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Egyptian Move Towards Libya Bet. Political Crisis & Military Build-up

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Introduction

A previous study published by the Egyptian Institute for Studies (EIS) titled, [Egyptian Role in Libya: Determinants and Tracks](#), concluded that the likeliness of a direct and declared intervention in Libya by the Egyptian army started to increase more than ever before; confirming that such potential intervention is linked to the failure to find a political track for resolving the Libyan crisis and the outbreak of battles waged by the GNA against the militias affiliated to Khalifa Haftar to control Sirte and Al Jafra, the line at which the internationally recognized GNA forces stopped after liberating several areas in western Libya that had been controlled by Haftar's militias during the past months.

Following up the ongoing developments in the Libyan file, there have been no serious political activity, whether international or regional, to avoid the state of conflict in the Libyan interior. Also, there have been no political initiatives, whether international or regional, to bring the conflicting parties to the negotiating table, except for the Egyptian initiative proposed by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in May 2020, which was immediately rejected by the Government of National Accord (GNA).

The GNA forces are still stationed at the Sirte-Al Jafra line, where they stopped after liberation of several areas in the Libyan West during the past months. However, the Al Watiya base, which is now under the control of the legitimate GNA, was bombed early July by unidentified warplanes, where no party claimed responsibility for the airstrikes that targeted equipment inside the base, including air defense systems. However, media reports have recently revealed that Russia was behind bombing the Al Watiya airbase, citing a special source in the Turkish presidency, confirming that neither Egypt, nor UAE, nor France¹ were behind the attack. The source stated that the airstrikes seemed to have avoided Turkish equipment, but other reports indicated that the bombing resulted in losses to a

¹ Who bombed the Al Watiya airbase in Libya? Private sources talking to Al-Jazeera Net, Al-Jazeera Net, published 16 July 16, 2020, accessed July 17, 2020, [URL](#)

Turkish air defense system². In response to the bombing of the Al-Watiya airbase that falls under the control of the GNA forces, the Al Jafra airbase that falls under the control of the Russian Wagner Group mercenaries and Khalifa Haftar's militias was also bombed, but the [GNA](#) forces denied responsibility for the attack.

Anyway, the Libyan crisis has witnessed several new developments since the previous EIS study was published, which will be reviewed and analyzed in this paper, to assess the likeliness of a large-scale Egyptian military intervention in Libya in the next stage, as follows:

First: Developments of positions of Sisi regime and other forces backing Haftar

In the above mentioned [EIS](#) study, we stated that there are several determinants that govern the Egyptian policy towards Libya: some of which have been in place since the beginning of Sisi's support for Khalifa Haftar in 2014; while other determinants have recently emerged based on development of events in the Libyan interior, in light of the Turkish intervention in the Libyan arena. Also, there are determinants related to the two countries (Egypt and Turkey), regardless of their ruling regimes.

Among the most important determinants of Egypt's policy in addressing the Libyan file, is the determinant of "Egyptian national security" or the "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, which some Turkish official statements have recently confirmed that Turkey understands its requirements³.

² Al Watiya Base: Did Haftar's allies give a "lesson" to Turkey or will the bombing of the base accelerate the GNA advance to Sirte, BBC, published July 8, 2020, accessed July 16, 2020, [URL](#)

³ Turkish Presidency: We understand Cairo's "legitimate" security concerns about its border with Libya; however, it follows a "wrong policy" by supporting Haftar, AA, published June 21, 2020, accessed July 17, 2020, [URL](#)

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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 countries.

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, which increased these concerns.

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.

At the present time, there is no sign of a political solution to the Libyan file, and based on the military developments in Libya during the past few days, it seems that the likeliness of outbreak of military operations between parties to the conflict is increasing; which justified the Egyptian army's military exercises on the western and northern regions near the Egyptian-Libyan border during July 2020, most notably the "Decisive 2020" drill, in which all branches of the Egyptian army participated "land-air-sea"⁴.

⁴ The Egyptian army announces exercises on the Libyan border related to "sharp and rapid changes", Russia Today, published July 11, 2020 , accessed July 16, 2020, [URL](#)

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In addition, as quoted by private military sources, there is an intensive Egyptian military, land and air, buildup towards the western and northern strategic directions near the Libyan border at the present time, whether in the Mohamed Naguib military base in the city of Hammam, or the Sidi Barani base near the border, in anticipation for any emergency that may push the Egyptian army to a declared intervention in Libya. As reported by private sources, large quantities of air defense systems have been transferred to the Egyptian army towards the Egyptian-Libyan border, as well as information about the presence of non-Egyptian units in these sites.

As the activist and war correspondent Ebrahim Gasuda revealed in July, that the Egyptian military forces arrived on the morning of Monday, 12 July 2020, to the former Al-Qatei border camp and the Gulf military region in Ajdabiya. According to Gasuda, another batch of Egyptian forces was sent to Sirte. Also private sources told 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.

During July 2020, the Libyan GNA forces monitored the arrival of military supplies coming from Egypt to the city of Tobruk, northeast of Libya. The Libyan Army Media Center, affiliated to the GNA, released pictures of transport vehicles intended to carry weapons and military equipment⁵.

Not only did the Egyptian army intensify its presence near the Egyptian-Libyan border, but other countries supporting Haftar also mobilized their forces in Sirte and Al Jafra in anticipation of the upcoming battles in the event of failure of a political solution between parties to the conflict. Also, 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

⁵ GNA forces monitor arrival of military supplies from Egypt in support of Haftar, Al-Jazeera Mubashir, published on July 15, 2020 , accessed July 17, 2020 , [URL](#)

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militias were 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.

Also, recent media reports confirmed supported by clear satellite images that June saw the arrival of Russian Sukhoi 24 and MiG-29 aircraft, military Ilyushin 76 cargo planes and reconnaissance aircraft, as well as the modernization of air defense units at the al Jafra airbase⁶.

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 from the GNA to start⁷.

Earlier, the GNA-led Volcano of Rage operation room released pictures it said were for crowds of Haftar forces with armed vehicles and two Russian-made anti-aircraft Pantsir air defense systems, adding that these military reinforcements of Haftar's forces were heading to the city of Sirte , controlled by the forces of Haftar supported by the mercenaries of Russian Wagner Group, the Janjaweed and Syrians⁸.

Second: Developments of GNA and Turkey positions

On July 11, 2020, the Libyan army affiliated to the Government of National Accord (GNA) announced that it would boost its defense system in preparation for a likely battle in the city of Sirte, and added that it would form a joint force to secure the western region after the expulsion of Khalifa Haftar's militia from there. Brig. Gen. Ibrahim Beit Al-Mal, the commander of GNA Army's operation in Sirte

⁶ Al-Jazeera Mubashir monitors Russian fighters and new air defense units in Al-Jafra (photos), Al-Jazeera Mubashir, published July 18, 2020 , accessed July 18, 2020, [URL](#)

⁷ GNA: Russian defense systems in Sirte ... and Russian mercenaries enter the Sharara field, Arabi21, published June 26, 2020, accessed June 2, 2020, [URL](#)

⁸ Libya .. GNA Army strengthens its defenses in preparation for the Battle of Sirte and forms a force to secure the western region, Al-Jazeera, published July 13, 2020 , accessed July 16, 2020, [URL](#)

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and al Jafra said that the Head of the Libyan Presidential Council Fayez Al-Sarraj and military commanders agreed during a meeting held on Saturday, July 11, 2020, in Tripoli on increasing technical support to the fighting axes of West Sirte, and to further improve and broaden the defense system. Beit Al-Mal added that this came after monitoring military build-up to Haftar forces in the area between Sirte and Al Jafra (450 km east of Tripoli).

The Libyan army announced that al-Sarraj, in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the Libyan army, discussed with the commanders of the western military regions, Tripoli and the central region, as well as the commander of the Sirte-al Jafra operations room on Saturday, 11 July 2020, the military situation in the country in general, the readiness of forces in various regions, the conduct of operations in the Sirte-Al Jafra region, in addition to reviewing the procedures for securing the liberated areas. The meeting also took up the reorganization of the military institution and mechanisms of implementing programs of integrating the supporting military formations and enhancing the defense capabilities of the Libyan army within partnership programs with a number of friendly countries. The meeting of Al-Sarraj and military commanders was held at a time when GNA forces continue to reinforce their forces west of the city of Sirte, in anticipation of a battle that Libyan activists say is on the verge. This also comes while Haftar's forces are also reinforcing their positions in the city, supported by Sudanese and Chadian militant groups, as well as Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group⁹.

The Turkish side, which is the most important supporter of the legitimate Government of National Accord, is still present in the Libyan scene strongly, as during July 2020, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar visited the capital Tripoli accompanied by Chief of Staff Yasar Guler and Admiral Adnan Ozbal, the commander of the naval forces. During the visit, the Turkish Minister of Defense affirmed that his country continues to back the internationally recognized Libyan GNA¹⁰. For his part, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu reiterated his country's position in supporting the GNA, and said that the Libyan government does not accept a ceasefire in Libya except in the event of withdrawal of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Pictures .. Turkish Defense Minister inspects his country's soldiers in Libya, Al-Jazeera, published July 4, 2020, accessed July 16, 2020, [URL](#)

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the Haftar militia from Sirte and al Jafra, and the return to the line of Skhirat agreement. Cavusoglu also warned in an interview with the Financial Times British newspaper that the escalation of tension may lead to a direct conflict between foreign forces supporting various parties in Libya.

After Al-Sisi's statements during his meeting with the sheikhs and notables of Libyan tribes, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that the steps of the Egyptian regime in Libya and their standing next to the putschist Haftar indicate that they are taking an illegal approach. President Erdogan added, "Our responsibilities in Libya will continue as they have been and we will not leave the Libyans alone"¹¹.

Meanwhile, Turkish media said a few days ago that the Turkish navy announced its intention to conduct naval exercises off several Libyan coast regions, called "Naftex". The drills, which will take place in the coming days, include massive exercises for the Air Force and the Navy¹².

However, on the other hand, press reports revealed citing informed Egyptian sources that the Turkish government works to avoid escalation of disputes with Egypt to the level of clashing. These sources revealed that the Egyptian Foreign Ministry hosted a Turkish delegation on June 27, amid a media hush, where the delegation included diplomats and high-level security officials. The delegation reportedly discussed with Egyptian officials a number of issues of disagreement between the two sides, most notably the Libyan crisis, and the agreement on demarcation of maritime borders between Ankara and Tripoli. According to the sources, Ankara sought during the meeting to dispel Cairo's concerns about the agreement, and explained that Turkey's military intervention to support the Tripoli government would not affect Egyptian national security¹³. However, observers of the Egyptian official statements and the pro-regime media coverage realize that this situation does not reflect any willingness to accept such Turkish efforts, although some bureaucratic and sovereign official bodies

¹¹ Erdogan: Egypt's steps in Libya are illegal, Turkey Now, published 17 July 2020, accessed 17 July 2020, [URL](#)

¹² Egyptian military exercises in the west of the country .. Turkey is preparing for another naval exercise off the coast of Libya, CNN, published July 10, 2020, accessed July 16, 2020, [URL](#)

¹³ Exclusive . New Gulf reveals details of Egyptian-Turkish talks on Libya, the New Gulf, published July 18, 2020, accessed July 18, 2020, [URL](#)

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in Egypt may be welcoming the Turkish approach, but Sisi and his regime controlling the government do not seem ready for reaching any understanding with Turkey.

Third: Likely developments in the coming stage

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), where over the past few months, the GNA forces took control of large areas that had been controlled by the militias of Khalifa Haftar.

Military experts are of the opinion that the GNA forces pause at the Sirte-Al Jafra line for some time is militarily understood, because whenever the GNA forces takes control of new lands, they need additional equipment of anti-aircraft, air defense systems and land armament to tighten control of the liberated lands and defend them from any likely attack, which needs some time from the GNA. It is to be mentioned that the GNA forces had taken control of the Al Watiya airbase and then installed its air defense systems extensively to secure it and avoid any hostile actions against it, but the base was subjected to aerial bombardment from "unknown" elements that destroyed these defense systems, which indicates that providing full protection to the base at the present time is difficult.

The element of surprise in military action is an important element, and the tactic of strategic attack in battles necessitates utilization of field superiority to acquire new lands as much as possible, in case of capacity and capability. Therefore, the GNA forces' pause of battles to control Sirte may indicate that they have tried to use their military gains to impose a political negotiation process in their favor, at least for the time being.

Therefore, it is likely that the Turkish-backed GNA forces' stationing there may be aimed at controlling Sirte and al-Jafra and then starting political negotiation to avoid engaging in other military battles whose outcome may not be entirely settled; and perhaps the withdrawal of the Russian Wagner Group mercenaries from Sirte (450 kilometers east of Tripoli) during the past few days towards the oil crescent ports, located in the east under the control of Haftar's militias, may indicate such

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understandings¹⁴. However, from our point of view, and according to some military reports, there are no actual military signs on the ground indicating that there are serious understandings resulting in an agreement between the conflicting parties inside Libya, and that the withdrawal of Wagner Group mercenaries is only a repositioning, deployment, and distribution of roles between the forces and militias supporting Khalifa Haftar in potential areas of engagement, and may be aimed at alluring the GNA and the Turkish side supporting it with a potential political solution as a way of deception to win time for completing preparations and providing more equipment that make it more difficult for the GNA forces to control Sirte and Al Jafra. Available information reported about likely preparation for a major counter-attack on the liberated areas in Libya's western region, as [reviewed](#) in a previous study published by the Egyptian Institute for Studies, which stated that the control of the area in which the Sharara oil field is located in the south, may be part of a broad encirclement of the liberated lands in the west by forming an arc that passes through Sirte-Al Jafra-Ubari.

An initial reading of the current situation in Libya indicates that there is a crisis in finding a political solution to the Libyan dilemma during that phase. Therefore, the likeliness of outbreak of upcoming battles between the GNA and the militias of Khalifa Haftar to control Sirte and Al Jafra, that the Egyptian regime sees as a "red line", is greatly increasing, which explains the intensified military build-up for all international and regional parties involved in Libyan crisis.

Perhaps what Anwar Gargash, the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs said, a few days ago, points to this; [Gargash](#) wrote on his Twitter account on 14 July, "The drums of war that are beaten around Sirte in Libya threaten serious development and dangerous humanitarian and political consequences."

On the other hand, the Sisi regime is working to find justifications for legitimizing intervention in the Libyan battlefield during the next stage in the event of deterioration of conditions and outbreak of upcoming battles between the GNA and the militias of the Egypt-backed Khalifa Haftar to control Sirte and Al Jafra. In this context, there have been several statements issued by the Speaker of the Tobruk-

¹⁴ Is the Sirte battle close? News about withdrawal of Russian mercenaries and GNA warns al-Sisi against interfering in Libya, Al-Jazeera Net, published July 15, 2020, accessed July 16, 2020, [URL](#)

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based parliament, Aqilah Saleh, most recently a few days ago, in which he said “the Egyptian armed forces can interfere to protect the Libyan and Egyptian national security if they saw that there was an imminent threat to the security of our two countries.” Saleh’s statement described Egypt as having been “the strategic depth of Libya at all security, economic and social levels, throughout history.”¹⁵

The Egyptian regime is also working to exploit all its cards inside Libya to legitimize its likely military intervention there. Therefore, Sisi on Wednesday, July 15, 2020, received a delegation from the Supreme Council of Sheikhs and Notables of Libyan Tribes on board a private plane coming from Benghazi. As the pro-Sisi regime newspapers reported, this visit coincided with the Tobruk-based parliament’s call upon the Egyptian army to intervene in Libya to protect Egyptian and Libyan national security, with the aim of supporting such likely intervention¹⁶. Al-Sisi received the delegation on Thursday, July 16, 2020, where Sisi’s comment during the meeting confirmed the Egyptian regime’s mobilization and assertion of the declared Egyptian intervention in the event of failure of a political solution between the conflicting parties, and in the event that the Sirte-Al Jafra line was bypassed by the GNA forces, claiming that this would pose a threat to the Egyptian national security, as Sisi stated during the meeting¹⁷.

Speaking to Libyan tribal elders, Sisi was keen to promote the power of the Egyptian army and its readiness to intervene militarily in Libya, saying, “Despite Egypt’s ability to change the military scene quickly and decisively if it wants to do so, as it has the strongest army in the region and in Africa, but this army is very rational and does not attack or invade outside its lands.” Al-Sisi continued to emphasize throughout his talk with the Libyan tribal elders that the Egyptian regime would not allow the transfer of battles or “chaos” to the regions of the Libyan East, stressing that the Egyptian army will respond to the request of the Tobruk-based parliament in the event of deterioration of the

¹⁵ The War in Libya: Tobruk parliament permits Egypt to intervene militarily, BBC, published July 14, 2020, accessed July 16, 2020, [URL](#)

¹⁶ Video .. Cairo receives the delegation of Libyan tribes to discuss the current repercussions of the Libyan crisis, Youm7, published July 15, 2020 , accessed July 16, 2020, [URL](#)

¹⁷ Al-Sisi: Any transgression of the Sirte-Al Jafra line is a threat to Egyptian national security, Youm7, published July 16, 2020 , accessed July 16, 2020, [URL](#)

situation, saying, "If you seek help, we will help you." All this indicates seriousness of the Egyptian military intervention in the event that Sirte and Al-Jafra were transcended and the battles were transferred to the cities of the Libyan East, because Sisi considers this a threat to his personal security and the security of his regime¹⁸. Any observer of the Egyptian media will certainly realize that there is clear mobilization for a coming battle with increasing possibilities to face what is called in the Egyptian media, "the Turkish-Ottoman occupation" of Libya.

Reaching a political consensus for the Libyan crisis nowadays is currently in difficult; and with a likely failure to reach a political solution, the situation may explode at any moment, which would entail dragging the Egyptian army into a quagmire of conflict whose consequences can never be predicted, not only at the level of Libya, but also to a large extent in the Egyptian interior.

Fourth: Motives and constraints of Egyptian military intervention:

There are several motives that drive Sisi into declared widespread military intervention in Libya at the present time. Meanwhile, there are several constraints that may prevent him from taking such a step to avoid the negative impact of intervention on his regime.

In the next lines, we will review both motives and constraints of Sisi's intervention in Libya, as follows:

1- Motives

A- Security of the regime:

As we mentioned earlier, Al-Sisi addresses the Libyan file as representing an important dimension of his personal security as well as the security of his regime. Therefore, al-Sisi considers the transfer of battles from western Libya to the east as a direct threat, as he repeatedly stated, which would push him towards intervention, especially if the military situation deteriorated, and the Haftar project collapsed in favor of the GNA forces, as this would then entail a threat to the security of his regime.

¹⁸ "If you bid help, we will help you." The most prominent messages of al-Sisi to the Libyan people, Al-Watan, published July 16, 2020 , accessed July 17, 2020, [URL](#)

B- Internal cohesion:

Sisi suffers from several internal problems and crises due to his mismanagement of some political and economic files. Meanwhile, there are parties within the sovereign institutions (the army and security services) that stand against him and his regime and have pressured the regime throughout the past period to achieve several gains. Given the fact that in times of wars, there is a kind of national cohesion, where inter-conflicts are completely avoided, opening the Libyan front may be an important motive for Sisi at the present time to mobilize the military and other sovereign bodies and silence dissenting voices.

C- A plan to escape forward:

The local Egyptian situation is currently witnessing many economic¹⁹ and security²⁰ 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 as 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 a likely control of the militants of the Libyan East, as Al-Sisi always reiterates. To intimidate and preoccupy the Egyptian public opinion with other issues, is, in fact, a well-known policy of the Sisi regime that always adopts the "security first" strategy. The regime always takes advantage of events and use them as a scare to intimidate and preoccupy the Egyptian public opinion with other issues. This the same strategy followed by the regime in addressing the events taking place in the Sinai through demonstrating that the state is fighting "violent terrorism" supported regionally and

¹⁹ Egyptian Economy under Sisi: Reality and Future, Egyptian Institute for Studies, Dr. Amr Darrag/Mustafa Nemr, 30 September 2020, accessed 28 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

²⁰ 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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internationally, and that the state is working day and night to combat such “terrorism”, and therefore any failure in other files (the economic file for example) should be overlooked, and the people must bear any difficulties, especially that the regime has so far failed to address another file that really threatens Egyptian national security, that is the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam file.

D- Military geography:

Libya is a neighboring country to Egypt, and it makes sense that the Egyptian army is aware of the military geography of Libya and the eastern Libyan region in particular, being similar to the geography of the Egyptian western region. Therefore, Sisi believes that the fact that his forces know well the geography of Libya and the theater of operations, may give them preference in managing the battles rather than the forces The GNA and their supporters in case of outbreak of battles if Sirte and Al-Jafra were bypassed by GNA forces. In addition, the Egyptian army's proximity to the theater of operations will also make it easier for them to maintain supplies and deploy forces during the battles more easily than the Turkish forces supporting the GNA.

E- The pretext of legitimacy:

The Egyptian army is the only army among the countries that support Haftar that may claim that its military intervention in Libya is legitimate, under the pretext of preserving the Egyptian national security on the one hand, as Sisi always reiterates in his speeches; and on the other hand, he will the Egyptian regime will claim legitimacy of the Egyptian army's intervention, as it came upon an invitation from a Libyan elected parliament, i.e. the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (although it had been dissolved by the Libyan supreme constitutional court in 2014); and perhaps this pretext would also be one of the factors that other forces allied with Sisi would take advantage of to push him into battles – as their armies lack such alleged “legitimacy” and can only support Haftar with various groups of mercenaries.

F- External pressure:

There are pressures from Haftar's supporters, especially the UAE, to push the Egyptian army to military intervention in Libya, linking this intervention to the economic support provided by Abu Dhabi to the Sisi regime, at a time when Egypt is suffering from major economic problems, that perhaps get even further worse during the coming period due to the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, as a result of the worsening economic situation of the Sisi regime, Sisi will be

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keen not to lose an ally like the UAE; 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 – as Libya's geography to Egypt is not like Yemen's geography – and also because the Sisi regime's relations with the UAE are much deeper and stronger than the Saudi-Egyptian relations.

2- Constraints

A- Concerns about likely consequences:

Sisi's declared engagement in battles in Libya will have many repercussions, as the Egyptian army may suffer casualties and losses, taking into account that the Egyptian army already suffers greatly in the face of the armed insurgency in Sinai in the face of a group of irregular militants; and perhaps when it faces regular professional military forces, losses may be much greater, which will have negative repercussions within the military institution. Such situation may create a state of discontent against Sisi within the military for implicating the army in an ill-considered battle, which would ultimately expose Sisi to a real threat from within the army, amounting to his overthrow if the scale of losses increased and it became clear that the military adventure failed. Some similar experiences confirm this fact, such as the experience of the Argentine president, Jorge Rafael Videla, who engaged in an ill-conceived war against the British army in 1982 after occupying the Falklands, where his humiliating defeat led to his removal from power by the Argentine army.

B- The Renaissance Dam File:

Sisi's entry into a war in Libya at the time when Egypt suffers from his ill-management of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) file that constitutes a direct strategic threat to the Egyptian national security, may expose Sisi to great internal criticism, either within the military or among the people that may see that the threat posed by GERD far outweighs any likely threat coming from Libya, which may open doors for turmoil and unrest that Sisi does not really want.

C- An opportunity for the anti-Sisi powers within regime:

There are some parties within the sovereign institutions that stand against Sisi, and those powers have clashed with Sisi in more than one occasion for achievement of some of their goals. The most dangerous mobilization that these parties exploited to pressure Sisi was on September 20, but Sisi

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then realized the danger and took some measures to contain them. However, Sisi soon returned to his old strategy of abusing his opponents, even if they were from sovereign bodies. In this respect, Sisi's implication in the Libyan interior and his likely defeat will give these groups an opportunity to put pressure on him once again; but this time with the aim of getting rid of him, especially after the conflict between them has reportedly become a "zero conflict"²¹. These parties can disseminate reports on risks posed to the nation by Sisi's plunging of the Egyptian army in unnecessary battles which may cause great losses and have severe consequences on the army's cohesion and ability to carry out its tasks. From this standpoint, Sisi might think a lot before engaging in such a military adventure to avoid such a dangerous scenario.

D- American objection:

One of the constraints that could prevent Sisi from implicating in a military intervention in Libya is the American objection to such wide-range intervention to face the army of a NATO member-state (Turkey) using American weapons. The United States is currently working to restrain the Russian presence in Libya, and does not want to let the Russians establish a project of their own there, and accordingly they understood and accepted the Turkish presence in Libya. Therefore, the United States may object to the likely Egyptian intervention, given the fact that the Egyptian regime and the Russian Federation are working side by side in the Libyan interior, and achievement of any success through the Egyptian military intervention, and the Haftar militia's restoration of control again is in fact in the interest of Russia, as it will maintain and may even increase Russian influence in Libya, which is likely to be encountered by an American objection. It is worth noting that [Mohamed Buisier](#), a former political advisor to Khalifa Haftar and an American-Libyan citizen residing in Texas, now one of the strongest supporters of the Government of National Accord, said in a post on his Facebook page after Sisi's meeting with the elders of some Libyan tribes, that Maj. Gen. Abbas Kamel, the director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (GIS), informed the delegation that met with Sisi that the international situation does not allow Egyptian military intervention in Libya, in addition to Egyptian fears of involvement in the Libyan conflict for years, but that does not mean that Egypt will not

²¹ Anti-Sisi powers within regime and opp. management policies, Egyptian Institute for Studies, Mahmoud Gamal, published April 21, 2020, accessed July 17, 2020, [URL](#)

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support them politically and logistically – and this may specifically indicate the American objection to Egyptian intervention in Libya.

The factors that may make al-Sisi's declared intervention in Libya most likely are currently increasing, mainly to preserve the security of his regime rather than seeking to defend the Egyptian national security.

Conclusion

We suggest that the factors that may make al-Sisi's declared intervention in Libya most likely are currently increasing; and if efforts to find a political solution to the Libyan crisis failed, and the GNA resumed military operations to control all Libyan lands as it has repeatedly declared, the motives that could drive al-Sisi to openly intervene militarily in Libya will further increase, mainly to preserve the security of his regime rather than seeking to defend the Egyptian national security.

Sisi has currently got no alternative but to continue to support the Haftar project in Libya, and he is not likely to abandon him for whatever reasons, even if other regional or international supportive states, such as Russia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, abandoned him. The fight for enabling Haftar is now considered a "zero battle" for Sisi, as it represents the security of his regime. In fact, the Egyptian regime does not trust the efficiency of any Libyan military figure for playing the role that Haftar has played so far (whereas Russians, for example, may prefer reliance on some of the former Gaddafi regime symbols). Moreover, the Egyptian regime believes that Haftar's disappearance from the scene may result in conflicts and splits in his camp that are not likely to entail having a single "strong leader". Therefore, the Egyptian regime will maintain its support to Haftar in the coming period, providing all forms of support, which has already appeared over the past months, and is likely to continue even much more in the foreseeable future. But if Haftar retreated and became in a worse military and political position than he is currently experiencing; and if his control further declined and became limited only to Libya's eastern scale, amid absence of a likely political solution between the conflicting parties, then Sisi would most likely resort to supporting division of Libya after losing hope that Libya could remain united under Haftar's leadership, to make sure that Haftar remains in control of the eastern part of Libya adjacent to the Egyptian border, and preserve the security and interests of the Sisi regime.

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However, if the GNA succeeded in transferring the battles to the eastern region to impose its control on all Libyan lands, and crossed the Sirte-Al Jafra line that the Egyptian regime sees as a “red line”, as the GNA repeatedly declared its intention to extend its influence and control over all the Libyan territory, the Sisi regime would intervene directly and openly with large forces in these battles, given the fact that the military support provided to Haftar's forces, including sophisticated weaponry and even provision of foreign mercenaries, was not sufficient to resolve the conflict. In this case, Al-Sisi is likely to justify his intervention by claiming that he seeks defending the Egyptian national security by confronting the extremist currents that attempt to control the Libyan border lands adjacent to Egypt, as well as facing the Turkish role that the Sisi regime claims to be working to destabilize the Egyptian state. Sending Egyptian troops to Libya may also be justified by provision of support to Libyans, especially in light of the repeated statements by Aqilah Saleh that Libya needs support from the Egyptian army in its war against terrorism and mercenaries in order to preserve the Egyptian and Libyan national security – which may indicate the possibility of such intervention²².

The study suggests that the motives and prospects of the military conflict in Libya are increasing with the passage of time, which will inevitably raise the possibilities of the Egyptian army's direct military intervention, where motives for such intervention outweigh its constraints, which would, in our view, entail many risks to the Egyptian army and the Egyptian national security in general, by entering into an unplanned military adventure, and accordingly adding a new challenge to numerous challenges facing Egypt at the present time – a challenge that may seriously push the nation towards failure of the State and its inability to fulfill the essential entitlements for Egyptian citizens.

²² Aqilah Saleh: Libya will need support from the Egyptian army in its war against terrorism, Masrawy, published June 25, 2020, accessed July 17, 2020, [URL](#)