

September 2021

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## Libya: 5,000 Syrian Mercenaries Continue to Operate in Tripoli

The UN demands the withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya as the next step after the reopening of the coastal road

## **Libya: 5,000 Syrian Mercenaries Continue to Operate in Tripoli**

*The UN demands the withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya as the next step after the reopening of the coastal road*

On 30 July 2021, the Libyan 5+5 Joint Military Commission [announced](#) the reopening of the coastal road linking the country's east and west. The road, which spans the length of Libya's coastline, had remained closed since April 2019. The United Nations (UN) Support Mission in Libya [welcomed](#) the reopening of the coastal road, calling it a "historic achievement". The UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Libya, Ján Kubiš subsequently called upon both sides of the conflict to immediately withdraw all mercenaries and foreign fighters, a process he believes to be the "next major step" in the implementation of the 2020 Ceasefire Agreement.

Kubiš' statement coincides with that of [UN legal experts](#), who called for all mercenaries and mercenary-related private contractors to leave Libya. [Jelena Aparac](#), chair of the UN's Working Group on the use of mercenaries, condemned the continued use of mercenaries, private military, and security contractors. The UN experts confirmed in their statement that some of the highly armed and well-trained private contractors from Russia, Syria, Sudan, and Chad operating in the country meet the criteria for mercenaries.

Syrian mercenaries have been deployed on both sides of the conflict. Since late 2020, the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) has recruited thousands of Syrian mercenaries to fight alongside the forces of the Government of National Accord (GNA). Conversely, Russian security forces have sent hundreds of Syrians from regime-held areas to join the ranks of the opposing Libyan Army, led by Marshal Khalifa Haftar.

Both the international community and local Libyan and Syrian bodies have strongly condemned the deployment of mercenaries to Libya, calling for an end to the practice, with Aparac claiming that the mercenaries "impede peace." However, the responsible parties, primarily Russia and Turkey, have turned a deaf ear and failed to take any steps to cease ongoing mercenary recruitment.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2021, STJ obtained information shedding light on Turkey's renewal of its mercenaries' contracts in Libya and their continued role in the transfer of weapons and military equipment to Tripoli. This was confirmed by STJ's monitoring of a small number of flights returning the minority of Syrian mercenaries who refused to renew their contracts during June and July 2021. STJ has also published a report documenting the continued deployment of [55 Syrian children](#) to a variety of sites in GNA-held areas, including Mitiga International Airport and the makeshift camps of, al-Sahbah, al-Na'am, and the Hadaba project.

## 5,000 Mercenaries from the SNA are Operating in Libya

STJ has monitored dozens of flights departing from different Turkish airports carrying SNA mercenaries to fight alongside the GNA forces in Libya. Although the exact number deployed is unknown, a high-ranking leader in the SNA told STJ that approximately 5,000 Syrian mercenaries and 800 medical workers and civilian police members are currently operating in Libya:

“Currently, there are about five thousand mercenaries from the SNA in Libya. Their tasks confined to guarding, securing oil installations, and monitoring lines of contact alongside Haftar forces. In addition, there are about 800 medical workers and civilian police members operating in Libya under contracts whose terms differ from those of the fighters.”

STJ’s source also noted Turkey’s ongoing role in the provision of weapons and military equipment to Libya, adding that the transfers take place by sea in accordance with agreements made between Turkey and the GNA. STJ has documented and published which kinds of weapons and when they were transferred in previous reports.

## Mercenaries Remain Active

Resisting demands from the UN and the wider international community to withdraw its mercenaries from Libya, Turkey has instead extended the contracts of its foreign fighters, from a period of three to six months. While STJ’s sources indicate that the frequency with which Syrian mercenaries are being replaced in Libya has decreased — only 25 to 50 mercenaries have recently been rotated — there appears to be no plan in place to remove the mercenaries already in Libya. A source claimed: “We received no directives to withdraw the fighters/mercenaries from Libya within a deadline, even though Turkey can withdraw them within one week.”

STJ has obtained several corroborating testimonies in June, including that of a mercenary in Libya who testified that he had already renewed his contract and that of a child in Libya who also confirmed that he was recruited by the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division in Syria and was sent to Libya in the first half of 2021. These testimonies demonstrate that the deployment of mercenaries to Libya has not stopped.

However, not all Syrians hired to work in Libya by armed factions are mercenaries. STJ has documented numerous cases of police members and medical workers trained and sent to work in Libya as nurses and police officers. Importantly, these civilian contracts differ from the mercenary contracts. Whereas mercenaries enter a contract with the Turkish government or security firms, civilian police members and medical workers work for the Libyan Ministry of Interior of the GNA, granting them the right to Libyan citizenship. On this subject, a source said:

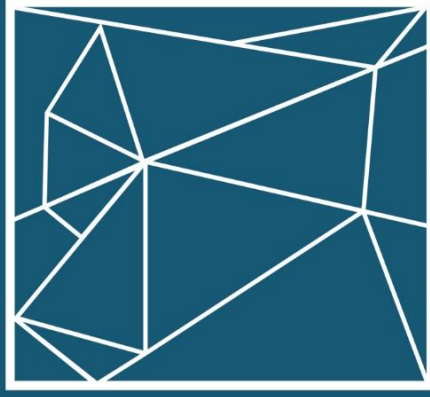
“Most likely, the civilian police members went to Libya to obtain citizenship for themselves and their families. Whereas fighters were sent to take part in hostilities and to carry out guarding tasks under contingent contracts with Turkey. The civil police members’ contracts, however, are managed by the Libyan Ministry of Interior.”

What remains clear is that there is no indication today that the Syrians sent to Libya, either by the GNA, Turkey, or Russia, will be withdrawing.

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  

---

Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

- 
- 🌐 [www.stj-sy.org](http://www.stj-sy.org)
  - 📘 [syriaSTJ](https://www.facebook.com/syriaSTJ)
  - 🐦 [@STJ\\_SYRIA\\_ENG](https://twitter.com/STJ_SYRIA_ENG)
  - 📷 [Syrians for Truth & Justice](https://www.instagram.com/Syrians_for_Truth_Justice)
  - ✉ [editor@stj-sy.org](mailto:editor@stj-sy.org)