Chapter Fifteen

Sirte

1. Introduction

Sirte is a major Libyan city lying on the western edge of the Gulf of Sidra. With approximately 100,000 residents, it is one of the largest cities in the country and an important center of the Libyan oil industry.¹

The city of Sirte lies directly on the Mediterranean Coast. The nearest cities are Misrata, roughly 200 kilometers (125 miles) to the northwest, and Ra’s Lanuf, roughly 150 kilometers (95 miles) to the southeast.² Sirte sits on the eastern edge of the Tripolitania province, near the dividing line between eastern and western Libya. The city of Sirte grew along with the oil industry after 1960, becoming the first major city to the west of the oil fields in the Sirte Basin.³

As the birthplace of Qadhafi, Sirte benefitted greatly during his time in power.⁴ Qadhafi built up the city considerably and used it as a luxurious spot to host foreign dignitaries and other important guests. It was also the place where the Sirte Declaration was signed in 1999 that laid the foundation for the establishment of the African Union.⁵

Throughout Qadhafi’s rule, some tribes were favored and offered more opportunities for advancement and employment than others. The three largest among these privileged tribes were the Qadhadhfa – the tribe to which Qadhafi belonged – the Magarha and the Warfalla. The Qadhadhfa tribe was particularly dominant in Sirte and while small in comparison to other tribes, its members took on a prominent political role under

---

³ BBC, Profile: Sirte, supra note 1.
⁵ BBC, Profile: Sirte, supra note 1.
Map 12: Map of Sirte (Map data © 2013 Google).