

Turkey-Russia cease-fire negotiations for Libya: Any hope for durability?

Thu, 2020-07-09 20:46

ANKARA: As Kremlin announced the ongoing consultations between Turkey and Russia for an immediate cease-fire deal for the longstanding Libyan conflict, the feasibility of such an agreement is being questioned more and more as the two countries support opposing sides.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the Libyan National Army (LNA), backed by Russia and led by eastern Libyan Commander Khalifa Haftar, is willing to sign a cease-fire document. Russia expects Ankara to convince the Government of National Accord (GNA) to proceed in the same way.

The ministerial-level talks have been ongoing for a while, with some postponements last month over the technical disagreements.

Samuel Ramani, a Middle East analyst at the University of Oxford, is skeptical about a cease-fire working on the ground.

“The Libyan war is much more complicated than a mere Russia-Turkey proxy war, even though it is often oversimplified to this binary in Western media outlets. The UAE and Egypt will be much more hesitant than Russia about signing a peace deal with Turkey and might not view such as a ceasefire as credible,” he told Arab News.

According to Ramani, Haftar’s military actions in Libya could continue.

“Alternatively, Turkey has powerful interests against a cease-fire at this time and has also escalated tensions with France. Moreover, when Russia says the LNA is on board, there is a question as to whether he means Libyan House of Representatives Chief Aguila Saleh, who might be, or Haftar,” Ramani said.

Experts insist that the spheres of influence in Libya should be clearly outlined to prevent another failed cease-fire.

Regarding the red lines for a cease-fire, Ramani thinks that freezing the conflict areas in and around LNA-held Sirte and Jufra is an immediate priority.

Sirte bears strategic importance as it lies close to key energy export terminals on the Mediterranean shores, while Jufra hosts a strategic military base where Russian aircraft and Wagner mercenaries are reportedly located.

“An escalation from either side in these areas would be a red line. Also, there is a need for assurances from both sides that they won’t restart a broader war if they perceive their rivals as being weak,” Ramani said.

Aydin Sezer, an expert on Turkey-Russia relations, thinks that Russia is concerned about the increasing military support that Turkey gives to the GNA,

which further escalates tension in the civil war.

“The only priority right now for Russia is to achieve a lasting peace through a sustainable ceasefire agreement. The same goes for France. Both these countries are also set to bring this issue to the UN Security Council. These latest ceasefire negotiations mean Russia wants to keep the diplomacy doors open for both sides,” he told Arab News.

Saturday’s attack targeting the strategic Al-Watiya air base in Libya damaged Turkish air defense systems where Turkey was reportedly planning to establish a permanent presence. The attack also came a couple of hours after Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar visited Libya.

“After that attack, Ankara felt obligated to be much more cautious regarding the fragile dynamics in Libya. The situation on the ground is complicated and time is not on the Turkish side. Therefore, the cease-fire is necessary for Ankara more than ever,” Sezer said.

For Wolfram Lacher, however, senior associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Russia and Turkey may well try to broker a ceasefire and thereby become the two key players in Libya, but it is doubtful whether such a cease-fire could succeed.

“Haftar has more room to maneuver with regard to Russia than Turkey has with regard to the GNA because he can still rely on Egyptian and UAE support. So, he may reject the terms of a Russian-Turkish ceasefire,” Lacher told Arab News.

According to Lacher, other powers – including the US, France, Egypt and the UAE – want to prevent a Russian-Turkish arrangement in Libya and instead want ceasefire talks to take place under the UN auspices.

“This competition over the forum for ceasefire talks will also make any cease-fire initiative more difficult,” he said.

On the other hand, Bill Park, senior lecturer in the Department of Defense Studies at King’s College London, thinks Moscow is uncomfortable with the implications of Turkey’s escalation in Libya.

“Russia wants to demonstrate that there might be limits to what it will tolerate,” he told Arab News. “At this stage, Ankara should be willing to take risks while Russia should meet the challenges for a negotiated agreement and manage the hostility between France and Turkey.”



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Russia working on immediate Libya cease-fire with Turkey Battle looms for key Libyan city Sirte

[Britain calls on Houthis to allow UN access to Yemen's time bomb oil tanker](#)

Thu, 2020-07-09 20:55

LONDON: The UK urged the Houthi militia to allow UN inspectors access to a derelict tanker and remove the oil it contains on Thursday.

FSO Safer has been moored 7 km off the coast of Yemen since 1988 and fell into the hands of the Houthis in March 2015.

The UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office said the 1.14 million barrels of oil onboard could leak into the Red Sea "if nothing is done" and that the tanker is an "environmental disaster waiting to happen."

The FSO Safer is an environmental disaster waiting to happen. If nothing is done, 1.14 million barrels of oil could leak into the Red Sea. Houthi Authorities must allow UN inspectors to access the ship and remove the oil. pic.twitter.com/1TKBRk8V7t

– Foreign Office (@foreignoffice) [July 9, 2020](#)

The Houthis have actively prevented international engineers from boarding FSO Safer to carry out essential repairs.

There are fears that the oil it contains will start to seep out as the vessel's condition deteriorates.



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[Oxfam: Yemen most at risk of virus-related hunger](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-07-09 20:41

LONDON: Yemen and Syria are among the countries most at risk of hunger crises in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new Oxfam report titled "The Hunger Virus: How COVID-19 is Fuelling Hunger in a Hungry World."

Yemen was ranked as the country most at risk of a hunger crisis, with Oxfam saying 15.9 million people, or 53 percent of the population, could face starvation.

The report cited how conflict had damaged the country's infrastructure and its ability to both produce and import food.

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The economic shock to the Gulf caused by COVID-19 and unprecedented slumps in the oil industry also had an impact on Yemen, with financial support through remittances and donations down over 80 percent from neighboring countries in the first four months of 2020, said the report.

It added that food imports to Yemen, which was already importing 90 percent of its food before the pandemic, were down 43 percent in March and 39 percent in April.

In June, the report said, Yemen had discovered more than 900 COVID-19 cases and recorded over 250 deaths, but those figures were likely to be underestimates due to the state of the country's health-care services.



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UN warns Yemen on brink of famine againYemen receives COVID-19 aid as medical sector struggles with virus

[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 Fayez 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

[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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