abdurrahman Çaycı, Modern History Professor at Ataturk University, "Turkish-French Conflict in the Sahara", Translation, Dr. Ali A'zazi, revised by Mohamed el-Usta, ([URL](#)).

Economic considerations:

Until the 2011 revolution, Libya had been the fifth largest supplier to Italy, while Italy was the world's largest exporter to Libya (open market for Italian products).

Italy was the third largest European investor and the fifth international investor in Libya, where investments covered several sectors, mainly energy, chemicals and mechanics.

Consequently, Italy believes that Libya is a vital strategic depth for the country economically, as a market of various Italian products, civil or military; as it is also one of the largest energy sources (oil and gas) for Italy, in addition to the huge Italian investments in infrastructure and dreams of reconstruction in Libya.

Security considerations:

Italy faces 3 major security threats in Libya (illegal immigration - terrorism - criminal activity). Italy considers Libya to be the largest passage point for illegal immigrants to Europe for its near coasts and deterioration of security conditions there. Therefore, Italy seeks to provide broad efforts to Libya in combating Illegal immigration by supporting the Border Guard and Coast Guard forces. The second threat is the existence of terrorist groups, most prominently ISIS, although its threat has recently weakened.

Italian policy in the Libyan file & its intersection with Egyptian regime:

Italy's efforts towards the Libyan file have been mainly aimed, from the first moment, to preserve Italian influence and privileges in Libya, which requires exerting efforts to find a political solution between the conflicting parties inside Libya after stopping fighting and all kinds of military support in implementation of the UN arms embargo imposed on Libyan parties.

Therefore, there is no convergence between the Egyptian regime policy and the Italian policy on the Libyan file, except in demanding for non-interference of foreign parties in Libya, in response to the recent Turkish role there, although the intervention of other parties in Libya has been there a long time before Turkish cooperation with the Government of National Accord²¹. However, the relationship

²¹ Highlights of Italy's interests in Libya, Libyan Organization of Policies and Strategies, ([URL](#)).

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between Italy and the Egyptian regime in general after the military coup remained strong due to their common interests, and even the crisis of the murder of Italian researcher Giulio Regeni at the hands of Egyptian security services did not affect the course of their bilateral relations; and therefore, there are no major differences between the two countries on the Libyan file.

However, there have most recently been signs of a shift in the Italian position towards the Egyptian regime due to lack of cooperation of the Egyptian regime in the file of the murder of researcher Giulio Regeni at the hands of the Egyptian security forces years ago. Although the Egyptian regime is trying to conclude several military deals with the Italian side, most recently the two Italian frigates that the Egyptian regime seeks to obtain from the Italian side for 1.2 billion euros, although there are popular and parliamentary pressures on the Italian government to cancel the deal because of the Giulio Regeni case.

Followers of Italian media and official and semi-official comments there during the past two weeks notices a radical shift in Italian-Egyptian relations manifested in the harsh rhetoric against the Egyptian regime in an apparently unjustifiable manner. Among the most important things that we have recently monitored was the interview conducted by Italian newspaper La Repubblica on June 15, 2020 with Marco Minniti, the former Italian Minister of the Interior (from 12 December 2016 to 1 June 2018), sometimes nicknamed "The Lord of the Spies", due to his long-time experience in coordinating the secret services, and described by some politicians as the most powerful and prominent man in Italy. Minniti, who was one of the most prominent councilors of two former Prime Ministers, Matteo Renzi and Massimo D'Alema, has confirmed that the time has come to seriously talk about the "Regeni" murder. Some observers of Italian politics believe that such a statement from a senior official like Minetti, who is closely related to the Italian intelligence services and one of the most important engineers of Italian politics towards Libya and Egypt, reflects tension in relations between Italy and Egypt in the current stage.²²

We suggest that this shift is due to the growing differences between Egypt and Italy regarding the Libyan file, as a means to pressure Egypt in this regard. It is also expected that the situation may

²² Minniti "L'EGgitoo deve farci processare chi uccise Regeni" pagina 8 lunedì 15 giugno 2020, ([URL](#))

escalate up to the freezing of the Italian armament deal, which may reach about 10 billion euros despite the huge benefits to the Italian economy from such deal. Some analysts have already begun to monitor Italy's bias towards the axis of Turkey-GNA, on the Libyan file. For example, on June 16, 2020, Turkish forces conducted naval military exercises in the Mediterranean with their Italian counterparts; where the Turkish Ministry of Defense announced that the Turkish and Italian submarines carried out naval exercises in the Mediterranean Sea within the framework of enhancing cooperation between the two countries that possess the two largest submarine fleets in the Mediterranean region. This position also comes in the context of competition and differences between the Italian and French positions on Libya, and the hidden conflicts between the two governments over their influence and control in such important country to both.

5) Egypt, Germany and the Libyan file

Germany is trying to play an influential and leading role in the Libyan crisis. In departure from the German foreign policy approach to the conflicts and problems of the Middle East region – where it used to commit itself to a traditional role – Germany is currently striving to play the role of mediator that seeks resolving divergent views of various parties in Libya to reach a political solution to the crisis.

But what is the secret behind the growing German interest in finding a peaceful solution to the crisis in Libya, and why did Berlin abandon its traditional foreign policy literature regarding the problems of the Middle East?

It is customary for many decades that Germany emphasizes through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statements on its commitment to the United Nations charters, international legitimacy, stability, and peace regarding the problems of the Middle East, but Germany's interest in the Libyan file and its pursuit of a peaceful solution to the Libyan conflict, reflects Germany's concern about the deteriorating situation in Libya²³.

²³ Why does Germany want to end the Libyan war?, Elaf, ([URL](#)).

Economic interests

A closer look at Germany's trade relations with Arab countries clearly reveals the secrets of German interest in the Libyan crisis. According to the latest economic report of the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Berlin, despite the armed conflict in Libya, Libya ranked first in the Arab world on the list of exporters to Germany. Libyan exports to Germany in 2019 amounted to worth of 2 billion and 800 million euros, while the total Arab exports to Germany amounted to about 9 billion and 600 million euros against 22 billion and 200 million euros worth of German exports to Arab countries, and it goes without saying that Libyan exports to Germany are mostly oil and its derivatives.

In addition, Germany has significant investments in Libya's neighboring countries, especially in Algeria, where the intensity of Libyan conflict directly led to production suspension of the largest German automobile manufacturing plant in North Africa, located in Algeria, with the emergence of indicators for the Federal Institute of Employment, emphasizing that the current year will witness the layoff of a relatively large number of labor in German companies operating in the export sector as a result of the decline in German industrial exports.

For these reasons, Germany appears to have thrown all its diplomatic weight in the Libyan arena in order not to leave it to other competitors, which may lead to loss of its largest petroleum supplier in the Middle East; and to maintain a broad marketing area for German products in the Middle East amid expectations of more global instability in current time.

Illegal immigration and refugees:

Undoubtedly, Germany's foreign policy shows great interest in the southern Mediterranean countries, as it is one of the tributaries of illegal immigration to Europe, which often flows in Germany, mostly from Libya due to the lack of security, control and combating smuggling. Berlin, which is still suffering from the repercussions of the war in Syria and its refugee crisis, where it received tens of thousands of Syrian refugees on its soil a few years ago, has realized that such experience should not be repeated in Libya that has turned into a transit point for illegitimate migrants to Europe.

Security dimension:

The German government does not hide its fears of the infiltration of terrorists and Islamic militants who are involved in fighting in Libya to Europe with the help of people-smuggling gangs that benefit from the chaos in which Libya has plunged since the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime.

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German policy in the Libyan file & its intersection with the Egyptian regime:

German diplomacy has extensive experience in secretly resolving conflicts, having entered successful mediations between Hezbollah and Israel, and between Iran and Israel. It also contributed to solving the refugee crisis in Europe, which had been exacerbated in an unprecedented way after refusal of countries from Eastern Europe to receive migrants after deterioration of the situation in Syria. Germany also played a major role in holding difficult negotiations with Turkey and Greece to limit illegal migration. Berlin also stopped arms sales to Saudi Arabia at the outbreak of the Yemeni war. All this poured in the interest of the German diplomacy, and strengthened its role in resolving international conflicts.

German foreign policy is known as the policy of extinguishing fires, and Germany is more concerned with achieving its interests and concluding economic deals, a policy based on data related to the German-European interests, and also related to Libya currently, in light of the decline in German exports, which started to arouse the concern of German companies that want to open new markets, something that will only happen if tensions in the region decrease.

Berlin is trying to unite the European ranks and create a unified European policy and vision towards the Libyan file, away from moving individually, to avoid further division in the European position.

Germany's policy towards the Libyan file depends on playing a neutral mediating role to bring views of various parties closer for reaching a political solution to the crisis, as it believes that the Libyan crisis cannot be resolved militarily. In fact, the Egyptian regime only adopted the idea of a political solution only after Haftar's recent defeats. However, there is a clear contrast between the Egyptian regime's policies, which depend on the French approach on the Libyan issue, and the German calls for solving the Libyan crisis²⁴.

6) The United States and the Libyan file

The American role in the United States appears to be mysterious to many. The United States recognizes the Government of National Accord and supports the Turkish position in the face of the

²⁴ Berlin is seeking peace in Libya.. What is the secret behind Germany's interest in the Libyan file? Al-Ahram Gate, ([URL](#)).

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Russian influence in Libya, but at the same time, Haftar is basically described as an America's puppet. The United States [provides support to Haftar](#) who is primarily supported by the US strategic allies, i.e. Egypt, UAE and Saudi Arabia, from the first moment of launching the so-called "Operation Dignity" in May 2014. Also, Sisi's interference and threats in Libya could not have been happened without American consent.

However, based on an in-depth analysis of developments, it appears that the United States addresses the Libyan file in two patterns:

1- First pattern: the declared attitude of the official American establishment, especially the Pentagon and the CIA, that recognizes the legitimate GNA and works to restrain the Russians in Libya, according to which the United States understood and accepted the Turkish presence in Libya.

2- Second pattern: the attitude of interest networks for limiting the Islamic trend via specific circles within the US administration, most prominently the presidential institution under President Donald Trump, where they deal with the Libyan file on the basis of the "flame war" policy, which requires ensuring that Libya remains always flaming allowing no party to win for the purpose of draining it economically on the one hand by concluding deals for Haftar and his supporters, for example the deals that Linden Government Solutions concluded for carrying out political pressure within the American institutions in favor of Khalifa Haftar in mid-May 2019, although the company has not renewed it²⁵. On the other hand, the Russian side is being depleted in an endless war, in addition to attempting to spoil the Russian-Turkish rapprochement that the US does not want. Moreover, the US administration under Trump realizes that the Emirati-Egyptian-Saudi support for Haftar is promoted as aimed at restraining the Islamic current in Libya, which is acceptable to the current US administration.

Therefore, the US policy comes as a combination of these two positions, by keeping the conflict ablaze, but not to the extent that enables Russia to take the lead, and accordingly we can understand

²⁵ Libya's rebel army ends its US lobbying amid battlefield defeats, Foreign Lobby, ([URL](#)).

likeliness of a green light given to Sisi by the US for a limited military intervention in Libya, as the paper will explain later.

Fifth: Future of the Egyptian attitude towards Libya under Sisi

Based on the above, and after a careful review of the Libyan scene to foresee the future of the Egyptian role in Libya, there are three likely scenarios as follows:

Scenario I: No military intervention

In this regard, there are three views in this regard, each of which believes that Sisi will not direct military intervention in the Libyan interior, whatever the reasons and motives may be, as follows:

1- The first point of view: Sisi is keen on not declaring military intervention in Libya at the present time, especially as the forces of the GNA are now stationed on the outskirts of the administrative borders of the city of Sirte. As for Sisi's comment about the "red line" of the Egyptian regime, it means that Sirte and al-Jafra should remain under the control of Haftar's militias, as they are currently, and in this situation, Sisi's forces will be on high alert on the Egyptian-Western border as is the case now, but they will not cross the border to Libya, given that Sisi will seek, based on this situation, to reach a political solution together with other parties supporting Haftar such as Russia and the United Arab Emirates by practicing pressure on the parties that support the GNA not to overtake Sirte and Al-Jafra, and thus the reason for a likely Egyptian intervention will be negated. Meanwhile, the Sisi regime will support Haftar with weapons and training to reinforce its elements again, and at the same time will train the Libyan tribes on the Egyptian-Libyan border, although some observers see that they are not likely to make a real military difference in the battles on the ground.

2- The second point of view: In his talk about the "red line", regarding "Sirte and Al-Jafra" Sisi did not mean Sirte and Al-Jafra specifically, but rather the areas beyond Sirte and Al-Jafra, up to the eastern region, which effectively means transferring the battles from the Libyan western region to the eastern region, which Sisi does not want because the eastern region represents an important dimension to the security of his regime and government. Also, Sisi knows, in light of the current situation, that the US administration does not welcome the Russian role in Libya, so the US showed understanding of the Turkish intervention in Libya, which will work to curb the Russian ambitions there. Considering that Al-Jafra is currently falling in Russian spheres of influence, the United States

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may provide support to the GNA forces to enable it to seize these two cities in the coming period to cut off a likely Russian control in the region. After the meeting that brought together GNA PM Fayez Al-Sarraj on the one hand and the US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland and US Africa Command (AFRICOM) head Gen. Stephen Townsend, some reports said that the GNA and the American side reached understandings for seizing Sirte and Al-Jafra during the coming period. Therefore, in his talk about the "red line" Al-Sisi's meant crossing Sirte and Al-Jafra and going beyond them, and that the point that Sisi specifically intends is "Ajdabiya and Jalu" which represent the first point in the eastern region adjacent to the administrative borders of the Libyan western region. (See the map below).



3- The third point of view: A declared Egyptian military intervention in Libya is impossible under any circumstances, as Sisi faces many internal crises, and that his opponents are lurking about and waiting for a major failure of his regime that causes increased discontent and maybe division within the military institution, in addition to the public discontent and boredom. Sisi's engagement in an "ill-conceived" war in the Libyan interior in front of the GNA forces that are backed by the Turkish army, which is second largest army in NATO, may result in huge casualties among the Egyptian army forces, which may be exploited by the anti-Sisi parties within sovereign bodies to get rid of him. Therefore, it is not in Sisi's interest to take military action inside Libya, so as not to repeat the experience of the Argentine president, Jorge Rafael Videla, who entered into an ill-conceived war against the British army in 1982 after occupying the Falklands, where his humiliating defeat led to his removal from

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power by the Argentine army. What also supports this viewpoint, is the fact that despite clear requests from Saudi Arabia and the UAE from Sisi to largely participate in the Yemen war, yet his participation was limited due to the same calculations.

According to this point of view, the comments that Sisi made at the Egyptian-Libyan border come only in the context of threatening with the aim of imposing himself as a major player and to ensure that the Egyptian role would not be ignored within any likely initiatives or talks for seeking a solution to the Libyan issue that represents an important dimension for the Egyptian national security as well as the security of his regime in particular, which may be understood by the countries backing the GNA. Perhaps what the spokesperson for the Turkish presidency²⁶ said a few days ago that Turkey understands Egyptian concerns about its national security indicates this point. The withdrawal of the combat aircraft that participated in the military parade at the Sidi Barani base near the Egyptian border with Libya a few days ago while Sisi was in the western military zone, that satellite images showed on Tuesday, 23 June 2020, is also an indication of absence of real preparations for an imminent military intervention²⁷.

Some believe that Sisi is seriously suffering in combating an armed insurgency in Sinai, where the military performance in the face of militants is weak, taking into account that the Egyptian army has not been able to achieve a convincing victory for years. If the Egyptian army engages in a military intervention in the Libyan interior, will further suffer, and accordingly, Sisi will be careful not to interfere in Libya to avoid casualties among his forces²⁸.

Scenario II: A declared limited intervention

Dr. Yezid Sayigh, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, where he leads the program on Civil-Military Relations in Arab States (CMRAS), believes that Egypt will not fight a major war in Libya, unless it finds itself compelled to enter the Libyan battlefield after a direct threat.

²⁶ Kalen: We understand Cairo's "legitimate" security concerns about its borders with Libya; however, it follows a "wrong policy" by supporting Haftar, AA, 21 June 2020, accessed 23 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

²⁷ Satellites monitor withdrawal of Egyptian warplanes..., Al-Jazeera Net after being displayed at a base near the Libyan border, ([URL](#)).

²⁸ Egypt's Sisi risks a quagmire in Libya - and that's not in the US's best interest, The Hill, ([URL](#)).

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However, Dr. Sayigh believes that the possibility of Egypt's direct intervention is increasing, although he thinks that the Sisi administration strongly prefers not to do so, and will only do so as a last option.

Sayigh also believes that if Egypt interferes, this will not be a complete intervention and will only be aimed at discouraging the forces loyal to the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) and its Turkish supporters from advancing to or crossing the Sirte-Jafra line. Anyway, according to Dr. Yezid Sayigh, the Egyptian army does not need to advance to this line (Sirte-Jafra) or face the forces backed by Turkey directly.

According to this scenario, he expected that the first step for the Egyptian army forces would cross the border and carry out extensive deployment, but would shortly pause. In this way, Sisi will signal his seriousness in attempt to persuade the other side to stop its progress to avoid a clash. But in the worst case, Egypt has the ability to transfer large numbers of troops to Libya due to its geographical location; and in this regard, its potentials may outweigh the potentials of the Turkish military presence with its current size in Libya. However, until that time, the Egyptian forces are likely to remain in the Libyan eastern border region²⁹.

Others believe that Al-Sisi might carry out such formal step by moving Egyptian forces inside the Libyan territory in case the GNA crossed the Sirte-Al-Jafra line as a threat to prompt the GNA forces to stop at that point, until the whole file be referred to negotiations for reaching a political solution.

In this context, Major General Hisham Al-Halabi, a military expert, reportedly said that if the GNA forces crossed the Sirte-Al-Jafra line with its tremendous oil wealth, they would push the Egyptian army to confront them through its traditional forces from land, air, and marine branches to stop such progress. In this regard, Al-Halabi believes that the military geography is in favor of the Egyptian army that will operate in a theater of operations that is known well to its forces while the military geography will be against the Turkish army because such theater of operations is not known to its forces. However, but he believes at the same time that Turkey does not want to fight Egypt, and that

²⁹ Is Egypt heading for war? Carnegie, 23 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

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Egypt also does not want to engage in a war, due to its current economic conditions and the internal situation in general after the impact of the coronavirus pandemic³⁰.

According to the two points of view, Dr. Sayigh or Maj. Gen. Al-Halabi, Sisi's intervention with large numbers of forces will in fact be accompanied with limited combat intent, which will all ultimately support the first scenario.

However, such move may benefit Sisi so much: in addition to threatening the GNA and the Turkish administration to actually intervene if they progress beyond Sirte and Al-Jafra as stated above, it may also unite people behind Sisi, under the pretext that the State is at war; given that during wars, the home front, including the people and all State institutions, must be lined up behind the political leadership, avoiding any differences.

Scenario III: A declared military intervention

The continued effective Egyptian intervention in various ways, politically and militarily, in the Libyan file is mostly expected, as all determinants of this role seem to be continuing in the foreseeable future. The Egyptian regime will continue to employ its military potentials, including arming and training, as well as participation with troops and warplanes to provide Khalifa Haftar with all forms of military support to avoid further losses during the next stage, so that his project would not become more threatened.

Sisi currently has no alternative but to maintain his support to the Haftar project in Libya, and he will not abandon him for whatever reasons, even if other regional and international supportive countries, such as Russia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, abandoned him. To Sisi, the battle for enabling Haftar is considered to be a "zero battle", as the Egyptian regime does not guarantee the emergence of a proper Libyan military figure to play the role that Haftar is currently playing, unlike Russia that might prefer to rely on some figures from the former Gaddafi regime. The Sisi regime believes that Haftar's disappearance from the scene is likely to result in conflicts and defections in his camp that do not entail the emergence of only one "strong leader"; therefore, Sisi will maintain provision of all forms

³⁰ Why do the Egyptian military trust their ability to defeat the Turks easily?, video, ([URL](#)).

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of support to Haftar in the coming period, which has already appeared during the past few months, and is expected to continue in the foreseeable future more heavily.

If Haftar retracts and becomes in a worse military and political position, and his control stays limited only to eastern Libya, in absence of a likely political solution between the Libyan parties, Sisi may support a division project of Libya after losing hope that Libya will remain united under Haftar's leadership. In this way, Sisi will prefer that the Haftar project remains in control of the eastern part of Libya adjacent to the Egyptian border, in order to preserve the security and interests of the Sisi regime.

In case the GNA succeeds in transferring battles to the eastern region to impose its control on all Libyan lands, and cross the Sirte-Al-Jafra line that the Egyptian regime considers a "red line", as statements of the GNA indicate, despite the advanced weaponry provided to Haftar's militias as well as the use of mercenaries, it is not unlikely that the Sisi regime would carry out a declared direct intervention with deployment of large forces, under the pretext of preserving the Egyptian national security and confronting extremist currents that seek to control the Libyan border lands adjacent to the Egyptian territory, as well as facing the Turkish role that the Sisi regime claims to be working to destabilize the Egyptian State. The repeated statements made by Aqilah Saleh, the speaker of the dissolved parliament of Tobruk during the past few days, in which he reiterated that Libya would be in need of support from the Egyptian army in its war against terrorism and mercenaries during the coming period, may indicate such a likely intervention³¹.

What indicates that the military situation may develop in the coming days, is that Colonel Mohamed Qanunu, the spokesman for the GNA army, has revealed that there are military supplies provided by Russia to Haftar's militias. On Friday, 26 June 2020, Qanunu announced "arrival of six anti-aircraft Pantsir air defense systems to the city of Sirte, coming from Russia," noting that "more than 11 Russian cargo planes landed at the Qardabiya Base, south of Sirte days ago, carrying mercenaries from Syria, weapons and ammunition on board". Some sources also reported that Haftar militias were

³¹ Aqilah Saleh: Libya will need support of Egyptian army in its war against terrorism, Masrawy, 25 June, 2020, ([URL](#)).

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gathering mercenaries from Sudan and Chad in southern Ajdabiya in preparation for sending them to Sirte, while other sources reported on 28 June that Wagner and Syrian mercenaries were installing Scud missile platforms in the Jarif area in Sirte, expecting that these missiles would target the city Misurata to the west. In another context that might indicate that the coming days will witness military developments on the ground, Brig. Gen. Ibrahim Beit Al-Mal, the commander of GNA Army's operation in Sirte and al-Jafra, confirmed that GNA forces have completed all preparations for the operation to liberate the city of Sirte, only pending orders to start³².

In addition to the Russian support that arrived in the city of Sirte, reports revealed that Russia has sent forces and military support to the Libyan south, and other reports revealed that Russian mercenaries have arrived in the "Ubari" area in southern Libya to control the Sharara oil field located there, which was directly condemned by the United States on Friday, 26 June, when Washington expressed concern over the intervention of the Russian Wagner Group and other foreign mercenaries against the facilities of the National Oil Corporation in Libya. This came in a statement to the American embassy in Tripoli, saying: "We share the National Oil Corporation's deep concern about the shameful intervention of the Wagner Group and other foreign mercenaries against the institution and its employees in the Sharara field (south), which constitutes a direct attack on Libya's sovereignty and prosperity."³³

A careful military view of the intense Russian military build-up in these areas may indicate what is more dangerous than that, and that the Sharara oil field may not be the target in itself, as the completion of an arc that includes large forces, passing through Sirte-Al Jafra-Ubari may mean a military build-up that constitutes a siege around the western region that the GNA forces have recently liberated, in preparation for a likely major attack on this region.

French President Emmanuel Macron announced on 29 June 2020 at a press conference in Berlin after meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel that his country does not support Khalifa Haftar in

³² GNA: Russian air defense systems in Sirte ... and Russian mercenaries enter the Sharara oil field, Arabi21, 26 June 2020, accessed 2 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

³³ US concern about Wagner's Intervention against facilities of the Libyan Oil Corporation, Arabi21, 26 June 2020, accessed 27 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

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Libya, saying: "I want to clarify a wrong idea. France does not support Haftar but rather seeks a permanent peaceful solution." Regarding Russian foreign formations, Macron said he condemns the role of mercenaries a few days after controlling the Sharara oil field. The Russians are in Libya, days after their entry order with others, the Sharara oil field, was exposed. Macron considered that Russia is playing on the "contradiction" arising from the presence of a Russian private militia in Libya called "Wagner", and not soldiers from the Russian army³⁴. These statements by Macron have been interpreted by some that in the coming stages, France will not move in the same direction in line with the Russian project in the Libyan interior which provides all kinds of support to Khalifa Haftar, although Paris has been working alongside Russians over the past years, suggesting that France will follow another track to achieve its goals in Libya, due to the developments witnessed by Libya during the past few months, the successive losses of Haftar, and the United States' rejection of the Russian role and influence in Libya at the current stage.



³⁴ Macron: France does not support Haftar, and Russia plays on "contradiction" in Libya by using Wagner Militias, Arab Post, 28 June 2020, accessed 30 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

Consequently, as stated above, military intervention by the Sisi regime is most likely in the event that the battles shift to Libya's eastern regions beyond the Sirte-Jafra line to the city of Ajdabiya. However, there are still two other scenarios that justify the Egyptian military intervention:

1- Escape-Forward Policy:

The local Egyptian situation is currently witnessing many economic³⁵ and security³⁶ difficulties, and it is likely that it will further worsen as a result of the health and economic effects that will result from the mishandling of the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the issue of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), as explained at the beginning of this paper, which may result in ignition of large-scale protests.

In light of this, and with the deterioration of the situation in Libya, particularly the Haftar project that is likely to become worse during the coming stage, which the regime will consider more threatening to its security and stability, the Sisi regime may intervene militarily in the Libyan file, for two reasons:

a- Defending the security of the regime, as with the fall of Haftar, the regime will consider this a real threat to its security and stability, and will harness all its potentials to face such threat.

b- A way to escape the internal situation, and to preoccupy the Egyptian public opinion with another issue, i.e. defending the Egyptian national security that is at risk based on the likely control of the militants of the Libyan East, as the regime is expected to claim. To intimidate and preoccupy the Egyptian public opinion with other issues, a well-known policy of the Sisi regime that always adopts the "security first" strategy.

2- Intervention as a result of UAE or Russian pressure

The Egyptian regime is currently facing many crises that may further worsen during the coming stage, as a result of the repercussions of the coronavirus crisis on the economic situation in Egypt.

³⁵ Egyptian Economy under Sisi: Reality and Future, Egyptian Institute for Studies, Dr. Amr Darrag/Mustafa Nemr, 30 September 2020, accessed 28 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

³⁶ Repercussions of the Spread of COVID-19 on Egyptian Economy, Egyptian Institute for Studies, Dr. Ahmed Zikrallah, 13 March 2020, accessed 2 July 2020, ([URL](#)).

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Consequently, the Sisi regime will need more support from its allies and supporters, especially the UAE that provides all forms of support to Khalifa Haftar, including funding the battles that his militias fought during the attack on Tripoli, although the Egyptian regime did not support this move at the beginning, believing that there is no need to attack the capital at the time, but under the UAE, the main supporter of the Sisi regime, practiced pressure on Sisi, he reversed his position.

In light of the current escalation and the existential threat of the Haftar project in the Libyan interior, which the Emirates has funded with billions of dollars to bring Libya and its ports under its control and eliminate the current of political Islam inside Libya, being the strategic enemy of the UAE regime in the region – therefore, the UAE may seek military escalation by pushing the Sisi regime to intervene with regular forces to repel the GNA forces in the event of complete failure of Haftar militias as well as Russian and foreign mercenaries to compel the GNA forces to withdraw to the depth of the western region again, thus strengthening Haftar's position at the negotiating table later.

As a result of the economic crisis in Egypt, Sisi will be very careful not to lose an ally like the UAE, the main supporter of his regime; and therefore the Egyptian regime may be forced to intervene militarily in Libya as a result of the Emirati pressures. In this case, Sisi may not be able to evade military intervention in Libya as he did in Yemen, due to the different circumstances, and also because the Sisi regime's relations with the UAE are much deeper and stronger than the Saudi-Egyptian relations.

Also, a likely military action in support of Haftar may not be limited only to defending the eastern region, but there may be preparations for a new attack on the western region, especially after reaching the city of Ubari and the Sharara oil field recently, which will necessitate intervention of the Egyptian army.

Among indicators of the UAE pressure on the Egyptian regime for direct intervention in Libya, is the hints and statements announced by the Emirati academic who is calculated on the UAE regime [Abdel Khaliq Abdullah](#), where he urges the Egyptian army to intervene in Libya, stressing that the Egyptian army will resolve the battle in favor of Khalifa Haftar in case it intervened in the Libyan battles, with support from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and France.

Conclusion

The Libyan issue is currently in a very complicated situation, given the growing regional and international roles played there as described above. The possibility of a broad Egyptian military intervention in Libya largely depends on development of events in the next stage, as well as the pressures practiced by other parties that are influential in the Libyan situation on the one hand, and on the Egyptian position on the other hand.

Reviewing the different scenarios suggested by the study, and their outcomes according to various developments, we believe that if the balance of powers and interactions of various parties result in an international consensus on the GNA surpassing of the Sirte-Jafra line and then stopping at that point, with a pledge that the Haftar militias will not attempt to re-attack the region once again, while pushing for a political process on new foundations that depend on balances of the situation on the ground, the prospect of a widespread Egyptian military intervention in Libya will remain limited, whether through mere threats or by pushing show forces for pressure, proof of attendance, and fulfillment of Egyptian national security requirements.

But if the Russian-Turkish consensus (also in the Syrian file) fails, and the United States also fails to control the situation and maintain the balance it wants there, and the UAE pressurizes for a decisive victory for Haftar, the military operations are likely to continue, and the Turkish-backed GNA forces will seek ending Haftar's domination of the oil crescent area in the first place, and the entire Libyan East after that; or Haftar's militias will attempt to start a new military operation against western Libya. In both cases, the widespread intervention of the Egyptian army will be more likely, in the context of an explosive situation that may be out of control.

We believe that failure to reach an international consensus is not likely at the present time as all parties will attempt to avoid an explosion that could result from such a scenario, especially as Russia and Turkey do not want to engage in a military confrontation. In this case, the current military moves remain in the context of practicing pressure to form the best negotiating position when discussing a political solution. However, the likeliness of failure of such consensus will remain unexcluded, as the brinkmanship policies may lead to an explosion of the situation at any moment, which entails dragging the Egyptian army into a quagmire of conflict whose consequences can never be predicted not only in the Libyan arena, but also on the Egyptian interior.

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