

Mediterranean Review



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This document provides an overview of developments in the Mediterranean Basin and other regions of interest from 23 October–05 November, with hyperlinks to source material highlighted and underlined in the text. For more information on the topics below or other issues pertaining to the region, please contact the members of the Med Basin Team, or visit our website at www.cimicweb.org.



In Focus: The Tunnel Economy in Gaza After the Attack in Sinai Katerina Oskarsson

Gaza's economy has been seriously impacted following recent closures of smuggling tunnels precipitated by a deadly military attack. On 05 August, sixteen border guards at an [Egyptian army checkpoint](#) in the Sinai Peninsula were killed. Following the attack, Egypt promptly closed and systematically began destroying underground [smuggling tunnels](#) connecting the Gaza Strip and Egypt. Egyptian authorities suspected that militants had entered Egypt from Gaza via the elaborate system of tunnels which have provided daily necessities and basic goods to Gaza's population since an Israeli-imposed blockade in 2007.

Background Information

After Hamas seized control of the Gaza strip in 2007, Israel imposed a blockade on the area, describing it as a "[hostile territory](#)". Both Israel and the United States consider Hamas a terrorist organisation, as does Canada, the European Union and Japan. Former Egyptian President Mubarak complied with Israel's tight restrictions on the movement of goods and people, which critics called "economic warfare", paralysing Gaza's economy, and significantly lowering the standard of living for the approximately 1.5 million Palestinian residents. In response, the Palestinians began to construct a network of more than [1,000 tunnels](#) beneath the border to circumvent the blockade and secure basic goods. Israel [eased the blockade](#) in July 2010, allowing the delivery of basic non-military goods through the Kerem Shalom crossing on the Israeli side, while in May 2011 Egypt also eased the blockade by [opening the Rafah](#) border crossing for travellers but not goods. Around [300 tunnels](#) are likely to be currently functioning, with more than [USD 500 million](#) in goods estimated to pass

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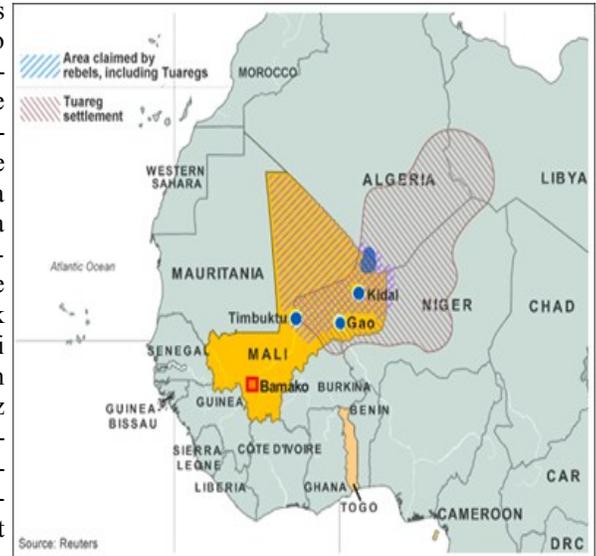


North Africa

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Algeria

Burkinabé Foreign Minister Djibril Bassole visited Algeria on 22 October as an envoy of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to discuss ways to encourage Tuareg rebels to [hold talks](#) with the Malian government, reports *Magharebia*. Furthermore, France and the United States are increasing diplomatic pressure on Algeria to [gain its support](#) for military intervention in Mali, reports *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*. Having avoided the Arab Spring revolutions that took place in neighbouring countries, Algeria maintains the most powerful military in the region. Moreover, Algeria has a long history of dealing with the Islamists in Mali, most of who are of Algerian descent, making Algeria a vital element for international action against the radical Islamists in northern Mali. Pierre Boilley, the head of the French think-tank Centre of African Studies, said that “[a]n intervention in northern Mali is possible without the military backing of Algeria but not without its green light”. US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton met with President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in Algiers on 29 October to [urge Algeria](#) to support a possible African-led military intervention in Mali, reports *Tunis Afrique Presse*. Meanwhile, *Reuters* informs that Algeria has given its [“tacit approval”](#) for an international military intervention in northern Mali. This comes despite fears that the conflict could spill over into southern Algeria and possibly initiate a refugee crisis in the region, especially among displaced Tuaregs who could migrate north to join tribes in Algeria.

Source: [Reuters](#)

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Mauritania that [swarms of locusts](#) are forming in Chad and could gather in Mali and Niger before moving to the northern countries, reports *Bloomberg*. Algeria and Morocco are among the region’s largest wheat producers and without proper preparation the locusts may cause substantial damage to their crops. A “very small” swarm is reportedly capable of eating as much food as 35,000 people would eat in a day. FAO established agreements with Algeria, Morocco and Senegal to donate pesticides to Mali, Chad and Niger as a preventative measure. FAO received USD 4.1 million funding out of a requested USD 10 million for locust monitoring purposes.

Libya

Hundreds of people fled the city of Bani Walid, home to remaining pro-Gaddafi loyalists, [during shelling](#) by the government-backed militias, reports *Newsweek*. The United Nations expressed concern about the situation, but was reportedly unable to provide aid as Libyan officials denied entry to the city. The city’s electricity and water have been cut off since the beginning of October. The battle for the city, which has lasted almost twelve months, has caused families who have been forced to flee the city to feel antipathy toward the government and the militias. In addition to the dire conditions caused by the siege, there were also reports indicating the use of [chemical weapons](#) against Bani Walid; militia fighters were reportedly wearing gas masks as they entered the city, and a local hospital reported that “healthy individuals with no history of heart or lung disease” were diagnosed with gas intoxication, informs *Russia Today (RT)*. However, the situation in Bani Walid remains unclear. On 24 October, the Libyan government announced that it had [taken control](#) of the city, amid fears that the victory could cause reprisals and more violence, reports *Al Jazeera*. However, days after the government’s victory announcement, armed militiamen were still moving in and around Bani Walid. Furthermore, on 29 October, Libya’s Minister of Defence Osama al Jueili stated that the “[Libya’s army] chief of staff has [no control](#) over the town and therefore armed men are able to prevent families from coming back,” and added that the militias were operating a checkpoint at the entrance to Bani Walid, reports *News 24*. According to al Jueili, only a small number of people remain in the city and those that do remain are forced to live in [“tragic conditions”](#).

Libya’s General National Congress (GNC) approved the [proposed cabinet](#) put forth by the new Prime Minister Ali Zidan, informs *BBC*. On 30 October, the day before the approval, a GNC session had been interrupted by protesters who were unhappy with the proposed cabinet. During the 31 October voting session, about 100 peaceful protesters stood outside the parliament building. According to reports, the session was not interrupted by these protesters. However, later that same day, after the cabinet had been approved, dozens of armed militiamen backed by artillery occupied the congress building, reportedly [demanding the removal](#) of several ministers who were linked to the former regime. The group remained in the building for two days before ending their occupation on 02 November.

Militias loyal to the Libyan government [clashed](#) against another militia group that had “gone rogue” on 04 November in a Tripoli neighbourhood, informs *The Washington Post*. The Supreme Security Committee (SSC), a union of militias loyal to the Libyan government, fought along with the police against the rogue militia group, exchanging machine-gun fire and rocket-propelled grenades. Mohamed Abu Shkiwa, an official of the SSC, said “[t]he problem is that the revolutionaries still think they’re revolutionaries, not employees who march to orders,” referring to the actions of the rogue group. Furthermore, a day after the clashes, a group of protesters [demonstrated](#) in front of the Zawiya oil refinery in Tripoli, causing it to shut down operations for two consecutive days, informs *Reuters*. According to Essam al-Muntasir of the Zawiya Oil Refining Company, demonstrators are the veterans of the 2011 civil war, protesting because “they haven’t received adequate compensation and feel the government hasn’t given them their full rights”. According to the al-Muntasir, the company’s employees cannot enter the facility and tankers cannot leave the company compound which is causing a petrol shortage in the city.

Morocco

The Moroccan Ministry of Interior announced that police had arrested nine suspected al Qaeda militants on 01 November, leading to the discovery of plans to establish a [training camp](#) in the Rif Mountains, informs *BBC*. According to the ministry, the cell wanted to establish the training camp to “carry out terrorist attacks against public authorities”, “to make explosives”, and to take over “commercial premises in Sale to finance their criminal plans”. Following an investigation, five of the nine suspects remained in custody, while the other four were taken for further investigations by police.

Morocco is reportedly [using torture](#) against its own people and the people of Western Sahara, reports *AFP*. The UN Special Rapporteur on the use of torture, Juan Mendez, stated during a briefing to the UN Security Council that “[t]here is a lot of evidence of excessive use of force” and added that “[w]henver there is a sense that national security is involved, there is a tendency to use torture in interrogation. Difficult to say how pervasive or how systematic it is, but it happens frequently enough that the government of Morocco should not ignore the practice”. Mr. Mendez presented his findings gathered during a trip to Morocco and Western Sahara in September, as the Security Council debates the necessity of a permanent mandate for the UN mission in Western Sahara to investigate human rights abuses in the country.

A boat carrying about seventy illegal African immigrants from Morocco to Spain [capsized](#) on 25 October, killing at least fourteen people, reports *RTT News*. Authorities from both Spain and Morocco launched rescue operations after the incident. Seventeen people were pulled from the water alive, some of whom reportedly needed urgent medical assistance.

Tunisia

Salafists in Tunisia reportedly [cut off four fingers](#) of a man selling alcohol in the governorate of Manouba, a suburb of the capital Tunis, on 27 October, reports *Gulf News*. Riot police clashed with the Salafists after they attacked other alcohol vendors during the Islamic holiday *Eid al Adha*. The commander of the National Guard in Manouba was injured during the clashes and was later hospitalised in Tunis. National Guard members in four governorates subsequently wore red armbands for three days to induce the government to take action against the Salafists. On 30 October, [Salafists continued attacks](#) in Manouba after one of them was arrested for assaulting Khaled Tarrouche, the head of the suburb’s public security brigade, reports *Al Jazeera*. One person died and three security officers were injured as a result of the attacks. Large numbers of police and soldiers were deployed in Tunis on 31 October in order to prevent retaliation by the Salafists. Moreover, Tunisian President Munsif Marzouqi extended the country’s [state of emergency](#) until February 2013, reports *AFP*. The state of emergency has been in effect since January 2011, and since last July extensions were given only for thirty day periods, indicating improving security conditions in the country. The announcement of the three-month extension made on 31 October revived fears of escalating instability and insecurity.

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Northeast Africa

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Egypt

The Ministry of Interior announced on 31 October that it had [detained twelve Islamist militants](#) after a raid in Cairo, informs *Reuters*. Those arrested during the raid, which included a Tunisian and a Libyan, are suspected of having links to al Qaeda and planning attacks within Egypt and abroad. Preliminary investigations indicate the twelve belong to terrorist cells within Cairo but are also operating in Sinai and beyond. Police seized a number of small arms and light weapons during the raid, including explosives and rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

Egypt has been granted a [EUR 1.25 billion loan](#) (approximately USD 1.6 billion) for 2013, and will be eligible to receive a one billion euro loan annually for an additional three years (approximately USD 1.28 billion) by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), reports *Egypt Independent*. [A delegation from the International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF) was in Cairo on 30 October for further negotiations on a vital USD 4.8 billion loan that the Egyptian government hopes will bolster the ailing economy, reports *Bloomberg Business Week*. The economy continues to struggle since the 2011 revolution, and it is expected that most of the loan will be directed towards addressing the country's large deficit. The IMF deal is expected to be finalised by the end of the year. In other economic news, the government plans to auction 28 million square metres of [land for development](#) of tourism related ventures, reports *Reuters*. The land auction, which will include sites on the Red Sea, will start this month and has already attracted the interest of investors from Europe and other Gulf nations. Tourism, which accounts for ten per cent of the country's economy, has seriously declined over the past two years.

In the continuing controversy over the [draft constitution](#), President Mohammed Morsi's political party, the Muslim Brotherhood, announced on 31 October that it is committed to enshrining Islamic Sharia law as the basis of the new constitution, reports *The Washington Post*. While the Brotherhood has indicated that the Sharia penal code will not be immediately enforced until society as a whole understands and accepts it, details of how that decision will be made remain unclear. The ultraconservative Salafis continue to demand stronger language within the constitution to guarantee the implementation of Sharia law in its entirety and have threatened to hold demonstrations if their demands go unmet when the constitution is put to a referendum later this year. The 100-member Constituent Assembly largely comprises representatives from the Brotherhood and the Salafis, causing Liberals to remain concerned that fundamental human rights could be severely restricted and that a rein of religious scholars similar to Iran could ensue.

President Morsi recognised the widespread [problem of sexual harassment](#) in Egypt on 30 October, ordering an investigation by the Ministry of Interior following 735 police complaints over the four-day *Eid al-Adha* holiday, which ended on 29 October, according to *The Washington Post*. The harassment is more frequent during the holiday which is usually celebrated in crowded public places. Since the revolution, women have blamed the government for not reacting to an increase in sexual assaults and activists have repeatedly called on President Morsi to criminalise such harassment.

Coptic Christians selected a [new pope](#) on 04 November in Cairo, informs *Reuters*. Copts have chosen Bishop Tawadros to lead the largest Christian community in the Middle East. Once formally installed as pope in an official ceremony on 18 November, Bishop Tawadros will become the 118th leader of the church following the death of Pope Shenouda III who passed away in March after leading the church for four decades. Coptic Christians comprise approximately ten per cent of the country's population of 83 million.

South Sudan

A 3,000-member militia led by former gubernatorial candidate David Yau Yau is threatening to [reignite violence](#) in Jonglei state where at least 1,600 people died in ethnic clashes in 2011 and at least 100 government troops have been killed since August 2012, reports *Bloomberg*. South Sudan has accused Sudan of supporting the rebels and of airdropping weapons to the militia within sight of a UN peacekeeping mission post in Pibor County on 22 September. Sudan has denied the allegations. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is "increasingly concerned" that violent attacks by Yau Yau's militia and armed youth aligned with the movement "constitute a threat to the peace process". According to the Small Arms Survey, abuses committed by South Sudan's military during the recent [disarmament campaign](#) of Murle and Nuer ethnic groups helped Yau Yau, a Murle, to recruit fighters. Local authorities fear Yau Yau's militia could run rampant, since the disarmament campaign was considered largely successful in taking weapons from the Nuer and Murle civilians. In response to the attacks, the government has ceased the disarmament campaign and instructed the army to take "sweeping measures" to [clear the area](#) of rebels, reports *Sudan Tribune*.

South Sudan presented plans to the World Bank for the construction of a highway to the [Kenyan port](#) of Mombasa, reports *Bloomberg*. The World Bank is considering funding the project and is working to find co-financiers. In other economic news, French oil company Total announced it will most likely reach an agreement with South Sudan to [begin exploration](#) of a disputed block and will

begin work with a new partner yet to be determined, reports *Reuters*. Total has held the block since 1980 but shut it down in 1985 due to instability in the country. Ministers from Sudan and South Sudan have agreed to resume [oil production](#) within fourteen days. The two countries signed an agreement in September on oil fees and transportation.

Sudan

Sudan claims that an explosion at a Khartoum [weapons factory](#) on 24 October that killed two people resulted from an air strike carried out by Israel as part of Israel's proxy war against Islamist militants in the Sinai, reports *Reuters*. Satellite images released by the Satellite Sentinel Project to the *Associated Press (AP)* showed six 52-foot (16-meter) wide craters near the epicentre of Wednesday's explosion and military experts consulted by the project found the craters to be "consistent with large impact craters created by [air-delivered munitions](#)". The target may have been approximately forty shipping containers seen at the site in earlier surveillance images. Israeli officials have neither confirmed nor denied striking the site and have alleged that Iran is using Sudan as a conduit for [weapons smuggling](#) to the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip or Hezbollah in Lebanon, according to *AP*. Sudan has denied that Iran had any connection to the factory's production and that the attack would not deter their support to [Hamas](#), reports *Sudan Tribune*. On 29 October, two [Iranian warships](#) – a helicopter carrier and destroyer that had been conducting anti-piracy patrols off East Africa's coast – docked at Port Sudan, reports *AP*. The Sudanese foreign minister refused to link the arrival of the Iranian warships to the recent alleged airstrike on a Khartoum weapons factory, stating that the purpose of the visit was to exchange naval [combat experiences](#), reports *Sudan Tribune*.

Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) rebels claimed responsibility for [attacks](#) on 23 and 27 October in South Kordofan state, reports *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*. An army divisional headquarters and an artillery base were targeted following government air strikes on rebel-held villages. Rebels also claim they [killed](#) "scores of government troops" in attacks on 02 November in Daldako, a settlement northeast of South Kordofan's state capital Kadugli, reports *Reuters*. The Tripartite Initiative, developed by the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN) and Arab League, announced that it is ready to begin the delivery of [humanitarian aid](#) to populations affected by the conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile once the SPLM-N and the government give final approval, reports *Sudan Tribune*. However, the government continues to express concern over a "number of essential elements such as the security arrangements" and the SPLM-N refuses the involvement of any government personnel in the delivery of aid to areas under SPLM-N control.

In a brief to the UN Security Council, the UN's top peacekeeping officials have called on parties in Sudan's [Darfur region](#) to "engage fully in implementing the lagging peace process", following renewed violence in the region. A [tribal clash](#) in Sigili village, North Darfur between local militia and Zaghawa, one of Darfur's main tribes, killed thirteen people on 02 November, reports *AFP*. The AU-UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) reported that they had seen reports of "fatalities, an abduction of a civilian and widespread displacement" in the area but that government troops prevented international peacekeepers from reaching the area. The Sudanese government and a splinter faction of the rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) announced they will [begin negotiations](#) on 22 November on the basis of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), reports the *Sudan Tribune*. The negotiations will focus mainly on the "security arrangements and the political participation" of JEM in the government.

US President Barack Obama [renewed sanctions](#) on Sudan that have been in place since 1997, reports *Reuters*. The State Department cited the on-going conflict in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur which threatens regional stability and human rights. The Sudanese government has [condemned](#) the economic sanctions, claiming that Sudan has fulfilled conditions for lifting sanctions but that the US has reneged on its promises, reports *Sudan Tribune*.

Sudan and South Sudan Cross-Border Issues

South Sudan expressed disappointment with the proposal by the AU High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) to [extend negotiations](#) over the final status of the contested region of Abyei for six weeks, reports *Sudan Tribune*. Sudan has said if it does not reach a decision with South Sudan on the disputed region of Abyei within the AU's [six-week timeline](#), it would not accept the council's final proposal. The AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) approved a decision to give the two countries six weeks to settle the dispute or accept a proposal by the AU as "final and binding".

A senior US official reported that Sudanese rebels are using refugee camps along the South Sudan border to [recruit troops](#), including child soldiers, reports *AFP*. SPLM-N has [denied the accusations](#), stating that the uniformed rebels seen at the camp were visiting relatives and were not engaged in recruiting, reports *Sudan Tribune*. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is planning to relocate almost [63,000 people](#) from the Yida camp because of the town's proximity to renewed fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and rebel groups in South Kordofan. The agency is considering several sites and will begin relocating once rainy season conditions subside.

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Horn of Africa

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Ethiopia

South Sudan announced plans to facilitate mediation of the protracted border dispute between [Ethiopia and Eritrea on 24 October](#), informs *Reuters*. Although neither Ethiopia nor Eritrea commented on South Sudan's announcement, Ethiopia has previously claimed the conflict over the demarcation of their shared border following a 1998-2000 war required a negotiated settlement.

The Ethiopian Charities and Societies Agency (CSoA) announced on 27 October that it had ordered the [closure of ten non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\)](#) and issued warnings to hundreds more under the country's new civil society and charity law, informs the *Sudan Tribune*. CSoA stated that an additional 400 NGOs were warned that they were also operating in violation of regulations. Several international human rights groups have denounced the new law as a tool to control the activities of civil society. The law forbids human rights-related work undertaken by Ethiopian organisations that receive more than ten per cent of their funding from international donors.

The NGO Danish Refugee Council (DRC) reports that approximately [51,000 Ethiopian refugees](#) have arrived in Yemen since July, reports the *Yemen Times*. Yemen has become a popular destination, primarily due to its close proximity to Ethiopia, as well as a transit point for those en route to Saudi Arabia. The head of the DRC programme in Yemen, Allen Jelich, stated that Ethiopians often immigrate due to deteriorating economic conditions at home. Jelich further explained that Ethiopians travel to Yemen seeking employment within the country or to Saudi Arabia to look for employment there. Another recent report, released by the [Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat](#), (RMMS) indicates that many Ethiopian refugees face harsh and often deadly conditions upon arriving in Yemen, reports *Alert Net*. RMMS reports that kidnapping of Ethiopians has become increasingly common and many Ethiopian women arriving in Yemen are never seen again.

Kenya

A Kenyan policeman was killed and eleven others injured by a [grenade attack on a church](#) in Garissa district, in eastern Kenya, on 04 November, reports *BBC*. The church was located on a police compound, and most of the injured were policemen. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but police suspect al Shabaab and its sympathisers, who have recently carried out a number of attacks in Kenya in retaliation for the country's participation in the UN-mandated African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Several grenade attacks have occurred in both the capital Nairobi and the port city of Mombasa since October.

The planned [Lamu port project](#), which will include the construction of a new port, oil refinery and transport hub in northern Kenya, continues to generate controversy, reports the *Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)*. While the government has promised the project will create thousands of jobs and is an integral part of the government's long-term development plans, critics believe the project will displace tens of thousands from their homes within Lamu District and destroy the marine habitat on which local livelihoods depend. The Ministry of Lands has indicated that approximately 60,000 people will be displaced, but has not yet offered a clear plan regarding how the government will compensate them. Human rights activists have issued warnings that the issue, if left unresolved, could be used to provoke violence within the last few months preceding the presidential election. Violence erupted in the region in August, when the Orma and the Pokomo communities clashed over land issues, resulting in the deaths of over 100 people.



Source: [BBC](#)

Kenya has signed a [USD 59 million electricity deal](#) with the Spanish company *Iberdrola Ingenieria y Construccion SAU* to build a substation power plant, reports *Standard Media*. The planned substation will facilitate the import of electricity from Ethiopia and the Lake Turkana wind project to Nairobi, which consumes an estimated fifty per cent of the country's power, and is expected to increase the overall reliability of power provided to the city.

Somalia

Uganda will pull its troops from all [international peacekeeping missions](#) in Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Central African Republic (CAR), reports *The Observer*. The decision follows a leaked United Nations report accusing Uganda and

Rwanda of financially supporting M23 rebels in DRC, an accusation which both countries deny. According to Lt. Gen. Katumba Wamala, the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) land forces commander, Uganda has contributed at least 6,332 soldiers to the UN and AMISOM since 2007 to combat al Shabaab. Ugandan Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi announced to parliament that Uganda would withdraw troops from international duties because their efforts had been questioned by the UN report, and the country had not received proper recognition for its peacekeeping efforts. Furthermore, *The Guardian* reports that Kenya's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Richard Onyokna stated that [over 2,700 Ugandan troops](#) have been killed in Somalia as a part of AMISOM since 2007. Onyokna also stated that approximately three dozen Kenyan troops had been killed as a part of the mission. Neither Uganda nor the African Union has confirmed the number of deaths.

In related news, the UN Security Council met briefly on 31 October in New York, despite the emergency conditions created by Superstorm Sandy, to briefly extend the [mandate of AMISOM](#), which was set to expire that day, reports the *UN News Centre*. The mandate for AMISOM, created in 2007, was extended until 07 November. In continued [fighting with al Shabaab](#), Somalia lost its first General in an ambush on 29 October, reports *BBC*. General Mohamed Ibrahim Farah was killed as trooped travelled near the town of Merca, a town captured from the Islamic militants in August. Although al Shabaab has recently withdrawn from several strategic towns, they remain in control of large parts of the countryside.

The 2012 death toll of Somali media workers has risen to eighteen with the [death of two journalists](#) during the past two weeks, including a prominent radio dramatist in Mogadishu on 30 October, informs *The Guardian*. Warsame Shire Awale was renowned for writing material critical of al Shabaab. The previous week, Mohamed Mohamud Turyare, a *Shabelle* radio reporter, was shot and later died from his injuries. The killings continue to occur with impunity as the police appear unwilling or unable to investigate the murders. However, al Shabaab has claimed responsibility for killing more than ten media workers so far. [Reporters Without Borders](#) has called 2012 the deadliest year ever for journalists in Somalia.

Flooding in Somaliland has caused displacement following [heavy rains](#), reports *IRIN*. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that between 300 and 400 families have been affected by the flooding, and that a number of food stores had been destroyed and livestock killed. The Somaliland Red Crescent Society distributed tents in some districts where people had lost their huts. District officials estimate that 2,800 people are immediate need of shelter, food and non-food items. Local officials are also concerned about possible outbreaks of waterborne disease and told *IRIN* that the displaced also urgently require water chlorination, water pumps, and plastic sheets.



Source: [Somaliland Red Crescent Society](#)

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through the tunnels annually. Officially, goods are only allowed to be transported into Gaza [through Israel](#). Despite the relaxation of the blockade, significant shortages have remained, forcing Gaza's population to [rely on the tunnels](#) for construction materials – the import of which continues to be banned by Israel. Other sources note that anything from [food, fuel and cars](#) to [people](#), arms and other contraband are imported through the tunnels. *The Guardian* adds that children's bicycles and cattle are also [among smuggled items](#).

[Smuggling via the tunnels increased](#) in the northern Sinai as a result of a security vacuum caused by the ousting of Mubarak in February 2011, and the subsequent withdrawal of Egyptian police forces from the Sinai Peninsula. However, the 05 August border attack prompted new Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi to strengthen the government's [authority in Sinai](#) by sending thousands of troops into the peninsula and ordering the destruction of several dozen tunnels – which could have provided means for militants to smuggle weapons into Gaza to [use against Israel](#).

Economic Implications

Smuggling tunnels are considered critical for the supply of many basic commodities and are seen as a [life-line for Gaza's economy](#); therefore, the closures have prompted fears of an economic crisis in Gaza, reports *Al-Akhabar*. According to an economist in Gaza, Maher Al-Tabbaa, "If [all] tunnels are closed there will be a [complete collapse](#) in Gaza. It would suffer an economic catastrophe." Al-Tabbaa notes that thirty per cent of Gaza's goods are brought in through the tunnels, while tunnelers claim eighty per cent of [food sold](#) in Gaza is imported through the underground network. According to Gaza's Ministry of Economy, imports of basic food goods have [declined](#) by 31 per cent, while construction materials have plunged by 45 per cent since the closures.

Although tunnel smuggling has [partially resumed](#) since the August attack, tunnel owners are only able to open their routes at night when police control is minimal. Consequently, the heightened risks and reduced capacity of the tunnel trade has led to a rise in prices of essential commodities. According to a technician working in Gaza City, "The price of everything coming from Egypt has skyrocketed," exacerbating an already daunting economic situation in Gaza where the [unemployment rate](#) has reached nearly seventy per cent and nearly forty per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. Construction materials such as [cement and steel](#) continue to be targeted by the Israeli blockade, and as such, these constitute the main commodities smuggled through the tunnels. Israel does not allow passage of these commodities out of concern that such materials could be used for [military purposes](#). According to a trader smuggling cement to Gaza, [the cost of cement](#) has increased by fifty per cent since the Egyptian army closed the tunnels. Another tunnel owner told *Reuters Television* that out of 200 tons of goods that used to be brought through tunnels daily, tunnelers have been able to bring only [around 20 to 25 tonnes a day](#) due to the closure. This has led to concerns that the crackdown on the tunnels will [endanger a building boom](#) in Gaza that has been fuelled by the smuggling of construction material, writes *Reuters*. Also the amount of [smuggled fuels](#) including gasoline and diesel from Egypt has reportedly declined by more than seventy per cent.

Prospects for Future Trade

In reaction to the attack on the Egyptian army checkpoint, the Hamas government [shut down](#) the tunnels to human traffic to prevent suspects from fleeing to Gaza, stating it [did not support](#) the attack. Moreover, Palestinians [held protests](#) near the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, calling on the Egyptian government to stop destroying the tunnels until there is an alternative to the Israeli-imposed blockade, reports *Reuters*. Hamas has voiced on several occasions its willingness to close down all smuggling tunnels in exchange for the establishment of a [joint free trade area](#) between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, allowing for legal entry of goods into Gaza. Hamas reportedly sees the free trade area as a [means to circumvent Israeli control of imports](#) to Gaza and to increase its tax revenues.

Egypt responded to the free trade zone proposal by stating that it "[requires more study](#)", with *Reuters* adding that [Egypt is cautious](#) to make changes to an international agreement stipulating that the Rafah border crossing serves only for travel. Moreover, there have been concerns that Israel could [close the Kerem Shalom](#) crossing if Rafah is opened to commercial goods. According to the International Crisis Group, there have been speculations that Egypt could agree to the idea of a free trade zone [in exchange for reconciliation](#) between Hamas and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. However, according to Egypt's presidential spokesperson, Yasser Ali, the idea of a free trade zone was [never officially discussed](#). Also, relations between [Egypt, Israel and Hamas](#) are complicated, according to Abdel Monem Said, director of the Cairo-based Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. Said believes that "Morsi knows he can't really allow Palestinians in Gaza to starve. And there is pressure from inside the [Muslim] Brotherhood to support Hamas." On the other hand, Egypt continues to face constraints by its security cooperation with Israel. As a result, Hamas concedes a free trade zone is unlikely in the near future, and remains focused on "more realistic options", such as allowing for increased human traffic at Rafah.

