

# Battle looms for key Libyan city Sirte

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Thu, 2020-07-09 19:08

CAIRO: A military buildup around the Libyan city of Sirte has raised fears of a major battle for control of the area's strategic oil reserves.

The Libyan National Army (LNA), which has occupied Sirte since May, accused Turkey of targeting the oil-rich city and supplying militias in the area with weapons.

LNA spokesman Ahmed Al-Mesmari said that western Libya is under total Turkish control.

He said that Turkey aims to reach Libya's "oil crescent," a coastal region home to most of its oil export terminals.

The LNA is closely monitoring Turkey's moves in Sirte and Al-Jufra, he added. "We expect an attack on Sirte by Turkey and the militias at any time," Al-Mesmari said.

His statement was confirmed a few days ago on a social media account affiliated with Turkey, which posted a map of areas under its control as well as the latest developments in Libya. The map showed areas under the control of Khalifa Haftar, LNA commander, and the Government of National Accord (GNA). It also featured arrows illustrating that Sirte and Al-Jufra are the next targets of the GNA, despite a no-fly zone on the area imposed by the LNA.

The developments led UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to warn on Wednesday against a military buildup near Sirte, which is located between the capital Tripoli and Benghazi.

The warning came after LNA troops led by Haftar retreated and GNA troops led by Fayeza Al-Sarraj, prime minister of the GNA of Libya, advanced.

In a UN Security Council meeting chaired by Germany via video conference, Guterres said foreign interference in Libya had reached "unprecedented levels."

He condemned the violation of a cease-fire in place since 2011, which also called for the handing over of advanced military equipment and a declaration of the number of mercenaries involved in the conflict. However, Guterres did not name the parties who violated the cease-fire.

Guterres called on Al-Sarraj and Haftar to engage in political negotiations and agree to a cease-fire.

During the conference, the representatives of Germany, the US and France warned Turkey about its involvement in Sirte.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry indirectly criticized Turkey for sending Syrian militants to Libya.

"The transfer of Syrian extremist militants to Libyan territories by one of the regional parties aggravates the situation in Libya. This issue is a serious threat to the security of the Libyans as well as neighboring Mediterranean countries," he said.

Shoukry added: "These threats clearly and currently endanger Egypt, and we

will not tolerate this type of threats which are close to our borders, at a time when foreign interferences provide those militants with support.”

He said: “Supporting extremism must stop. We have to put an end to the sources of support by regional players who are confirmed to care less about the stability of the Mediterranean region. Solving this problem and resisting such policies is a prerequisite for the success of our efforts to protect the future of our peoples and that of the Libyan people.”

Shoukry expressed Egypt’s concern regarding the deployment of what he labeled “terrorist groups” west of Libya, with Daesh presenting the greatest potential threat. He said he considered such a deployment a threat to the security and stability of Egypt.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi suggested that any violation of Sirte and Al-Jufra will push Egypt to intervene in accordance with international norms and conventions.

Egyptian military expert Samir Farag said that oil is the main reason behind Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s interference in Libya. Farag said that Sirte and Al-Jufra are Erdogan’s two main goals in controlling Libya’s “oil crescent.”

Farag said: “Erdogan knows very well the competence of the Egyptian forces and is afraid of facing them. President El-Sisi said that Sirte and Al-Jufra are red lines.”

He added that if Turkey interferes in those areas, “there will be a strong reply.” He said the Egyptian Air Force is ready and capable of reaching any place which poses a threat to Egyptian national security.

Farag hailed the French role in the Libyan crisis. He said a speech by the French representative during the Security Council meeting on Libya was clear and strong.

“Erdogan faces a difficult situation internally and externally,” Farag said, adding: “Perhaps NATO would adopt resolutions on preventing Turkey from using military coordinates.”

Mohamed El-Ghobary, former director of the Egyptian National Defense College, said Libya has become “an international venue for conflict that is not only regional.”

“The whole world agreed that Sirte is a red line and that whoever crosses that line is an aggressor,” he said.

El-Ghobary added that Sirte is in the middle of Libya and controls the transfer of oil from south to north, and that Turkey aims to deploy there because of this. But Egypt would not allow this, he said.

“Egypt has a development plan that requires it not to slip into any potential losses,” he said.

The Egyptian leadership has a military strategy and political ideology. Any intervention will be “accurately calculated,” El-Ghobary said.



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UN chief warns foreign interference in Libya 'unprecedented' Guards block oil tanker from loading at Libya's Es Sider port

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## [Can STEM education guarantee job security in the Middle East?](#)

Thu, 2020-07-09 18:48

DUBAI: Advances in technology continue to redefine the ways in which we think, work, live and interact with people and our surroundings. As a result, many traditional careers are in decline, which raises important questions for young people in particular.

Will the number of jobs that are rendered obsolete by the rapid pace of technological change be greater than the new opportunities and career options it creates? And, crucially, what are the key subjects to study and skills to learn to keep in step with the times and future-proof career options?

According to Manal Hakim, the founder and CEO of Geek Express, an educational-technology platform, the key to future job security lies in predicting changes in employment roles and learning the skills needed to adapt to them. In the next decade, for example, it is estimated that the increased use of AI in all sectors will eliminate 75 million jobs, but create 133 million, she said.

Many future jobs will be based, to a significant degree, on “coding, robotics and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) skills,” said Hakim, adding that demand will grow for workers proficient in jobs such as data analysis, software and app development, robotics, and e-commerce and social media.



According to Manal Hakim students who acquire technological skills in a focused, purposeful way, and also gain familiarity with learning in a technological environment, end up as assets for potential employers.  
(Supplied)

The importance of, and emphasis placed on, STEM education lies in the fact that it focuses on real-world applications of the four disciplines through a cohesive learning approach. Considered by education experts as a driver of sustainable growth in Gulf Cooperation Council countries, STEM-related classes are offered across the region, through workshops in schools and also as standalone courses.

By teaching students as young as five years old the fundamentals of skills such as coding, robotics and design, STEM education is laying the “foundation of both education and innovation,” said Hakim.

She describes coding, robotics and design as the “new universal language,” and an integral part of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics) education, which is an integrated approach to learning designed to encourage students to think more broadly about real-world problems.

There is already a shift underway in education, with a growing emphasis on dedicated lessons on coding and STEM skills for children in the earliest grades, according to Cody Claver, general manager of accredited online school iCademy Middle East.

“Students are drawn to the futuristic skills they see as fun and engaging,” he said.



According to Cody Claver, general manager of accredited online school iCademy Middle East, there is already a shift underway in education, with a growing emphasis on dedicated lessons on coding and STEM skills. (Supplied)

He believes that students who acquire technological skills in a focused, purposeful way, and also gain familiarity with learning in a technological environment, end up as assets for potential employers.

Currently, Geek Express provides private, live online coaching to 1,200

students between the ages of 5 and 17 in Beirut, Dubai, Jeddah and Doha. It uses a “futuristic school” model that offers a range of learning options, in English and Arabic, that students can work through at their own pace, including hands-on projects, private lessons, semester-long classes and educational holiday camps.

The main focus, said Hakim, is to teach young people how to code so that they become “creators of technology” and not simply passive users. More than 30 courses are available, beginning with block-based coding logic for the youngest students, followed by more complex algorithms, game design, app and web development, and advanced classes on data science and AI.

“A child should be able to design his or her own app, not only use it,” Hakim said.



Caption

The importance of preparing young minds to adapt to future job-market demands might transform our ideas about, and approach to, education, said Claver.

“I believe we will see a continued re-imagination on the part of companies such as Google, Amazon and the like, to have students bypass traditional university structures and train directly with them,” he said.

Given the rapid changes in technology, and the resultant evolution of the job market, how prepared are education authorities to ensure students meet future employment demands? This is a particularly important question for the Middle East and North Africa region, where nearly half of the population is under the age of 24, according to data from UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund?

Three main criteria will determine job security in the years ahead, particularly for those born since 1995: flexibility, diversity of qualifications, and technological skills.



Caption

Emma Whale, vice president of Schools education company Pearson Middle East, said that educators and regional governments are making concerted efforts to ensure these criteria are recognized as the gateway to future employability, but there are also other factors that create a gap between skills and jobs.

“The gap is also about language proficiency, and those uniquely human skills that will differentiate us in the future from AI,” said Whale.

Hakim said that efforts are already being made to ensure young people learn the skills they need for the future but more can be done.

“There have been great initiatives in the region, such as the UAE’s One Million Arab Coders and the Saudi Vision 2030 for education,” she said.

However, she said that the growing need for STEM skills is outpacing the slow process of change to curricula in the region and around the world.



“I believe the best ways to fill the gap are broader and bolder (education) reforms, and consistent collaboration between the private and public sectors to build momentum for STEM adoption across private and public schools, homes, activity centers, camps and youth programs, with this model as the foundation for all education,” said Hakim.

Proper analysis of employment trends is also important when preparing for the future as it provides valuable pointers for educators and policymakers. A survey by education provider Pearson Global, for example, found that 79 percent of respondents felt they should do more to develop their knowledge of STEM subjects.

“An understanding of in-demand skills such as coding, UX (user experience) design, cloud computing and analytical reasoning helps people to expand their knowledge and capabilities and set themselves apart from other (job) candidates,” said Whale.

She also listed creative thinking, reasoning, collaboration, strong interpersonal communication, emotional quotient, diversity and cultural intelligence as ranking high among sought-after personal skills in the job market.



The Fourth Industrial Revolution is being fueled by a fusion of technologies that blur the lines between the physical, digital and biological and the key to success in the job market during this era will be to welcome change and celebrate it, according to Emma Whale, vice president of Schools education company Pearson Middle East. (Supplied)

The half-life of job skills – meaning the amount of time it takes for half of the knowledge associated with those skills to become irrelevant – has fallen from 30 years to an average of just six years. As a result, Whale said: “Companies in the future will look at hiring candidates with a desirable mix of hard and soft skills.” Hard skills are related to technical knowledge and training, while soft skills are personality traits such as leadership and communication.

While endorsing the value of a broad academic grounding, she said it is important for students with a clear idea of the industries they might want to work in to follow a clear vocational pathway, which can provide a faster track to employment.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is being fueled by a fusion of technologies that blur the lines between the physical, digital and biological. The key to success in the job market during this era will be to welcome change and celebrate it, said Whale.

“It’s time for all of us to begin acquiring skills that will make us valuable

resources in the future workplace,” she added.

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First GEMS Saudi school to bring world-class education to Dhahran

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[\*\*Yemen court begins trial of Houthi\*\*](#)

# Leaders

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-08 22:02

AL-MUKALLA: A Yemeni military court in the government-controlled city of Marib held the initial session of the trial of Iran-backed Houthi leaders on Tuesday, accused of masterminding the coup against the internationally recognized government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in 2015 and the subsequent military campaign.

The defendants faced charges of forming a terrorist armed group called Ansar Allah, colluding with the Lebanese group Hezbollah and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), revolting against the republican system, putting Masur Hadi under house arrest and trying to kill him.

Along with the movement's leader, Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, among the 175 accused figures were Mohammed Al-Houthi, a member of the country's Supreme Political Council, Abdullah Yahiya Al-Hakim, a senior military commander, the Houthi ambassador to Iran, Ibrahim Mohammed Al-Daylami, and dozens of ministers, intelligence, military and political officials.

According to the official Saba news agency, the prosecution demanded the maximum available punishments for the defendants, including the death penalty.

By the end of the session, the court decided to publish the names of the accused figures in local newspapers and demanded that they appear the same court on Sept. 25, or face prosecution in absentia.

With the help of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Houthi militias seized control of the capital Sana'a in September 2014, and placed Mansur Hadi under house arrest, dismissing his government and replacing it with their allied Revolutionary Committees. The Houthis killed Saleh in late 2017 after leading a brief military uprising in Sana'a.

## **Dismantled Houthi cell**

Also in Marib, Yemen's defense and interior ministries said on Tuesday that the Houthi cell that was dismantled in Marib's Wadi Abeda area late last month was responsible for masterminding many attacks against government, military and security targets in Marib.

In a joint statement, the two ministries said the cell, led by Mohsen Saleh Subayan, planned and carried out attacks against local security forces and Saudi-led coalition troops in Marib, planted landmines and improvised explosive devices, assassinated military and security officers and smuggled weapons. The statement noted that Subayan, along with several of his associates, were killed when they resisted security forces that came to capture them, and that drones, weapons and munitions were found in the area.

Local security and military officers believe that Houthi sleeper cells were

involved in directing drone and missile strikes that targeted military camps in Marib since late 2015. The deadliest Houthi attack was in January 2020, when a drone and missiles fired by the Houthis landed at a camp, killing more than 110 soldiers, triggering heavy clashes between government forces and the Houthis, which disrupted diplomatic efforts to reach a peace deal led by the UN Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths.

Official media reported on Tuesday that Prime Minister Maen Abdul Malik Saeed called the governor of Marib, Sultan Al-Arada, to congratulate him on dismantling the cell and foiling plots to undermine security and stability. Marib has hosted thousands of Yemeni army troops and coalition forces since the beginning of the Saudi-led military operation in Yemen in March 2015.



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Yemen on brink of famine again

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[US military commander stresses the](#)

# importance of Lebanon's stability

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Wed, 2020-07-08 22:23

BEIRUT: Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, commander of the US Central Command (USCENTCOM), has stressed the importance of the strong partnership between the US and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

He reaffirmed the importance of preserving Lebanon's security, stability, and sovereignty, and underscored the importance of the strong partnership between the US and Lebanese militaries.

Gen. McKenzie arrived in Beirut amid protests against this visit organized by supporters of Hezbollah on the road leading to Rafic Hariri International Airport, while Lebanese troops took extreme measures to prevent protesters from approaching McKenzie's convoy.

The Information Office of the Lebanese Presidency issued a statement noting: "(General) McKenzie met with President Michel Aoun who praised the cooperation between the Lebanese and US armies in matters of training and armament, and hoped to further develop the military cooperation between Lebanon and the US."

Aoun pointed out to "the support that the Lebanese Army received from the US Army in 2017 during the battle of Aarsal against Daesh and Al-Nusra," and added "the (Lebanese) army succeeded in eliminating terrorist dormant cells and continues pursuing them."

The statement noted that McKenzie confirmed the "continuous support of the US military command to the Lebanese army that is defending Lebanon's independence and sovereignty at all levels including combat and continuous high-level training."

Gen. McKenzie was accompanied by USCENTCOM officials and officers, as well as the US Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea, and US Defense Attaché Robert Meine.

The US Embassy in Lebanon said: "The one-day visit to Lebanon also included meetings with senior Lebanese political and defense leaders, including representatives of the Ministry of Defense and the Lebanese Armed Forces, office calls at the US Embassy, and a brief stop at memorials honoring the memory of those who have perished in service to their country."

Since 1997, the US has classified Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. Hezbollah's influence on state affairs has increased since the formation of Hassan Diab's government last January.

This was McKenzie's fourth visit since he assumed his duties on March 28, 2019 as successor to Gen. Joseph Votel, commanding US military operations in several countries, including Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Afghanistan.

The visit of the general coincided with the announcement by the Lebanese army command of the closure of three roads in Hermel region, used to smuggle goods between Lebanon and Syria. In addition, it announced the closure of two illegal crossings and five roads that are used to smuggle stolen cars and goods.

Smugglers between Lebanon and Syria operate under the protection of Hezbollah, which asserts that it is not capable of curtailing smuggling. Sheikh Naim Qassem, deputy secretary-general of Hezbollah, said on Tuesday "Hezbollah is unable to close illegal crossings and holds the army responsible for achieving the task."

On Wednesday, opposition lawmakers and activists ridiculed the Hezbollah chief, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, after he called for "an industrial and agricultural jihad to cultivate the land to avoid starvation."

Nasrallah's opponents called it a "sign of impotence," given his additional call for "negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)."

Nasrallah did not mention any specific reforms, while he continued his campaign against the US ambassador, calling on her to: "Stop interfering (in Lebanese affairs)." He also renewed his calls for "opening up to China, Iran, and Syria."

Lawmaker Rola Al-Tabash, member of the Future Parliamentary bloc, said that Nasrallah's words were like those of a man "who kills a man and (then attends) his funeral."

Former lawmaker Fadi Karam, member of the Lebanese Forces bloc, said that Hezbollah's leadership "depict national meltdown as if the solution was only confined to securing foodstuffs from rooftops, balconies, or from the bankrupt axis. For us, life is not only about eating and sleeping, but it is also about education, culture, institutions justice, citizenship, and independent judiciary."

Meanwhile, Qassem Tajeddine, 64, recently returned to Lebanon after his release from a US prison. The US State Department warned that any US citizen who did business with him would "be subject to severe sanctions."

Al-Hadath news channel quoted a State Department official saying: "Tajeddine, who provides financial support to Hezbollah, will remain on the US sanctions list and the State Department objects to his release from prison, but respects the court's decision. Sanctions will be imposed on any American who deals with Tajeddine."

Tajeddine spent three years in prison, and was released two years before the end of his five-years sentence. In May 2009, Tajeddine was first accused of being an important contributor to Hezbollah; he was arrested in 2017 in Casablanca, Morocco, at the request of US authorities, and was extradited to the US where he was accused of "circumventing the US sanctions against terrorist groups and money laundering."



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US general sees smaller but enduring troop presence in Iraq  
Pompeo: We are trying to prevent Iran from selling crude oil to Hezbollah

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## [Pompeo hints at Iran links in killing of Iraq expert](#)

Wed, 2020-07-08 19:21

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday demanded justice over the killing of a prominent Iraqi extremist expert and highlighted threats against him by Iran-linked groups.

Hisham Al-Hashemi, an internationally known scholar whose vast contacts inside Iraq made him a mediator among rivals, was gunned down outside his Baghdad home late Monday by masked assailants on motorcycles.

"In the days leading up to his death he was repeatedly threatened by Iran backed armed groups," Pompeo told a news conference in Washington, without

explicitly blaming Tehran.

“The United States joins partner nations in strongly condemning his assassination and call(ing) for the government of Iraq to bring to justice the perpetrators of this terrible crime... swiftly,” he said.

Hashemi was an authoritative voice on extremist movements including Daesh, which are violently opposed to Iran.

But he infuriated Tehran-backed factions in Iraq’s Hashed Al-Shaabi military network through his support of popular protests last year against a Baghdad government seen as too close to Iran.

Some experts have voiced fear of a new violent phase in Iraq and believe the turning point may have come in January when a US strike in Baghdad killed a top Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani.

President Donald Trump’s administration has sought to check Iran’s regional activities and choke its economy and frequently seeks to throw a spotlight on purported nefarious activities backed by the clerical state.



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Iraqi analyst Hisham Al-Hashimi killed in Baghdad after pro-Iran militia threats  
Iraqi analyst Hisham Al-Hashimi killed in Baghdad after pro-Iran militia threats