

# Ethnic Tubus fear southern Libya offensive

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OUBARI: In the southern Libyan city of Oubari, shops are shuttered and tension is palpable, as residents fear an imminent incursion by forces loyal to strongman Khalifa Haftar.

We “dread the repercussions of military operations that are unfolding on the edge of town,” said 22-year-old hospital administrator Ali Senoussi, speaking on behalf of his Tubu community.

Many residents in Oubari – some 900 kilometers (560 miles) south of Tripoli – are Tubu.

The ethnic group fears vengeance by Arab communities that have joined an offensive by Haftar’s self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), which is on the outskirts of the city.

Long marginalized, Tubus live in the Tibesti region, which straddles Libya, Chad and Niger, an area long at the mercy of roaming rebel groups, traffickers and extremists.

“We are residents of this region. Our support and love for it is immense,” said 22-year-old Senoussi, clothed in a traditional head robe to screen desert sun and wind.

“We cannot accept being involved in wars with Arab tribes that fight alongside Haftar,” he insisted, sipping tea in the courtyard of a hospital where he works as an administrator.



Tubus live in the Tibesti region, which straddles Libya, Chad and Niger.

The LNA says it is seeking to purge “terrorist and criminal groups,” and some accuse the Tubus of supporting Chadian rebels.

But Senoussi dismisses the offensive as “a threat to the social peace of the whole region.”

Tubu lawmakers even allege that ethnic cleansing is under way.

The community was among the first to join the 2011 uprising that ousted and killed Muammar Qaddafi.

But the former dictator’s downfall by no means improved Tubus’ standing in

Libya.

Despite being home to some of the country's biggest oilfields, the region is regularly hit by shortages of all kinds – petrol, electricity, gas cylinders and even bread.

Prices have rocketed on the black market.

Senoussi said the lack of fuel had forced him to leave his car at home and walk to work.

“Most public sector workers prefer to walk” to avoid long queues that have become a fixture of daily life at gas stations, he said.

The intensified chaos of recent years means that the southern border areas are more than ever a haven for extremists, traffickers and rebels.

These groups exploit a security vacuum that is exacerbated by an ongoing power struggle between a UN-backed Government of National Accord in Tripoli and a rival administration loyal to Haftar in northeastern Libya.

Tribal and ethnic quarrels between the Tubus, Tuaregs and Arab groups over trafficking have added fuel to the fire.

“We are Muslims, but we have a culture and language that we share with our cousins from Chad, Niger and Sudan,” explained Ali Yahyia, a Tubu expert on his community.

But this does not undermine “our support for the Libyan homeland,” he insisted.

The LNA launched its ongoing military campaign in mid-January and on Wednesday night entered Murzuk, another southern Libyan city home to many Tubus.

Renowned for a fortress that dates back more than seven centuries, much of the historic settlement now resembles a ghost town.

Murzuk's windswept streets are littered with garbage.

Like Oubari, shops are closed and people are scared to circulate.

Even bakers – hit by a lack of flour – cannot raise their blinds.

“The city faces numerous problems at the service level, particularly at the hospital where we have only one doctor,” deplored municipal councillor Ibrahim Omar.

“With the military operations that are ongoing, the doctors refuse to come, fearing for their lives,” he said.

If the situation persists, “food stocks will in the end be exhausted.”



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## [Palestinians to cut civil servant salaries after Israeli tax freeze](#)

Author:

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RAMALLAH: The Palestinian finance minister on Thursday announced salary cuts for civil servants, days after Israel said it would withhold tens of millions of dollars in tax transfers to the Palestinian Authority.

Israel's security cabinet on Sunday approved the freezing of \$138 million (122 million euros) over the PA's payments to the families of prisoners, or prisoners themselves, jailed for attacks on Israelis.

Israel, which collects taxes on behalf of the PA, says the payments encourage

further violence.

The PA claims they are a form of welfare to families who have lost their main breadwinner.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said Wednesday he would not accept anything but full payment of the tax transfers owed by Israel.

The PA, which is already running a deficit, will “pay the salaries of civil servants in time, but they will be reduced”, said PA finance minister Shukri Bishara after a meeting with EU representatives in Ramallah.

The cuts will not apply to salaries “paid to pensioners and families of martyrs, wounded or prisoners”, he added, adding that wages below 2,000 shekels (\$550) would also not be affected.

Many Palestinians view prisoners and those killed while carrying out attacks as heroes in their conflict with Israel. Palestinian leaders often venerate them as martyrs.

Under a 1994 agreement, Israel collects around \$190 million each month in customs duties levied on goods destined for Palestinian markets that transit through Israeli ports.

The money it then transfers to the PA is the authority’s most important source of revenue.

The Palestinians want EU countries to pressure the Israeli government to rescind its decision, said Mahmoud al-Aloul, deputy of Abbas’s Fatah party. Palestinian leaders will take steps to “boycott Israeli goods”, he said, adding they had already prepared “a list of Israeli products that have local (Palestinian) equivalents”.



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# [Security chief in south Libya town assassinated: ministry](#)

Author:

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TRIPOLI: Armed men have murdered a security official in southern Libya, the UN-backed government said Thursday, a day after forces opposed to it said they had entered his town.

The interior ministry of the internationally-recognized unity government branded the murder of General Ibrahim Mohamad Kari, security head in the town of Murzuk, a "cowardly crime" and vowed to bring the culprits to justice. In a brief statement, it said Kari was killed on Wednesday by "an outlawed armed group," without giving further details.

Authorities "will pursue his murderers and bring them to justice" and "will not remain idle in the face of crimes that threaten the security and stability of the country," it added.

Libyan media said Kari, a member of the minority Tubu community, was killed when armed men raided his home in Murzuk.

On Wednesday night, forces loyal to Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar said they had entered and taken control of Murzuk as part of an offensive launched in January.

Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army has said the operation is intended to "purge the south of terrorists and criminal groups" including rebels from Chad.

Haftar's forces have accused Tubu of supporting the Chadian rebels.

Murzuk is a stronghold of the Tubus, many of whom are opposed to Haftar's offensive, and lies in a region where tensions run high between them and Arab tribes, who have largely joined LNA ranks.

Kari's murder also reflects the many divisions that have divided Libya since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

The Tripoli-based GNA is locked in a bitter and protracted power struggle with a parallel administration based in the country's east and backed by Haftar's LNA.



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## [Protests against jail sentences for journalists in Turkey](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-02-21 21:27

ISTANBUL: A group of lawyers on Thursday gathered outside Istanbul's main courthouse to protest against an appeal court's upholding the convictions of former journalists and executives from opposition daily Cumhuriyet.

The court on Tuesday confirmed jail sentences against 14 former Cumhuriyet staff including prominent journalists who are charged with "aiding and abetting terror groups without being a member."

They had been free pending the appeals, but after the court verdict eight of them would have to go back to prison and the remaining six – who were given sentences of more than five years, have the option of appealing further to the Supreme Court.

The controversial case against Cumhuriyet – one of the few remaining dailies opposing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – has sparked concerns over the state of free press in Turkey.

### **Media supporters**

Around 100 supporters of the journalists including lawyers and opposition MPs staged a protest outside the Caglayan courthouse.

Tora Pekin, a lawyer in the Cumhuriyet case, said the latest ruling meant “the end of the free press” in Turkey, in an address to the crowd.

“It is the time to remember what we said from the very beginning of the case: The ruling delivered is the end of the free press that no longer exists even on paper,” he said.

Veteran journalist Kadri Gursel and lawyer Bulent Utku, who were initially supposed to remain free given their time served, will also have to go back to prison in line with the laws, Pekin said.

“Gursel is supposed to remain in prison for one or two days to fill the remaining term,” Pekin told AFP, adding that the eight were due to return to jail within a week after an arrest warrant.

Turkey is currently ranked 157th out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders’ 2018 Press Freedom Index.



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## [Largest mass grave of 3,500 people found outside Raqqa city in Syria](#)

Author:

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RAQQA: Two feet deep, below a plot of farmland outside the Syrian city of Raqqa, lies a large and deadly legacy of Daesh: A mass grave holding an estimated 3,500 people.

First responders learned of the burial site in the Al-Fukheikha suburb last month, more than a year after US-backed forces captured Raqqa from Daesh and as they closed in on the group's final redoubt of Baghouz further south.

The belated discovery is the biggest example yet of how the violence Daesh sowed will be harvested for years to come, diggers and activists said.

Several dozen mounds of dirt line one side of the Al-Fukheikha plot, marking the more than 120 bodies already dug up by the Rapid Response Division of Raqqa's civil defense service.

"These are individual graves, but behind us, by the trees, are the mass graves of those executed by Daesh," said Asaad Mohammad, the 56-year-old forensic assistant at the site.

**FASTFACT**

**The belated discovery is the biggest example yet of how the violence Daesh sowed will be harvested for years to come.**

"There are some 2,500-3,000 bodies estimated there, plus between 900 and 1,100 bodies in the individual graves, so at least 3,500 total," he said.

Eight other mass graves have already been identified around the northern Syrian city, including one nicknamed "Panorama," from which more than 900 bodies had been exhumed.

Earlier this week, diggers in flimsy medical masks excavated a small bundle



wrapped in greying, damp cloth.



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500 bodies exhumed from mass grave in Syria's Raqqa With little aid, Syria's Raqqa struggles to revive schools