

The Niger-Libya corridor

Smugglers' perspectives

Peter Tinti and Tom Westcott

Summary

Instability and high levels of violence in Libya preclude credible interventions to stem irregular migration flows from off the coast of Libya to Europe. As a result, policy-makers have increasingly been looking to the transit country of Niger in order to reduce the number of migrants crossing into southern Libya for onward travel to Europe via the Mediterranean. In Niger, international attention, premised on the assumption that European interests are congruent with those of local actors, has concentrated on the city of Agadez, a smuggling hub in the Sahara Desert. Yet vested interests related to migrant smuggling and the free flow of people in Niger are misaligned with those of Europe, and the city of Agadez is in fact part of a broader system of ethnically derived zones of protection and control embedded in the political economy of the Sahel. Interventions designed to reduce migration flows and enhance protection for the migrants must be predicated on a far more nuanced understanding of local dynamics and the non-state actors facilitating the trade, so as to avoid destabilising one of the few pockets of stability in an already volatile region. This paper draws from interviews with local communities and smugglers themselves along the Niger-Libya corridor.

WITH EUROPEAN POLICYMAKERS desperate to stem the flow of migrants from Africa, the Middle East and Asia into Europe, there is a real concern that placing an undue focus on interdiction and prevention abroad might lead to an increase in human insecurity, violence and instability in source and transit states in the short term while laying the foundations for new sets of migrant crises in the medium to long term. While there have been analyses, including those conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, that focus on migrant

smuggling networks and their operations, relatively little research has been devoted to understanding the individuals that comprise these networks and the impact migrant smuggling has had on their lives and communities. This study is one of a series of research papers that seeks to put individual smugglers at the centre of the analysis, so as to better understand the short- and long-term implications of anti-smuggling policies. To that end, this paper is part of a broader programme – running under the auspices of the ISS, the Global Initiative and funded by the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) – to better understand the contemporary landscape of irregular migration from Africa, and its short-, medium- and long-term implications.

Migrants from all over sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and Asia have arrived in Libya in the hundreds of thousands since 2012

This particular study focuses on the smugglers facilitating the unprecedented flow of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to Libya with a specific focus on the smuggling corridor that links northern Niger to southern Libya. This smuggling route, through which hundreds of thousands have passed since the onset of what has come to be called the ‘migrant crisis’ in Europe, is one of the key pathways linking migrants from West and Central Africa, and to a lesser extent, the Middle East, to North African shores for onward passage to Europe. In 2013, various estimates suggested that as many as 3 000 people per week were passing through Agadez and using smugglers to move toward Libya¹ – a figure that has remained consistent and even increased in the years after, with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimating that as many as 170 000 migrants, mostly from West Africa, passed through Agadez on their way north as of October in 2016.²

Long, semi-structured interviews with eight individual smugglers operating along this corridor, combined with extensive and ongoing research on the topic of migrant smuggling networks, forms the basis of this analysis. These interviews focus on the transporters who move people from Agadez into southern Libya, who form only one part of the broader migrant smuggling industry.

Anonymity was promised in order to gain access to those transporting and supporting the smuggling industry, and to encourage them to speak candidly about their backgrounds and their work.³ Four of the interviews were carried out in northern Niger, principally in the city of Agadez and its environs. Four others took place in southern Libya, in and around the towns of Murzuq and Qatrun. The quality and credibility of their information was in turn filtered through the authors’ extensive knowledge of the region, interviews with key informants such as government and law enforcement officials, previous interviews with smugglers and interlocutors, as well as open-source information generated by international organisations, non-governmental organisations, government reports, and local and international media.

170 000

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OCTOBER 2016

An annex at the end of the report contains biographical information of each of the smugglers interviewed.

Background to the crisis: Libyan collapse

Since the fall of Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has emerged as one of the key launching points for boat departures of irregular migrants trying to reach Italy, and by extension, the rest of Europe. In some cases, these migrants are asylum seekers who wish to obtain refugee status in Europe as they flee war, despotic regimes and political persecution. In other cases, those boarding boats on Libyan shores are economic migrants searching for better employment opportunities, often, but not always, in response to failed local economies, grinding poverty and a dearth of viable paths to upward mobility in their home countries. All too often, those attempting to reach Europe irregularly do not fit neatly into either category, as both their legal status as well as their motivations defy straightforward categorisation.

Migrants from all over sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and Asia have arrived in Libya in the hundreds of thousands since 2012, after the collapse of the Gaddafi regime and Libya's subsequent descent into factionalised civil war left the country in a state of near anarchy. Gaddafi had long served as Europe's de facto border guard and never hesitated to leverage this role in order to gain greater political and economic concessions from his counterparts across the Mediterranean.⁴

Gaddafi's warnings that a political vacuum in Tripoli would mean chaos in the Mediterranean proved prescient. Without any central authority to stem the tide of departures, migrants from all over the world sought passage to Europe through Libya, reinforcing pre-existing migration paths, blazing new trails and transforming the business of migrant smuggling into a billion-dollar industry.

The networks that move migrants into Europe now span dozens of countries. They employ different business models and operate with varying degrees of coordination and sophistication depending on the networks involved, the routes taken and the nature of the services provided. In the case of Libya, a fully developed smuggling infrastructure did not truly emerge in the wake of the disruption caused by state collapse until the arrival of Syrian refugees in Libya in late 2012 and into 2013. As

described in more detail in a previous ISS/Global Initiative publication, 'Survive and advance: the business of smuggling migrants and refugees into Europe',⁵ the fact that Syrians were, on average, several times wealthier than other prospective migrants and were more capable of pooling resources, meant that smuggling networks quickly coalesced around Syrian purchasing power and demand for smuggling services out of Libya.

Sub-saharan Africans have been migrating to Libya for decades in search of employment opportunities, but a mix of border control policies and the prevalence of good job prospects for African migrants in Libya's economy up until 2011 largely suppressed the number of departures from Libya to Italy. By 2013, however, at which time smuggling networks had matured around Syrian demand, detected arrivals of illegal border crossings along what Frontex calls the 'Central Mediterranean route' spiked, from only 15 900 in 2012 to 40 000 in 2013. These numbers more than tripled in 2014, with 170 760 detections that year, and remained nearly as high in 2015, with 153 946 detections.⁶ According to IOM statistics, in the first six months of 2016, approximately 63 000 arrivals were detected along the Mediterranean route, a rate of arrival comparable to the previous year.⁷

The networks that move migrants into Europe now span dozens of countries

It is important to note, however, that Syrians are no longer leaving from Libya in significant numbers. In fact, a spike in crossings along what Frontex calls the 'Eastern Mediterranean route' – often also referred to as the Aegean route – in 2015 and 2016, meant that Syrians seeking passage in Europe preferred to cross from Turkey into Greece, rather than travel all the way to Libya to cross the sea to Italy. The confluence of drivers behind the unprecedented flows along the Aegean route are beyond the scope of this paper but are outlined in detail in the ISS/Global Initiative publication *Survive and advance*⁸ and the accompanying paper of this series on human smuggling in Turkey.⁹

As the earlier paper also demonstrates, smugglers operating in Libya, having built the requisite smuggling

infrastructure on Syrian demand and purchasing power, transitioned from the core business of arranging departures for Syrians and swelling their profits with migrants of other nationalities as extra cargo to the high-volume activity of moving migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁰

Facilitating the movement and transport of people – as migrants, pilgrims and as slaves – has been a part of traditional Saharan livelihoods for centuries

Before any of these migrants are ready to cross the Aegean Sea, many of them must make a perilous journey from various parts of sub-Saharan Africa in order to reach Libya. And for many of them, even reaching Libya requires paying a smuggler in order to cross heavily guarded borders, navigate dangerous territory controlled by various militias and armed Islamist groups, and traverse harsh terrain such as the Sahara. In some cases, the smugglers facilitating these journeys are connected with the smugglers operating on the Libyan coast, forming highly organised networks operating out of key nodes along the routes. In others, networks are more a loose alliance of freelancers and criminal opportunists specialising in facilitating passage around specific political, cultural or geographic barriers in a sequence that eventually ends at the Libyan coast. Regardless of the route or the clients, however, smugglers – who range from financially powerful kingpins to low-level touts at bus stops – are almost always involved.

Saharan gateways

Libya shares over 4 300 km of land borders with six countries, and aside from the minority entering via neighbouring Egypt and Tunisia along the Mediterranean coast,¹¹ the vast majority of migrants, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa, enter through its southern borders, with the two main flows coming in from Niger and Sudan. For decades, the transport, trade and smuggling of subsidised licit goods from domestic markets to foreign ones, as well as contraband and illicit goods – such as cigarettes, narcotics and small arms – has formed the economic basis for entire communities in the Sahara and the area below it known as the Sahel. In fact, facilitating the movement and transport of people – as migrants, pilgrims and as slaves – has been a part of traditional Saharan livelihoods for centuries.

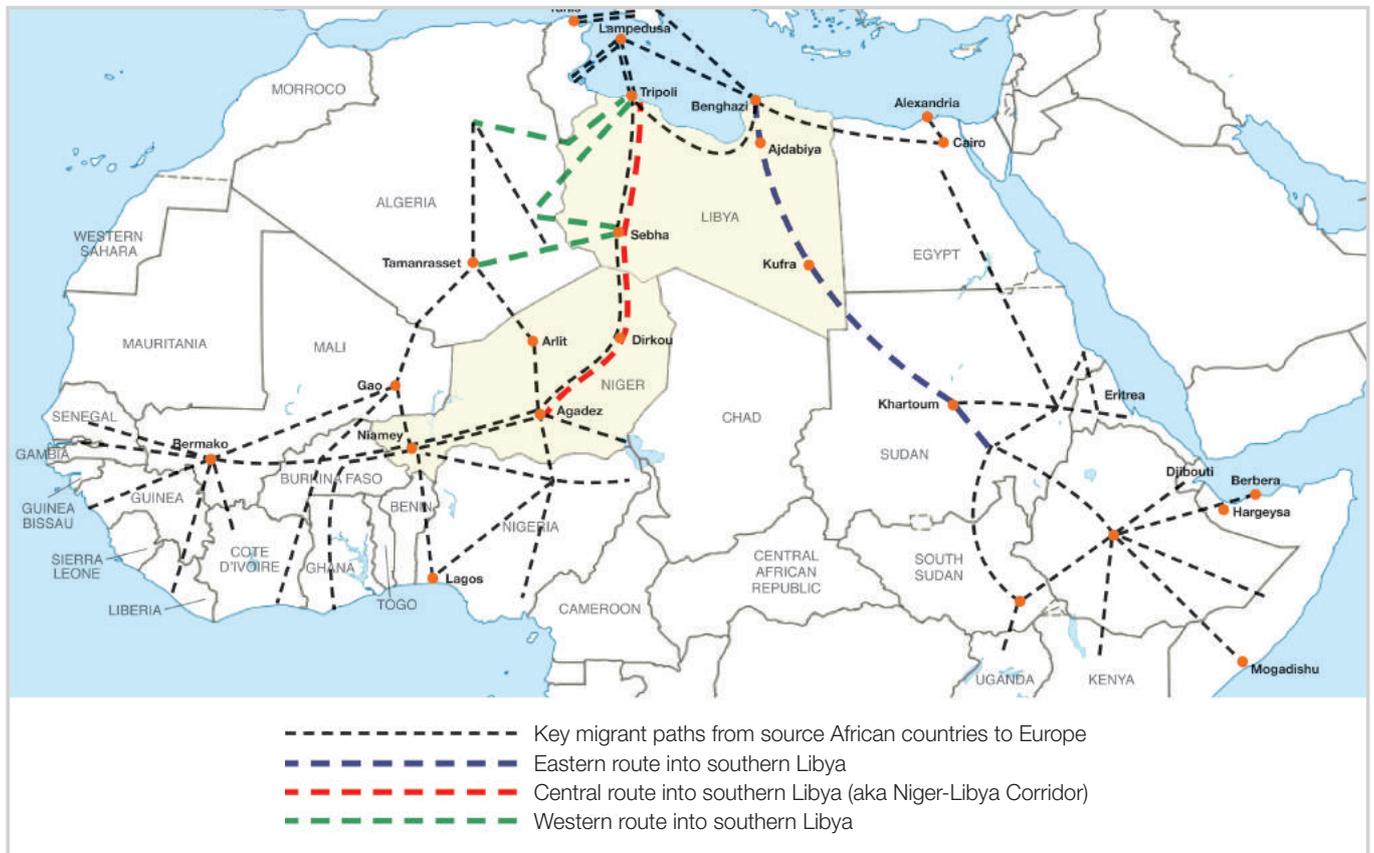
Yet it is only fairly recently that the smuggling of migrants became one of the most lucrative business enterprises in the Sahara and Sahel, and communities that have long engaged in smuggling were particularly well positioned to capitalise on what is now a constant flow of people from throughout the African continent seeking passage to Europe via the North African coast. In the case of Libya, the country from which there are by far the most boat departures to Europe, there are three main routes into the country's south. Dubbed the eastern route, the central route, and the western route, these

LIBYA SHARES OVER

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Figure 1: Map of key routes to Europe



Source: Authors' own.

three corridors into southern Libya comprise the key gateways linking sub-Saharan Africa to Europe.

The first corridor, known as the western route, sees migrants entering southern Libya from Algeria, with the town of Ghat in southwest Libya serving as the key hub within Libyan territory. This route, controlled primarily by Arab tribes and ethnic Tuareg smugglers, predates the current migration crisis, having long served as a route for migrants seeking employment opportunities in Libya. Yet the route declined in popularity after the only road from Ghat to the Libyan coast was cut off due to conflict in the town of Ubari, where ethnic Tuareg and Toubou militias have been fighting an ostensible proxy war on behalf of Libya's rival national governments. Though the road linking Ghat to the coast did reopen in 2016, the western route remains considerably less popular than the central route, which links to southern Libya via Niger.

Several factors account for why the western route remains less popular than its central alternative. Both routes service primarily the same communities of sub-Saharan Africans seeking passage to the Libyan coast. Yet for many sub-Saharan Africans – such as those from Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea and Mali – taking the eastern route means passing through northern Mali, an area beset by instability and sporadic violence. Furthermore, with the exception of Malian citizens, other nationalities from source countries in



TAKING THE EASTERN ROUTE MEANS PASSING THROUGH NORTHERN MALI, AN AREA BESET BY INSTABILITY AND SPORADIC VIOLENCE

sub-Saharan Africa need a visa in order to pass through Algeria, which means they need to pass through Algerian territory undetected and rely on their smugglers to bypass authorities or pay the requisite bribes. While this is by no means an insurmountable challenge, as smuggling networks have been passing through southern Algeria for decades, it does make the trip more complicated and more expensive.

By contrast, the central route, which – in addition to servicing the aforementioned nationalities – is populated by large numbers of Nigerians, Ghanaians and Cameroonians, bypasses the dangers of northern Mali and the administrative challenges of Algeria altogether.

The vast majority of the hundreds of thousands using the central route linking Niger to southern Libya hold passports from a 15-country bloc called the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which permits freedom of movement for citizens of all member states. As a result, migrants from the ECOWAS bloc, which includes all of the major source countries of West Africa, are free to enter any of the countries along the central route without a visa for 90 days, meaning that the only leg in the journey within the African continent for which a smuggler is needed is upon exiting the ECOWAS zone from Niger to Libya.¹² Thus, reaching the key smuggling hub of Agadez, in central Niger, is only a matter of taking a string of buses, bush taxis and other forms of public transport. This ease of travel – combined with several other factors such as relative security, systematisation of the route and instability along alternative routes – are the main reasons the central corridor linking Niger to Libya has emerged as the most popular among West Africans.

Migrants from the ECOWAS bloc are free to enter countries along the central route without a visa for 90 days

The third key corridor into southern Libya is the eastern route, linking Sudan to the Libyan town of Kufra in the southeast. This route remains largely inaccessible to researchers due to security concerns, but security personnel in southern Libya, as well as interlocutors in Khartoum, Sudan, say it has increased in popularity

since the onset of the crisis, with large numbers of Eritreans, Somalis, and Ethiopians passing through. The networks operating across the Horn of Africa and through Sudan were the most professional and profitable prior to the crisis¹³ and are still widely considered to be the most sophisticated, with mounting evidence that some even have command and control centres linking actors between key nodes in Addis Ababa, Khartoum and Tripoli.¹⁴

From the perspective of European policymakers, breaking down the networks on the eastern route linking East Africa and the Horn of Africa to southeast Libya can be seen as a particular challenge because they are the most organised and feature the highest levels of criminality. At the same time, networks that have more defined structures might also be susceptible to policy interventions and may take longer to adapt and reorient themselves when faced with disruptions of their operations.

Reaching the key smuggling hub in central Niger is a matter of taking buses, bush taxis and other public transport

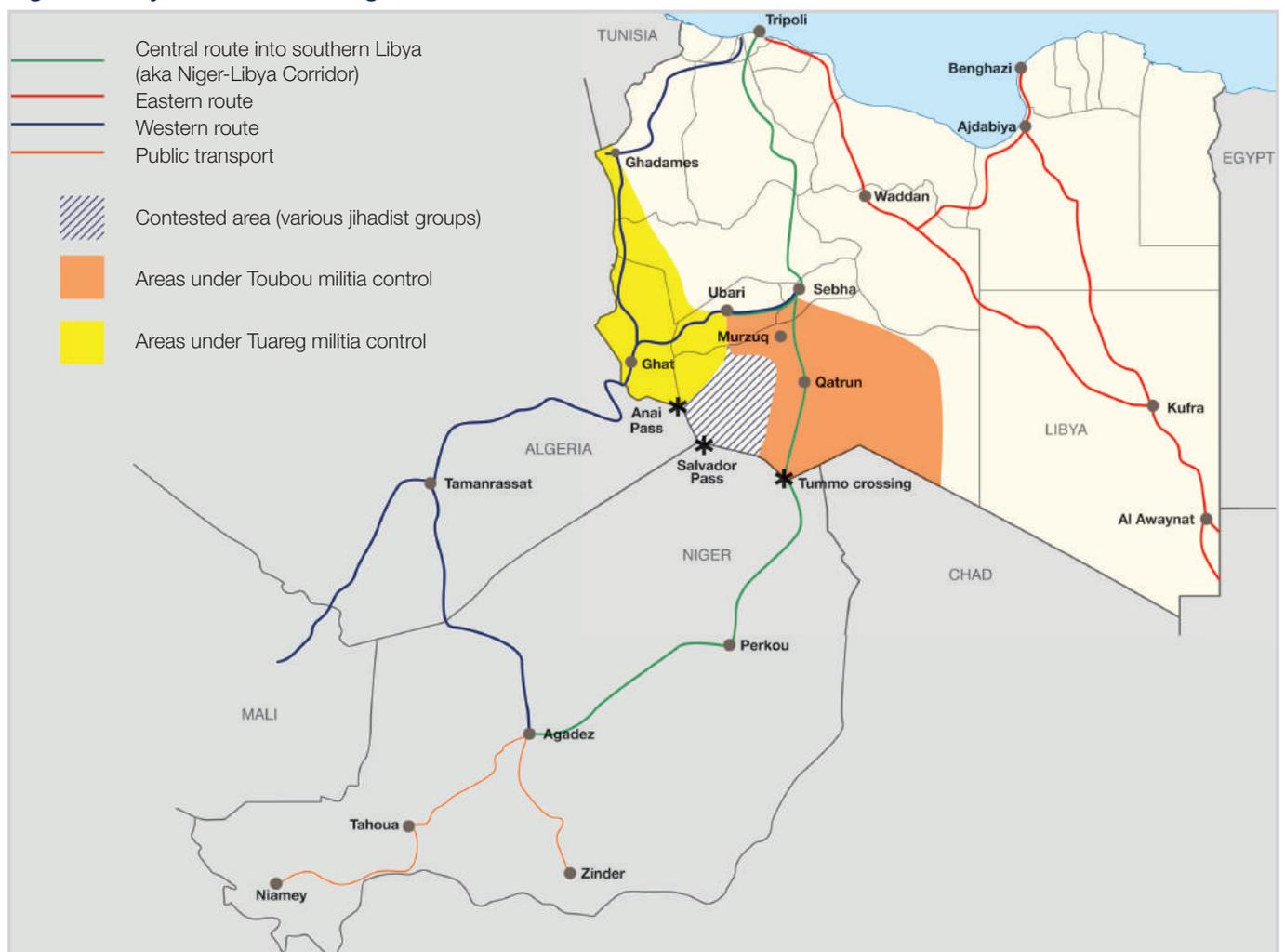
However, the Niger-Libya corridor, which is the focus of the rest of this report, is arguably the least criminal of the three main corridors leading into southern Libya. This lack of organised criminality poses one of the more intractable policy dilemmas for European policymakers seeking to stem the flow of irregular migrants from West Africa into Libya for onward travel to Europe. As this paper will demonstrate, and the testimonies of smugglers themselves will reinforce, the only credible means to shut down the Niger-Libya corridor would require dissuading migrants from making the journey and thus reducing demand for smugglers' services. In addition, it would require convincing the Nigerien government to devote resources and precious political capital toward cracking down on smuggling networks and interdicting migrant convoys at the border with Libya. Even if European partners could build the Nigerien government's capacity to take such measures, a range of political, economic, legal and security realities on the ground preclude it from stopping migration through Niger into Libya.

The Niger-Libya corridor

Of the various communities that have long derived their livelihoods from the movement and trade of goods, two particular non-Arab, nomadic and semi-nomadic Saharan tribes, have enjoyed longstanding control of many of the routes linking southern Libya to its southern neighbours. These are the Tuareg – who predominantly live in northern Niger, northern Mali, southern Algeria and southern Libya – and the Toubou, the majority of whom live in northern Niger, Chad and southern Libya.¹⁵

In the uncertain aftermath of the 2011 revolution in Libya, the Tuareg and Toubou negotiated an arrangement over border control – and thus smuggling networks – along Libya's 1 400 km southern border. The Tuareg, through their existing militias and parts of the national army, would control the southwest from the town of Sebha to Ubari and Ghat. As such, the Tuareg maintained control of their traditional smuggling routes linking parts of southern Algeria and parts of northern Niger to southern Libya. The Toubou, on the other hand, would manage the area from Sebha to the east, stretching all the way

Figure 2: Libyan border crossings



Source: Authors' own.

to Kufra, where they would have access to the routes linking northern Niger, Chad, Sudan and parts of Egypt to southern Libya. The area between the Tummo border post, run by the Toubou, and the Anay pass, controlled by the Tuareg, would serve as a buffer zone.¹⁶

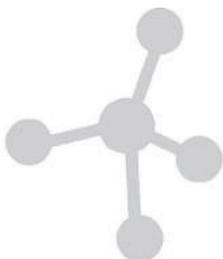
This agreement was short-lived, as Tuareg Zintani forces to the northwest and Toubou militants to the east challenged control of the area. The Tuareg were in part weakened by the fact that several factions within their community were pre-occupied and divided by a Tuareg-led separatist campaign in northern Mali. With the Tuareg's funds, weapons and workforce being devoted to the attempted establishment of a breakaway republic in northern Mali, competing forces in southern Libya, mainly the Toubou, were able to challenge them for territory. Similarly, the fall-out from the collapse of northern Mali and international reconstruction efforts has left the Tuareg splintered amid their own competing political, economic and ideological differences, underpinned by a desire by different factions to maintain control over particular territory and defend certain trafficking interests.¹⁷

For their part, the Toubou were marginalised under Gadaffi, and their interests have been largely overlooked since the revolution. Although officially supporting Libya's eastern government, a continued lack of material support means Toubou areas of Libya have functioned almost autonomously through necessity for almost three years. In the predominantly Toubou towns of Murzuq and Qatrun, which have always been economically disadvantaged compared to their coastal counterparts, smuggling operations have enabled communities to sustain themselves in the face of neglect, abandonment or the absence of Libya's formal governing bodies.

Toubou networks have consolidated their control over smuggling networks that connect northern Niger to southern Libya

It is difficult and potentially dangerous for Toubou to travel to other parts of Libya, particularly western Libya, so young Toubou can no longer access educational and employment opportunities outside of their sphere of influence. Smuggling is one of the very few lucrative job opportunities, and one with relatively low barriers to entry.

Toubou networks have therefore consolidated their control over smuggling networks that connect northern Niger to southern Libya and expanded beyond their traditional zones of influence. With the international community more concerned with issues of terrorism and energy security, two areas in which the Toubou have tried to posture themselves as credible partners, Toubou involvement in migrant smuggling was of negligible importance to Western security officials. Yet with the backdoor to Europe wide open amid the political vacuum in Libya, migrant smuggling has become a security issue, to the extent that the political economy of moving people across the Sahara



NETWORKS OF RECRUITERS AND BROKERS HAVE UNSPOOLED THROUGHOUT WEST AND EAST AFRICA

has thoroughly enmeshed itself within the political and economic structures of northern Niger and southern Libya. Networks of recruiters and brokers, first active along the Libyan coast, have unspooled backwards throughout West and East Africa, invigorating existing smuggling networks and creating new ones altogether.

Practicalities of the desert journey

The interviews with smugglers in Niger and Libya confirm that the basic schematics of migrant smuggling along the Niger-Libya corridor have largely remained the same throughout the crisis, but the extent to which the industry has grown and become formalised and entrenched in state structures indicates that, from a policy perspective, the overall situation is quite different than it was at the outset of the crisis.

As previous reports have demonstrated, when the migrant smuggling industry in the desert hub of Agadez was first developing according to the new realities of post-Gadaffi Libya, large groups of migrants from all over West and Central Africa would travel to Agadez by public transport. Once in Agadez, these migrants would seek the services of smugglers, congregating outside banks and money transfer houses before leaving Agadez and its surroundings every week.

As early as 2013, smugglers transporting migrants from Agadez to Sebha did so with complete impunity, in part because there is nothing illegal about driving people within Niger, and Agadez is an important launching point for migrants and Nigeriens alike travelling to other parts of Niger in search of employment opportunities in the mining sector. Between March and August 2013, as many as 5 000 people were leaving Agadez for Libya every month, paying anywhere from US\$200 to \$300 depending on the final destination in southern Libya. People smugglers in southern Libya said that, in the cooler peak months, around 8 000 people per month were crossing the border from Niger into Libya.¹⁸ According to the IOM, more than half of the estimated 80 000 migrants who had reached Lampedusa in Italy in 2014 passed through Agadez.¹⁹

Occasionally, international pressure has forced the Nigerien authorities to take some action – albeit symbolic – against migrant smugglers. In the wake of an October 2013 incident in which the bodies of 92 migrants, mostly children, were found in the desert, Nigerien authorities

vowed to crack down on migrant smuggling networks. But smugglers in Agadez say that the only people who can expect to be punished are those who are not paying the requisite bribes or have drawn the ire of local officials for reasons that might have nothing to do with smuggling.²⁰ More recently, the Nigerien government has arrested smugglers, but there is little available information as to whether they have been prosecuted under new anti-smuggling legislation. Furthermore, as this paper will highlight later, local security, political and economic imperatives mean that the Nigerien government has little incentive to crack down on smuggling networks operating out of Agadez.

Migrant smuggling networks along the Niger-Libya corridor are based upon a longstanding regional system of tribes

On the Niger side of the border, migrants are driven out of areas around Agadez in convoys consisting of anywhere from 50 to 80 vehicles, which, at the request of the government, are accompanied by a military escort for which the smugglers must pay, though some choose not to do so and risk being attacked by militants in the desert. The military protection ends at the town of Dirkou, from which point the smugglers' convoy is on their own until they reach the Libya border. Migrant smuggling networks along the Niger-Libya corridor are based upon a longstanding regional system of tribes, the importance of which is not always well understood to outsiders, but is absolutely crucial to understanding the social fabric of both countries, particularly in northern Niger and central and southern Libya. When it comes to smuggling networks, there are few more potent organising principals than tribal affiliations, even in the face of strong economic, political and ideological currents.

Whereas Agadez is traditionally a town inhabited by ethnic Tuareg, Hausa and Arabs, Toubou networks – thanks to their newfound monopoly over the smuggling networks along this key corridor, and the unprecedented profits they are generating – have allowed them to push further south and west from their normal areas of influence. Their increased presence and purchasing power in Agadez is a source of contention among certain communities, particularly the Tuareg, who traditionally

enjoyed a privileged position within smuggling networks operating out of Agadez. The Tuareg still dominate networks that move goods and people from Agadez toward Algeria, but the value of those flows are significantly less compared to the convoys of pick-up trucks heading for Libya every week.

Once vehicles carrying migrants from Agadez cross into the Libyan side of the border, either directly through or around the official border crossing in Tummo, they connect with the 600 km paved road that currently serves literally as a smuggling ‘highway’ to the southern hub of Sebha. The area from the Niger-Libya border until about 20 km south of Sebha is traditionally Toubou territory, and from the border until that point, security checkpoints and border posts are largely under Toubou control. The actual town of Sebha, however, is segregated according to a patchwork of rival Arab tribes, and the Toubou can only move around certain parts of Sebha, with the smuggling trade in Sebha and in the areas north predominantly controlled by the Gaddafi, Warfalla and Magarha Arab tribes. Thus, Sebha represents a fairly clear line of demarcation between smuggling networks operating along the Niger-Libya corridor with the Toubou controlling the areas to the south and Libyan Arab tribes the areas inside the city and heading north.

In many cases, Toubou smugglers in Niger will ‘exchange’ their migrants before Sebha with smugglers operating in southern Libya

Migrant smuggling along this route tends to be carried out by two types of transporters. The first, and most prolific, are those that specialise in the exclusive transport of people in Toyota pick-up trucks. At present, according to Toubou and non-Toubou smugglers, as well as security personnel along the route and immigration control officials in southern Libya, these smugglers are almost exclusively Toubou, originally from southern Libya, rather than Niger and Chad, and they are involved during the entire trip from Agadez to Sebha.²¹ Due to the fluid security situation in southern Libya, the de facto border to where Toubou smugglers can continue north may not always go as far as Sebha. In many cases, Toubou smugglers in Niger will ‘exchange’ their migrants before Sebha with smugglers operating in southern Libya, or even before crossing into Libya.

The other actors transporting people along this corridor are engaged in dual-smuggling operations, that is, they move a combination of people and goods, and are primarily lorry drivers who supplement their profits by offering migrants rides on top of the goods or in the cab of the car. For the most part, these drivers are Arabs from Libya – who might also have homes and families in Niger – from the Gaddafi, Warfalla and Magarha tribes. The Magarha in particular are involved in continuing the route from Sebha to the coast of Libya.

‘Any tribe from southern Libya could technically do this job, but now the Warfalla and Gaddafi tribes are the ones with the power, so we do it,’ says



THE OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSING IN TUMMO SERVES AS A SMUGGLING HIGHWAY TO THE SOUTHERN HUB OF SEBHA

*Mohamed, a 68-year-old Gaddafi who makes fortnightly trips between Agadez and Sebha in the lorry he owns. Those smuggling goods as well as people say that the goods vary but are predominantly household wares, food and other licit products. 'Today, I have many different products, including mattresses, bikes, chairs and a lot of food, including chickens,' Mohamed explains.²²

Mohamed, who has been driving lorries along this route for 28 years, works independently and finds people to add to his load of merchandise in the days leading up to the trip, either in Agadez or Sebha. Very few Toubou along the Niger-Libya corridor partake in dual smuggling. Those Toubou that do are typically operating along different routes in the southeast, linking Chad and Sudan to southeastern Libya. That said, several Toubou smugglers say they do occasionally fill their pick-up trucks with contraband for the return journey from Sebha to Agadez, though doing so carries risks, especially if they are transporting arms, because Nigerien authorities – along with Western security partners, including French special forces – are in the region as part of anti-terrorism initiatives.²³

With Toubou now in control of the networks linking Agadez to Sebha, some of the dual smugglers, especially those who have just entered the industry, employ Toubou as 'fixers' who can accompany them during the journey and facilitate passage through certain areas. Once vehicles cross into southern Libya, the importance of having permission to pass through Toubou dominated areas is even more important, as being part of or paying into Toubou controlled protection networks is the only way to ensure safe passage.²⁴

Although both types of transportation follow the same route, they vary considerably both in terms of how much the migrant must pay and how long the journey takes. The goods lorries are a slower option, usually taking eight to 10 days from Agadez to Sebha, and therefore less expensive, in part because they are not the core business of the driver but a means of augmenting profit margins.

The appeal of travelling on lorries will differ depending on the profile of the individual migrant. On the one hand, they are safer, as they follow roads that are, at least in theory, monitored by state security authorities. On the other, they take longer and can spend considerable

time idle at the border crossing, as they are unloaded, inspected and reloaded. Even when loaded with goods, most lorries can still carry between eight and 25 people on every journey, sitting on top of the goods, with someone sometimes allowed to sit in the cab. It is an option favoured by families, as well as migrant workers who, dissatisfied with the work situation in Libya, want to return home to sub-Saharan Africa and using the cheapest possible option.

The vast majority of migrants transiting along the Niger-Libya corridor do so via Toyota

Migrants traveling from Libya to sub-Saharan Africa often bring goods back home, and thus prefer to take lorries. Mohamed says he charges between US\$140 and US\$180 for journeys back to Niger, with an extra US\$0.75 charged for every kilogram of goods. Trade, trafficking and smuggling of goods and people between Niger and Libya is by no means a one-way flow, and it is important to note that interconnectedness between people and trade in north Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, often overlooked by outside observers, is an important and essential feature of the economy and livelihoods in the region.

The Toubou networks that drive Toyotas, however, operate under a different business model, predicated solely on the movement of as many people as possible through the desert as quickly as possible. They often drive in the same convoys as the lorries, sometimes comprising 70 to 80 vehicles, under the protection of military escorts between Agadez and Dirkou. From Dirkou, however, the majority of the Toyotas then speed off into the desert, meandering their way to the Libyan border and eventually linking up with the paved road that leads to Sebha. The perilous journey typically takes between three and four days in total.

Though it is more expensive than the lorry option, the vast majority of migrants transiting along the Niger-Libya corridor do so via Toyota, so much so that many lorry drivers have said that it has cut into their ancillary business. 'I take far fewer people these days because of

the Toyotas,' Mohamed admits. 'Most people prefer to go by Toyota because it's much quicker.'

*Adam, a Toubou Toyota driver from Murzuq who operates between Agadez and Dirkou on the Niger side of the border, and Sebha, Qatrun and Murzuq on the Libyan side, cites speed as the main reason why migrants prefer Toyotas. 'No-one uses the lorries anymore because it takes five days even to reach the border, and then they have to wait at the border for a day while the lorry is unloaded, checked and reloaded,' he says.²⁵

Another Toubou smuggler originally from Niger but now based in Libya, *Barka says that he takes between 28 and 31 passengers every time, crammed into the back of his truck.²⁶ Other smugglers interviewed in Agadez say that sometimes they cram as many as 35 migrants in the back of a single pick-up.²⁷ Aside from water and fuel, people are the only cargo on board, with each passenger given a wooden pole to allow them to hang on to the lorry as they dangle their legs off the side.

With the Toubou generally not able to safely move around most of Sebha or move north of the city, migrant smugglers drop their clients off near the town

*Barka says the frequency of his trips depends on his financial situation. Sometimes he does them weekly, other times once a month. Occasionally, it might be six months between trips. He charges his clients the equivalent of US\$360 to travel in the back of his truck, most of them paying in cash upfront, but some, perhaps three or four per trip, travel on a credit system, with payment only collected on arrival in either Sebha, Murzuq or Qutran.²⁸

Adam describes an almost identical scenario. 'My car is a Toyota Hilux, double-cab, and I usually make one journey [from Agadez to Sebha] every week. I charge LYD500 [US\$360] for the seats in the back and a bit more for sitting inside the cab. There are two ways to pay – cash or credit,' he says. Unlike Barka, however, Adam occasionally has truckloads that are almost all paying on credit. The breakdown depends entirely on the pool of clients he has found for that particular trip. 'Credit is where someone guarantees payment on arrival. This could be a relative, friends or a prospective employer,' Adam explains. 'I meet the customer in Agadez, and he makes a call to someone in Libya who I speak to, to confirm everything. When we arrive in Libya, we call him again to arrange payment.'²⁹

Ibrahim, a Toubou smuggler originally from Libya but now based in Agadez, highlights the extent to which he makes money on both legs of the trip. He got into the business after the Libyan revolution in 2011, when he started helping a friend as a driver on several journeys. Once he realised how much money his friend was making, he decided to get into the business himself. He bought a Toyota Hilux in Libya and started transporting migrants. 'The only

US\$360

COST OF AN AVERAGE
ONE-WAY TRIP FOR A
MIGRANT TRAVELLING FROM
AGADEZ IN NIGER TO SEBHA
IN LIBYA ON THE BACK OF A
TOYOTA HILUX DOUBLE-CAB

other type of smuggling I do is that of fuel. Given that I usually come back from Libya – where fuel is cheap – without any passengers, I can load eight barrels and sell them on the mining site of Djado, or sometimes in Agadez,’ he explains.³⁰

Networks or freelancers?

Although some of the Toubou smugglers interviewed during the ongoing Global Initiative research express satisfaction with the fact that migrant smuggling has empowered the Toubou in general and injected cash into Toubou business, political and military networks, none claim to be part of any broader network or affiliated to any larger organisation or political movement. Each claims to work independently, proudly defining themselves self-employed entrepreneurs.

Because the smugglers facilitating the flow of migrants from Niger into Libya are not part of any particular organisation, most Toubou get involved because they know or meet someone else who works as a smuggler, as Adam did. Initially they may help with logistics on a route or act as a co-pilot. When they have learnt the route and the ‘ways’ of smuggling, they become a driver. Eventually, when they have enough money, they buy a vehicle and run their own operations.

With the Toubou generally not able to safely move around most of Sebha and completely unable to move north of the city following the 2011 conflict, migrant smugglers from this tribe drop their clients off near the town, a few kilometres south of the outskirts.

‘I just drop them there. Normally they have a phone number of a relative or friend or someone else who will come and collect them. If they know no-one, I leave them with some Arab guy, but it is not my business,’ explains Adam. ‘After that point, I don’t care. I cover Agadez to Sebha, that’s it. My job is only to transport them safely from A to B.’³¹

Mohamed and Ahmed were reluctant to give any information about how the smuggling trade works in Sebha, but migrants routinely report being captured, held and forced into slave labour, sexual servitude, debt bondage or held for ransom and told to contact their families back home to purchase their freedom.

Though the vast majority of migrant smuggling that takes place along the Niger-Libya corridor does not

meet the legal definition of human trafficking, the line between smuggling and trafficking often blurs once in Libya.³² The actual levels of organised criminality are considerably higher along the eastern corridor linking Sudan to southern Libya, and in southern Libya proper, where militias and criminal organisations specialise in the exploitation and enslavement of migrants. Due to ongoing insecurity in southern Libya, obtaining credible information that can be verified is incredibly difficult.

In Agadez, there are two primary methods for smugglers to find clients. The first is to personally look for them in the areas where migrants congregate, either near banks or money transfer establishments, or at bus stations where they arrive from all over West Africa. More recently, however, a system has emerged in which migrants themselves scour gathering places and bring their prospective clients to safe-houses throughout the city from where they can be pooled until they reach sufficient numbers for a departure. Some of these recruiters are paid for each referral and may bring migrants to different smugglers depending on the circumstances; other might work specifically for one network of smugglers. Still others are given free passage in exchange for their work. These safe-houses and assembly points are located throughout the city and in areas referred to as ghettos, as well as in nearby towns, such as Tourayat, that serve as launching points for migrant convoys but also consolidation points for migrants before departure.

The actual levels of organised criminality are considerably higher along the eastern corridor linking Sudan to southern Libya

Some – like *Amadou, a Senegalese man living in Agadez – might not be considered smugglers but are very much part of the system. Amadou does not consider himself part of a network or organisation, but he regularly works with the same people toward the common goal of moving migrants from Agadez to southern Libya. First coming to Agadez as a migrant hoping to reach Europe via Libya, he has been to Libya twice and claims he even got as far as being able to see Malta from a boat before the Libyan coastguard caught his ship and brought him back to shore. He also tried to go through Algeria but cut his trip

short after two of his friends died in the desert during the trip. Now, he makes a living finding other Senegalese migrants in Agadez and linking them up with Toubou smugglers. 'The job allows me to make a lot of money,' Amadou says, explaining that he sends money home each week, which he hopes goes toward building a house and starting a business.

As a result, while the networks that operate along the northern Niger and southern Libya corridor are not highly organised or centrally planned, they do exist within and are governed by a system born from structural and political realities and reinforced by repetition. The fact that migrant smuggling networks along the Niger-Libya corridor lack the organised criminality of some of the other key gateways to Europe, however, does not mean that they will be easier to combat. In fact, the task of stemming the flow of migrants in this particular context is fraught with challenges, and many of the realistic policy options available to Europe risk putting migrants in greater danger and destabilising the region.

Ameliorating the migrant crisis will require delicate policy responses that go beyond the Euro-centric obsession with borders and routes

'Everybody knows each other in this business, especially us, who have been part of it for a long time! We complete one another in a way,' explains *Lamine, a smuggler who works the Niger-Libya corridor but goes as far south as the city of Zinder, near the Nigerien border with Nigeria. 'As a matter of fact, we are working with foreigners from several countries, based in Zinder or Agadez, who manage 'ghettoes', where they gather compatriots before handing them over to us for the great crossing,' Lamine continues. 'We give them their share of the cake – although we are fully aware that they already get money from the migrants they bring us. It is an assembly-line type of work.'³³

With the business of migrant smuggling and the revenue it generates now thoroughly enmeshed in regional political, economic and military structures, ameliorating the migrant crisis will require delicate policy responses that go beyond the Euro-centric obsession with borders and routes and taken into account the political economy.



REVENUES GENERATED BY THE MIGRANT SMUGGLING INDUSTRY HAVE BECOME EMBEDDED WITHIN REGIONAL POLITICAL AND SECURITY STRUCTURES

Political economy

Smuggling of licit and illicit goods is an important part of the political economies of several communities in the Sahara and Sahel. In northern Niger and southern Libya, it is only in the last five years that the smuggling of people has become the most profitable sub-category within the smuggling economy. As a result, the revenues generated by the migrant smuggling industry have become embedded within regional political and security structures.

On the Libyan side of the border, various actors in Sebha have grown rich from the migrant smuggling trade. Various towns and cities southern Libya

and northern Niger have long flourished as smuggling hubs, with networks first predicated on the smuggling of subsidised licit goods, as well as illicit goods. Generous Libyan government subsidies long kept this trade a lucrative one, with smugglers seeking to sell subsidised goods for considerable profit in neighbouring economies. Despite admittedly controversial efforts to reduce the level of subsidies by one of Libya's post-2011 governments (there are currently two main rival governments operating in the country, among other actors who control territory), ostensibly to stop smuggling, as well as the plunging value of the Libyan dinar and rising prices, smuggling operations have not been particularly affected. Smuggling networks continue to flourish in part because the migrant smuggling economy has filled in gaps in the smuggling market.

However, the broader smuggling economy not only sustains migrant smugglers but also local institutions and state (or quasi-state) functions. The Tummo border crossing, for example, is staffed by a small group of security guards, most of who are untrained former revolutionary fighters and almost all of who are Toubou. Prior to the revolution, government employees who were not Toubou and who came from other parts of Libya staffed local police, immigration and passport control authorities. Yet these offices have been empty since 2011. 'They all ran away at the start of the revolution, and so we came here to protect the border,' one commander at the Tummo crossing point says.³⁴

The smuggling economy not only sustains migrant smugglers but also local institutions and state functions

Although the people-smuggling Toyotas avoid the Libyan checkpoints, they still pass reasonably close by, rejoining the road after each checkpoint. At one large checkpoint, a soldier says that they stopped apprehending the increasingly heavily armed Toyotas in 2013, citing a lack of equipment, money and support. If the situation continues, he says, even security personnel might be forced to join the smuggling operations. Some border security officials insist that Toyotas do not pass through the Tummo border crossing. However, local journalists

witnessed one Toyota loaded with people stopping at the border and handing a wad of cash to border guards.³⁵ The interviews confirm that in the event that they do not bypass the border post at Tummo, they can bribe any authorities they encounter.³⁶ One border security commander admits to receiving 'presents' from goods smugglers, which he says are usually barrels of fuel. 'Drivers are happy to reach this point from Niger because it means they have not been beaten or had their goods stolen,' he says.³⁷

Border guards in southern Libya say the majority of vehicles carrying migrants that do pass through their posts are lorries, which they describe as 'commerce' and 'trade', not smuggling. Mohamed says he has not experienced any problems with border security officials at the Niger-Libya border.³⁸

The fact that border officials are so easy to bribe, or that they are systematically collecting payment, needs to be considered within the current context of southern Libya. For authorities (de facto or otherwise) trying to carry out their activities in southern Libya, collecting payment is less a moral failing than it is a budgetary necessity – border security guards have not been paid since 2013. With no other source of income, it is not surprising that bribes or presents are accepted. In fact, more often than not, it is these bribes and presents are what allow them to carry out their professional activities in the first place.

The same dynamics exist on the Nigerien side of the border, where the Nigerien army escorts migrant smuggling convoys leaving Agadez and its environs every week for the first leg of the journey. 'There is no payment for the convoy in Niger; that is free,' says Barka. 'But at each checkpoint in Niger you have to pay. Drivers pay, and passengers from anywhere other than Niger pay. Passengers from Niger do not pay,' he explains, adding that he never passed through the Libya border crossing point at Tummo or any of Libya's formal checkpoints.³⁹ Several smugglers cite a price range of between US\$150 and US\$250 to be paid per car, 'without a receipt' at each checkpoint in Niger. When Lamine first started accompanying his friend on migrant smuggling runs, he was afraid, because he thought they would be caught and punished by authorities. But by the third trip, he says, he realised that all you had to do was pay the security personnel at each checkpoint.⁴⁰ Some drivers bypass

checkpoints between Dirkou and Tummo, preferring to make the journey without paying the unofficial tolls. The IOM has estimated this may be as much as 70% for certain checkpoints. However, making this choice comes with additional risks, both for the drivers and their passengers: by deviating off the major routes, there is a high likelihood of vehicle breakdowns or accidents in isolated areas without water, plus they are vulnerable to attack from bandits and competing militia groups.

According to *Mossa, an ethnic Tuareg smuggler who has been specialising in smuggling migrants from northern Niger into southern Algeria since the 1990s, he has personal connections with officials who can easily provide Nigerien travel documents to other nationals in order to make it easier to travel within Niger and avoid having to pay bribes. Most migrants want to go to Libya, but Mossa says there is still demand for smuggler services into Algeria, where many sub-Saharan Africans believe they can find work, or seek onward passage to Spain.⁴¹

The migrant smuggling industry is a tremendous boon for an economy that is suffering from closures and stoppages of local mines and regional instability

Adam says rather than paying bribes on the way back, he can usually give the security forces some of the goods he is bringing in from Libya. ‘On the way back to Niger, it’s easier,’ he says. ‘We have fewer people and some goods. Sometimes the security guys just take some of the goods instead of money.’⁴²

Niger’s state anti-corruption agency found that state security forces would not be able to function were it not for these bribes paid by smugglers and migrants. ‘The security forces recognise that they take money, but they have no choice. That is money they use to do their jobs,’ the deputy head of the agency told Reuters. The Reuters report concludes that security forces would not be able to purchase basic necessities – such as fuel, spare parts for vehicles or even food – without these bribes.⁴³

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that in the case of northern Niger, particularly Agadez, the migrant smuggling industry is a tremendous boon for an economy that is suffering from closures and stoppages of local mines, regional instability, and a decrease in remittances that used to come from family members working in Libya. In fact, some might go so far as to say that migrant smuggling revenues are a force for stability in northern Niger, which has thus far avoided much of the violence and conflict of neighbouring Mali. ‘Many are eating off these migrants,’ Ahmed Koussa, an assistant to the mayor of Agadez, told the *New York Times*, referring to the drivers, fixers and landlords who are all benefiting from the influx of migrants passing through Agadez. Koussa also acknowledged that those benefitting from migrant smuggling include government officials, not just entrepreneurs. ‘Police are eating, too,’ he is quoted as saying.⁴⁴



DRIVERS, FIXERS AND LANDLORDS ARE ALL BENEFITING FROM THE INFLUX OF MIGRANTS PASSING THROUGH AGADEZ

Similarly, Abdourahamane Moussa, the deputy-secretary general for the regional government in Agadez, told the *Wall Street Journal* that migrant money is bringing life to the city. 'Migrants are buying things, consuming our goods, animating our economy,' he is quoted as saying. 'People here are benefitting [...] How can we stop it?'⁴⁵ The migrant smuggling boom in Agadez has benefitted the entire economy, from local banks to restaurant owners to satellite phone and car sales executives to local merchants selling clothes, backpacks, foodstuffs and water as migrants prepare for their trip. The proceeds are also being reinvested into the local economy, sometimes for the express purposes of laundering, but other times as an investment into the industry itself, as a new crop of houses that can serve as consolidation has spurred a veritable construction boom.

'You have to know that there are many people making profit thanks to this traffic: smugglers, ghetto owners, authorities, businessmen and traders,' says Lamine, who struggled to get by as a smuggler of subsidised Libyan goods into Niger before he started smuggling migrants. 'If the government manages to stop this traffic, it will kill us, literally. We would starve to death.'⁴⁶

Policy implications

One of the key factors limiting the options available to European policymakers seeking to reduce the flow of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa into Libya for onward travel to Europe is the discrepancy in priorities. There is a fundamental disconnect between the way in which European governments and their counterparts in Niger view and even diagnose the problem. On the European side, there has been a failure to realise that the economics of migrant smuggling is one of the few things holding northern Niger together, that migration and the free movement of people is intrinsic to the region, and that haphazard efforts to cut off the migrant smuggling industry may actually work against the long-term goal of stability and development in northern Niger.

Within the realm of security, Europe would need to consider how anti-smuggling efforts might upset the very delicate security equilibrium that the Nigerien government has worked very hard to maintain despite external shocks emanating from war and conflict in neighbouring Libya, Mali and northern Nigeria. Niger's coup-prone armed

forces, for example, would stand to lose a key revenue stream if they were no longer able to collect money from migrant convoys, and the Nigerien government in Niamey would have no choice but to reallocate and rearrange its already tight budget in order to adequately fund its restive security forces.

Similarly, it is worth considering what the smugglers, many of whom are former combatants, might do if they were no longer able to earn money smuggling migrants. For Ibrahim, one of the Toubou smugglers interviewed in northern Niger, the answer is one that should give European policymakers serious pause. 'When there are no more migrants, we will go back to war, or we will kidnap white people [for ransom],' he explains. Economic booms followed by busts are rarely a stabilising phenomenon, which is to say that if Europe does succeed in stemming the flow of migrants along the Niger-Libya corridor, it is imperative that it offer economic alternatives to communities reliant on smuggling and its broader economy. 'The most dangerous terrorist we know of is poverty,' Ibrahim tells us. 'And I work like a slave to escape from this poverty by smuggling migrants.'

'If the government manages to stop this traffic, it will kill us. Literally. We would starve to death'

One also has to consider the possibility that the panoply rebel groups and Islamist militants operating in the region might actively seek to recruit a new pool of unemployed young people with smuggling skills. These considerations in part explain why migrant smuggling has ostensibly been decriminalised in Niger, even as Niger passes new laws against migrant smuggling at the encouragement of international actors. Asked if he thought his activities were illegal, for example, an incredulous Ibrahim, says, 'Come on! You really believe authorities would let us do this if it were illegal?'⁴⁷

The European Union (EU) also needs to recognise that, given the nature of these challenges, it realistically has very few incentives to offer to the government of Niger to stem the flow of migrants.⁴⁸ One incentive is, of course, through payments and guarantees of aid in exchange for robust action against migrant smuggling. The EU plans to

spend US\$680 million on development assistance in Niger between 2016 and 2020,⁴⁹ but not only was this the scale of development assistance planned well before the levels of migration escalated, there is no guarantee that such assistance will actually address the needs of communities that stand to lose from anti-smuggling measures. It is also not evident whether aid programmes geared toward livelihoods are credible alternatives to the money that can be earned via migrant smuggling.

For its part, the Nigerien government has indicated to Europe that it would need €1 billion to counter irregular migration.⁵⁰ Yet smugglers are sceptical of the motives behind this figure, and some have gone so far as to say that Europe is setting itself up for blackmail by trying to outsource its border security to Niger. 'I am telling you, the government is an accomplice in this traffic. Better said, it is at its very heart. Even if the government tries to make people believe it is trying to stop this business, it is only to get money from white people,' says Ibrahim. 'They will turn a blind eye afterwards and will declare that smugglers managed to bypass checkpoints. It is not true! We do reach checkpoints, we do meet with officers there, and we do give them money, so that they let us go through. Period!'⁵¹

Most of those who smuggle goods and people across the border do not view their work as smuggling but 'trade and transit' within the context of the Sahara

Yet even if questions of political will and incentives are addressed, there is still the issue of capacity. The EU and the United States have invested far greater sums over the last decade in efforts to bolster the country in the fight against terrorism – with barely measurable results. Furthermore, it is hard to see how even €1 billion could have a measurable impact when the majority of smuggling in the region is in fact merely legal transportation within the ECOWAS zone. In fact, when asked about the legality of their activities, many smugglers cite the fact that ECOWAS allows people from member states to move freely within Niger. 'There is a lot of campaigning to stop the business, but believe me, no one can,' asserts Lamine. 'Legally speaking, freedom of movement is established by the ECOWAS texts, and if it is illegal, then why do authorities turn a blind eye on it?' Lamine also describes Western depictions of migrant smuggling and the West's attitudes toward African migration as 'white people dirt'.⁵²

It is also important to consider that local attitudes, of both government officials and smugglers themselves, are completely at odds with Europe regarding the extent to which smuggling is even a problem. Most of those who smuggle goods and people across the border do not view their work as smuggling but 'trade and transit' within the context of the Sahara. In interviews with the lorry drivers, such as Mohamed, an Arab from southern Libya, it is clear that they believe they are engaged in legitimate economic activities. Even when they use the word 'smuggling' to describe their enterprise, there is no negative association.⁵³

US\$680 million

THE AMOUNT THE EU PLANS
TO SPEND ON DEVELOPMENT
ASSISTANCE IN NIGER
BETWEEN 2016 AND 2020

Local security authorities view the activities of lorry drivers moving people across borders in the same light. ‘We don’t stop these lorries because they are commercial vehicles, going to sell things in adjacent countries,’ says one checkpoint guard. Another waves through an overladen truck, topped with some 30 people, saying, ‘These lorries carry goods and food. They are businessmen.’⁵⁴

For Mohamed and Ahmed, levels of satisfaction with both the job and the lifestyle it offers are incredibly high. ‘I love my job. It is 100% perfect,’ Mohamed says. ‘I have been doing this for 28 years, and I would never do anything else. I love this work, and I love working in the desert,’ he continues. Ahmed echoes the same sentiments. ‘This is my job, and this is my country. I have two wives in Sebha and one wife in Niger. This is my life.’⁵⁵

Moreover, it is worth asking to what extent anti-smuggling measures that focus on incentivising the Nigerien government to take action will increase human insecurity. As Amadou, the Senegalese recruiter who spends his days interacting with migrants looking for smugglers pointed out, ‘When Niger tries to stop this business, then migrants will have to go through a much more dangerous journey and smugglers will be more expensive too.’⁵⁶ It remains an open question whether the international community has the tools and requisite resolve to credibly engage the underlying drivers of irregular migration, but any anti-smuggling policy that is implemented without addressing demand for smuggler services would likely have the adverse effect of putting migrants at greater risk while also feeding even more revenue into the migrant smuggling industry.

On the Libyan side of the ledger, the policy choices are fewer, but in many ways, less convoluted. Stability and a functioning government in Libya and a return to something like the status quo before 2011, when Libya was a destination country for migrants, would reduce the numbers of economic migrants departing for Europe from Libyan shores. Security personnel in southern Libya say that programmes of support and development could also considerably reduce illegal immigration to Europe via Libya.

‘The smuggling operations are complicated, and there are a lot of different people involved, but extensive

development in this area is a key to resolving the problem,’ says one senior immigration official in southern Libya. ‘For people here, our demands are comparatively small. We want development, infrastructure and education. Development would change people’s minds and transform the area. If there is development here, the problem of smuggling will disappear.’⁵⁷ Not everyone is as optimistic, however, and the blueprint outlined above still does not address state capacity or the underlying demand for smuggling services. ‘They will never be able to control that border. It will always be the same,’ posits Barka.⁵⁸

‘We don’t stop these lorries because they are commercial vehicles, going to sell things in adjacent countries’

Thus, there is a natural and dangerous tension between the need to do something about migrant smuggling and the imperative to do no harm. Simply allowing these networks to continue and become more entrenched in the political economies of the region is likely to present its own sets of challenges down the road, but the wrong type of intervention – especially one that is inadequately prepared to deal with the consequences and secondary fallout – is equally imprudent.

If history is any guide, the EU and the broader international community have short attention spans and little appetite for sustained engagement with this part of the world, where more narrowly focused security imperatives and counterterrorism initiatives are likely to overshadow and complicate anti-smuggling efforts.

Quick fixes and underfunded initiatives are likely to create new sets of problems rather than ameliorating current ones. The challenge, therefore, is to come up with a comprehensive approach to the problem that acknowledges that irregular migration is likely to continue on a large scale in the near term, and to put in place medium- to long-term programmes that are sustainably funded and that target the creation of viable alternatives to the movement of people on a mass scale.

In terms of sequencing, the only realistic, albeit arduous, way forward is to devote diplomatic energy and resources to creating a coherent government in Libya with functioning institutions that can credibly police and

control its own territory, while also working to address the drivers of economic migration in source countries.

In the medium term, one option may be to provide incentives to more stable North African countries – Algeria, Morocco and Egypt – to provide more favourable policies toward economic migrants, which might divert some of the people currently heading toward Europe. The hydrocarbon economy of Algeria has long been a preferred destination for economic migrants from the sub-Saharan, though fear of terrorism has prompted increasingly punitive responses from the Algerian government. Investments in inter-regional trade within the ECOWAS zone could be another avenue, as the bloc is a priority trading partner for the EU, but currently comprised of outward facing economies that reinforce the tendency for movement. In reality, there are many policy options beyond that of the securitisation of borders and the conditionalisation of development assistance, should the EU choose to employ them.

The aspiration to migrate is a powerful force in the modern world and one that is unlikely to dissipate in the long term, even if there are ebbs and flows in the near term. In the meantime, especially given the current political climate in Europe, a combination of strategic patience as well as sobriety would serve policymakers well, if only to make sure that incoherent policies do not get replaced with counterproductive ones.

Recommendations

- Engagement and dialogue with the Toubou is going to be a critical element of any solution to reducing migration flows. Their political and economic interests will need to be considered in all of the countries where they hold influence, including Libya, Niger and Chad.
- Incentives offered to the state of Niger to address irregular migration should focus more on providing economic alternatives for the northern communities whose livelihoods are increasingly profiting from the smuggling economy and less on the capacity of state institutions to counter migration.

Annex: Profiles of smugglers interviewed

1. Barka*, 37, Toubou from Southern Libya. Interviewed in southern Libya, November 2015. Works independently as a Toyota driver, smuggling migrants between Agadez and Dirkou, Niger and the Libyan towns of Sebha, Qatrun and Murzuq. Views the activity as illegal, would rather have a different occupation so long as he could make a comparable amount of money. Takes some customers on credit, while some pay in advance.
2. Adam*, 27, Toubou from southern Libya. Interviewed in southern Libya, November 2015. Smuggles migrants from Agadez and Dirkou, Niger, to Sebha, Qatrun and Murzuq, southern Libya. Has been working in the industry for six years; three learning the ropes helping a relative, three driving his own car. Accepts payment in advance as well as on credit. Views the activity as illegal and would rather be a shop owner in a city if he could make the same amount of money.
3. Mohamed*, 68, Arab, Gaddafi from southern Libya. Interviewed in southern Libya, November 2015. Drives people and goods in his lorry between Agadez, Niger and Sebha, Libya. Finds his own customers in each town. Has been a smuggler for 28 years, does not consider it illegal and does not want to do anything else. Enjoys his occupation.
4. Ahmed*, 54, Warfalla Arab from southern Libya. Interviewed in southern Libya, November 2015. Drives migrants in the two Toyotas he owns, which he and a colleague drive in tandem. Has been a smuggler for 14 years. Primarily works between Agadez, Niger and Sebha, Libya. Loves his job, does not view it as illegal and does not want to stop.
5. Lamine*, 45, Tuareg from Zinder, Niger. Interviewed in northern Niger, April 2016. Smuggler who is still able to operate along the Niger-Libya corridor in collaboration with Toubou. Works Zinder-Agadez routes, and Agadez to Sebha. Started in 2009 once he realised how much money there was to be made. Does not think his job is illegal, and does not want to stop.
6. Ibrahim*, 36, Toubou from southern Libya. Interviewed in northern Niger, April 2016. Works as far south as Nigerien border with Nigeria but primarily Agadez, Niger into southern Libya. Got into the trade through Toubou friends. Does not want to stop, and enjoys the money and lifestyle. Thinks government would be foolish to try to stop migrant flows.
7. Amadou*, 47, from Senegal. Works as recruiter in Agadez, gathers sub-Saharan Africans as they arrive in Agadez and 'sells' them to Toubou smugglers. Initially came to Agadez as a migrant, and twice attempted to reach Europe from Libya but failed both times. Gets paid by smugglers per referral, and sends money back home to family in Senegal. Does not view job as illegal.
8. Mossa*, 45, Tuareg from southern Algeria. Interviewed in northern Niger, May 2016. Started smuggling migrants into Algeria from Zinder and Agadez, Niger in the 1990s. Would drop them in Tamanrasset, southern Algeria. Had a scheme with local authorities in which they would sell Nigerien travel documents to migrants from Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Senegal to make it easier to travel. Thinks every security agent is getting rich off the migrant smuggling trade.

Notes

- 1 T Reitano, L Adal and M Shaw, *Smuggled futures: the dangerous path of migrants from Africa to Europe*, Geneva: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2014.
- 2 L Destrijcker, *Welcome to Agadez, the smuggling capital of Africa*, *Politico*, 17 October 2016.
- 3 Where their assigned name first appears in the text, it is preceded by an asterisk.
- 4 BBC, *Gaddafi wants EU cash to stop African migrants*, 31 August 2010, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11139345.
- 5 T Reitano and P Tinti, *Survive and advance: the business of smuggling migrants and refugees into Europe*, ISS Paper 289, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, November 2015.
- 6 Frontex, *Central Mediterranean route*, <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/central-mediterranean-route/>
- 7 International Organization for Migration, *Mediterranean migrant arrivals in 2016*, 28 June 2016, www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-2016-222291-deaths-2888.
- 8 T Reitano and P Tinti, *Survive and advance: the business of smuggling migrants and refugees into Europe*, ISS Paper 289, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, November 2015.
- 9 T Reitano and M Micallef, *Breathing space: the impact of the EU-Turkey deal on irregular migration*, ISS Paper 297, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, November 2016.
- 10 T Reitano and P Tinti, *Survive and advance: the business of smuggling migrants and refugees into Europe*, ISS Paper 289, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, November 2015.
- 11 North African migration to Europe is the subject of a separate paper in this series: M Herbert, *On the edge: trends and routes of North African*

- clandestine migrants, ISS Paper 298, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, November 2016.
- 12 For more, see T Reitano and P Tinti, *Survive and advance: the business of smuggling migrants and refugees into Europe*, ISS Paper 289, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, November 2015, and T Reitano, L Adal and M Shaw, *Smuggled futures: the dangerous path of a migrant from Africa to Europe*, Geneva: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2014.
 - 13 Regional mixed migration secretariat, *Going west: contemporary mixed migration trends from the Horn of Africa to Libya and Europe*, Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2014.
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About the authors

Peter Tinti is a Senior Research Fellow at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime and independent journalist, focusing on conflict, human rights and organised crime. As part of his work for the Global Initiative, Tinti has written and contributed to several reports on organised crime in the Sahel, narcotics trafficking in Mali, and migrant smuggling networks in Africa, Asia, and Europe. In addition to his work for the Global Initiative, Tinti's writing and photography has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Vice*, among other outlets. He is also the co-author, along with Tuesday Reitano, of *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour* (Hurst, 2016), a book on the migrant smuggling industry behind Europe's migration crisis.

Tom Westcott is a British freelance journalist based in Libya, writing mainly about the Middle East, with a particular focus on Libya. Westcott contributes regularly to *Middle East Eye* and the humanitarian publication *IRIN* and has written for *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail*.

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ISS Pretoria

Block C, Brooklyn Court
361 Veale Street
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ISS Addis Ababa

5th Floor, Get House
Building, Africa Avenue
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: +251 11 515 6320
Fax: +251 11 515 6449

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