

## Tripoli solar industry

Political violence has led to frequent blackouts, forcing the country's residents to innovate. To meet the ever-increasing demands of energy consumption, a growing number of Libyans have adopted solar power.

At first glance, little about Libya would make it an enticing destination for the renewable energy industry. Political violence has wracked the country for the last eight years, and two factions, the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA), have been vying for the Libyan capital of Tripoli since April. Power politics have just disguised Libya's potential, however: the country's unique location and size have led some experts to estimate that it could produce five times more energy from solar power than it does from its sizable oil reserves.

"Solar power can absolutely be implemented in Libya, given the climate conditions, and it can also give more independence to local realities," Dr Federica Saini Fasanotti, a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, told The New Arab.

In some ways, the Libyan Civil War is only increasing solar power's appeal. The conflict has damaged many of Libya's electrical grids, exacerbating frequent blackouts and forcing Libyan electricians to repair what infrastructure remains as rockets fall around them.

Clashes between rival militias, meanwhile, have led to power outages in Tripoli. Solar energy could alleviate some of these problems by providing Libyans an additional source of electric power.

"All aspects of social, economic, and political services are in ruins," said Dr Mustafa Attir, a professor of sociology at the University of Tripoli and director of the Center for Sustainable Development Research.

"Electrical facilities are only one area that has been subject to a great deal of destruction. Some power plants and power distribution units were damaged by direct rocket hits, military incursions, vandalism, or theft of equipment. Also, high-voltage power lines and power grids have been tampered with from time to time."

Libya has been struggling to maintain its power grids for several years. In 2015, Benghazi and Tripoli lost power for over ten hours a day while mobile service stopped in much of the country's east.

The General Electricity Company of Libya, a state-owned enterprise straining to meet the demands of maintaining an electric power system in a war zone, has even sought assistance from the United States, which helped it form the Libya Electricity Sector Reform Task Force.

“For the time being, the two major sides - pro-GNA and LNA - haven’t targeted the power grid deliberately, but, nevertheless, it is subject to collateral damage,” said Wolfgang Pusztai, director of Perim Associates and a former Austrian intelligence officer.

“Furthermore, the maintenance and repair teams are not able to work in the combat zones. There are a few incidents where militias attacked transformer stations and stopped generators from leaving the city because - the militias claim - the other cities are by far better off with regard to the power cuts.”

The GNA, the only Libyan government recognised by the United Nations, hopes to mitigate its challenges with electricity generation by getting 7 percent of its power from renewable energy by 2020 and 10 percent by 2025.

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