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This document provides an overview of developments in the Mediterranean Basin and other regions of interest from 05–18 February 2013, 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: Eritrea, Repression and the Recent Coup
By Trista Guertin

On 21 January 2013, Eritrea, an isolated and [reclusive country](#), caught the world’s attention with the announcement of an attempted “[coup](#)”. Reporters without Borders reported that a group of up to 100 soldiers commandeered the Ministry of Information in the capital city of Asmara, taking control of the state television channel, Eri-TV. The soldiers reportedly had a list of demands broadcasted on air which included the enforcement of the [1997 constitution](#) and the release of political prisoners, before the station was abruptly taken off the air. This was the first programming interruption since Eri TV began airing in 1993. The events that followed remain vague, other than the channel resuming broadcasting twelve hours later and the government denying, then reluctantly acquiescing, that an incident had occurred. Little is known about the fate of the soldiers; it has been reported that they peacefully surrendered and returned to the barracks, having been granted clemency by President Isaias Afewerki.

What has garnered the attention of the international community, according to *Pressenza*, is the possibility that the “[Arab Spring](#)” may be making its way into the Horn of Africa, two years after engulfing countries in North Africa and the Middle East. *Associated Press (AP)* reports that, since gaining independence from Ethiopia in 1993, Eritrea has remained relatively [reclusive and isolated](#) from the rest of the world. Afewerki, who has ruled the country since 1993, maintains an authoritarian regime that allows for little freedom or information sharing. In 2012, Eritrea was described by Human Rights Watch (HRW) as “[one of the world’s most repressive governments](#)”. While the 21 January incident may not have been an official coup d’état as some have speculated, the idea that the roots of discontent may eventually lead to a real coup have piqued the world’s attention, and highlight some of the issues that the country continues to face, including repression, dictatorship and poverty. Meanwhile, the government continues to proclaim the country is stable and not susceptible to being overthrown.

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North Africa

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Algeria

Algerian authorities have [revised their security strategy](#) to mitigate the resulting threat due to interconnectivity between criminal and terrorist organisations, reports *Al Monitor*. Deteriorating security and increased drug trafficking due to the war in Mali has resulted in Algeria increasing security efforts in its south-western border area. The lack of security cooperation frameworks with its neighbours, particularly Morocco, increases the volatility. Algerian authorities will deploy border guards and material resources to secure the 2.8km stretch of border. Under the new consolidated strategy, Algeria is also establishing a border surveillance air unit within the *Gendarmerie Nationale*.

In other security news, Algerian and American officials met in Algiers on 10-11 February to discuss [counter-nuclear smuggling](#) and border security cooperation, according to the US Department of State. The meeting focused on exploring ways to “prevent, detect, and respond to nuclear and radiological material smuggling incidents”. Best practices in the areas of border security, nuclear detection, nuclear forensics, law enforcement and other preventive tools were also discussed in the meeting. Senior Russian and Algerian officials also met on 19 February to discuss bilateral [counter-terrorism cooperation](#), according to *Algérie Presse Service (APS)*. Officials from both governments expressed their willingness for closer cooperation.

Egypt

Riots and protests continue [throughout the country](#), reports *Ahram Online*, resulting in at least 125 injured on 15 February. In Gharbyia governorate, twenty protesters were arrested on charges of attacking government buildings. Also on 15 February, in Delta governorate, anti-Muslim Brotherhood protesters demanded justice for murdered activist [Mohamed El-Gendy](#), who died of massive injuries suffered while in police custody. On the same day, protesters also took to the streets in Cairo and Giza, as well as Beni-Suef and Al-Daqahliya governorates. In [Port Said](#), over 3,000 protesters turned out on 17 February, obstructing the harbour and governorate office, informs *Al Jazeera*. The protesters demanded death sentences for those who incited the [violence that erupted on 26 January](#) after an Egyptian court sentenced 21 people to death for their roles in the 2012 Port Said soccer stadium riots. Following the court’s announcement, violence broke out in several cities, including Port Said, killing over seventy people and prompting President Mohamed Morsi to declare a thirty-day state of emergency.

Egypt’s crippled economy faced another setback on 13 February after Moody’s Investors Service lowered the country’s [bond rating](#) to B3, six levels below investment grade, reports *Arabian Business*. Moody’s said the rating cut was due to the “on-going unsettled political conditions and recent escalation of civil unrest in the form of violent clashes between protesters and security forces”, and the ensuing thirty-day state of emergency declared by President Morsi in January. The credit ratings agency indicated that a further downgrade may be likely if the political uncertainty continues. A downgrade in December 2012 by Standard & Poor’s reduced Egypt to “junk status”, similar to that of another struggling economy, Greece. Meanwhile, talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a USD 4.8 billion loan – viewed as essential to restoring confidence in the country’s economy – have stalled. Concern about [rising unemployment](#) (estimated at above twelve per cent), declining tourism revenue, rising inflation, and expectations of a further devaluation of the Egyptian pound continue to plague the economy.

Egypt recommenced flooding of the elaborate [tunnel networks](#) connecting the Sinai Peninsula to the Palestinian-controlled Gaza Strip, informs *Business Week*. The destruction of the tunnels is widely viewed as an effort to restore order and prevent arms shipments flowing through the peninsula into Gaza. Hundreds of tunnels, which have allowed Palestinians to circumvent the 2007 Israeli blockade, have facilitated the smuggling of food, medicine, equipment, as well as allowing the movement of militants and weapons, both in and out of Sinai. The region has been viewed as increasingly lawless since the 2011 revolution that deposed former President Hosni Mubarak, during which security forces pulled out of the Sinai and have struggled to bring the region back under full control ever since. Following an [August 2102](#) attack which killed sixteen soldiers, President Morsi committed to eliminating terrorist elements in the area and began the destruction of the [tunnel system](#).

Libya

Two years after the revolution that toppled the former leader Moammar Gaddafi, Libya is still [struggling to control](#) the country’s porous borders and retrieve pilfered weapons, reports the *Associated Press (AP)*. Libyan Foreign Minister M. Mohamed Abdelaziz acknowledged his country’s challenges regarding border security, and the management of former fighters. He also said a European Union (EU) training force would help Libya; however, the country does not need foreign forces at its frontiers. Libya aims to integrate former fighters into a regular security force and prevent them from crossing the borders to neighbouring countries. British Foreign Secretary William Hague said: “It is important of course that Libya is able to secure its borders. That it is able to make sure that there aren’t ungoverned spaces particularly in the south of Libya, that militias can be demobilized.”

Libya faces another challenge with the [60,000 internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#), accused of alignment with the Gaddafi regime and war crimes, reports *IRIN*. Libyan Humanitarian Relief Agency (LibAid) reports that about half of the displaced people are ethnic Tawergha, from a town carrying the same name east of Tripoli. Tawergha community leaders harshly criticise the two-year delay in reconciling the IDPs from over twenty IDP camps, promising to unilaterally move the IDPs to their homes by mid-year.

Libya launched an appeal on 19 February against the International Criminal Court's (ICC) [order to extradite](#) Gaddafi-era intelligence chief Abdullah al Senussi, reports *Reuters*. Libya argues that it is capable of trying Senussi for his alleged role in violence against the protesters in the 2011 uprising. Ahmed al Jehani, the legal liaison between the Libyan government and the ICC, said that Senussi has requested a trial by the ICC and so far, has not been able to meet with his British lawyer. Moreover, trial dates have not been scheduled for Senussi and Gaddafi's son Saif al Islam due to indecision by the prosecutor general who has yet to determine whether to conduct both trials in one proceeding. Human rights activists express concern that international standards will not be met during the court process.

Morocco

Moroccan Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane [denied any links](#) between his Justice and Development Party and the Muslim Brotherhood, reports *Ahram Online*. The prime minister said that the Islamist movements have "their own political thought" and added that "[p]eople voted for us as a political party as Moroccans are Muslims by nature; the government does not plan to Islamise society or interfere in people's personal lives". On the questions about the appointment of only one female minister, Benkirane replied that women's empowerment in Morocco is a new issue and thus cannot be "compared to the standards in France". He said that "gradual participation is the best solution for such an issue".

Amnesty International (AI) urged Morocco on 18 February to retry 25 convicted [Sahrawis](#) in civilian courts and investigate allegations of torture. AI's recommendation resulted after a military court issued life sentences to nine people and twenty to thirty years imprisonment of fourteen other people on 17 February. Ann Harrison, AI Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director said, "the Moroccan authorities have ignored calls to try the defendants in an independent, impartial civilian court. Instead they have opted for a military court where civilians can never receive a fair trial" and added that "the use of military courts, compounded by the fact that torture allegations have not been investigated, casts a serious doubt on the Moroccan authorities' intention and whether they were more concerned with securing a guilty verdict than justice". The convictions are related to the violence that occurred when the Moroccan security forces forcibly removed people from the Gdim Izik protest camp in November 2010.

Tunisia

Protests continued for a second week in the capital of Tunis and the towns of Sousse and Gafsa, reports *Al Jazeera*. The [protests](#) began on 06 February following the assassination of Chokri Belaid, a left-wing opposition politician. The assassination has caused a political crisis. Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) urged a general strike as a reaction and President Moncef Marzouki's Congress for the Republic party threatened to resign if stabilisation plans are not implemented.

Tunisian Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali [announced his resignation](#) on 19 February, reports *AP*. Jebali offered to dissolve the coalition government and form an apolitical government of technocrats following the assassination of Belaid that caused widespread riots in the country. Although the move was welcomed by the opposition, Jebali's own party Ennahda rejected the initiative. He said: "I promised if my initiative did not succeed I would resign as head of the government, and this is what I am doing following my meeting with the president", and added: "Today there is a great disappointment among the people and we must regain their trust and this resignation is a first step". The resignation is expected to further deteriorate the political instability in the country; Standard & Poor's downgraded the country's credit rating due to the political instability.

Have a question on North Africa, Northeast Africa or the Horn of Africa?
Submit an RFI or recommend a topic for future *In Focus* coverage.
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We look forward to hearing from you!



Northeast Africa

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Cross Border Issues between South Sudan and Sudan

South Sudan has accused Sudan of deploying troops to the [disputed areas](#) along their shared border, reports *Al Jazeera*. On 12 February, South Sudan's Deputy Minister of Defence Majak D'Agoot stated that the increased number Sudanese troops was unusual and indicative of a possible incursion by Sudan. In response to the Sudanese deployment of troops, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir ordered the [immediate deployment](#) of police and government troops to the border areas, according to *Sudan Tribune*. A peace agreement between the two countries was signed in September 2012 that established a demilitarised zone along the shared border as a precondition for the resumption of oil exports from South Sudan utilising Sudanese pipelines. However, nearly six months later, the requisite demilitarised zone has been established.

Also on 12 February, South Sudan's Minister of Information Barnaba Marial Benjamin accused Sudan of using rebel militia groups to obstruct Juba's plans to build a [new oil pipeline](#), reports *Sudan Tribune*. The South Sudanese government has repeatedly accused Sudan of supporting subversive rebellions in its country after it gained independence in 2011. In particular, South Sudan asserts that Khartoum provides support to David Yau Yau and his rebellion based in Jonglei state. This is the first time the South Sudanese government has claimed that Sudan is supporting rebels to impede the construction of the new pipeline. Although Yau Yau integrated his forces into South Sudan's army (SPLA) in 2011, he led a second rebellion in April 2012. Last week, Yau Yau's militia was accused of carrying out an attack in Akobo County resulting in over 100 deaths.

South Sudan

Oil exports once accounted for 98 per cent of South Sudan's revenues. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that in 2012, South Sudan's economy contracted 54 per cent, one of the largest economic shocks in history. In an effort to generate much needed revenue, South Sudan plans to sell unexplored oil blocks for [USD 1 billion](#) in the next few months, reports *Independent Online (IOL)*. According to Deputy Finance Minister Marial Awou Yol, the government has finalised the sale of several oil concessions worth between USD 200 million and 300 million each. However, Yol declined to identify the buyers or the location of the blocks. One oil industry insider indicated that one deal had been signed for USD 250 million with a Nigerian company.

Security forces from Unity state apprehended two suspected [cattle raiders](#) on 13 February, reports *Voice of America (VOA)*. The pair is accused of killing a woman and two children when they attacked cattle keepers and stole their herd in a neighbouring state. The operation also recovered over fifty head of cattle. South Sudan has recently experienced several fatal cattle raids. On 08 February, well-armed rebels attacked members of the Lou Nuer tribe on their annual migration, killing more than [100 people](#), including women and children, in South Sudan's Jonglei state, according to *Al Jazeera*. The governor of Jonglei state, Kuol Manyang Juuk, reported that seventeen attackers were killed, as well as fourteen soldiers from the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), South Sudan's military, during the attack in Akobo County. The SPLA soldiers were escorting the tribe when they were overwhelmed by the rebels, who left with cattle and hundreds of women and children. Jonglei state has been plagued by massive bouts of inter-tribal violence for years. The United Nations (UN) reports over 2,600 deaths attributed to inter-tribal conflict were confirmed in Jonglei from January 2011 to September 2012; these deaths account for more than half of reported deaths in the country.

Source: [Al Jazeera](#)

Sudan

Rebel members of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and other Darfur-based rebel groups claim to have witnessed [Islamist rebels](#) from Mali arriving in Darfur since French and other forces launched their campaign in northern Mali in January, according to *Sudan Tribune*. Jibril Adam Bilal, a JEM spokesperson, stated on 18 February that Malian militia members arrived in Sudan and were subsequently integrated into the government militia, Abu-Taira, and moved into North Darfur state. Bilal stated that "[w]e were able to take pictures of them in different places and we will not let them disappear from our sight until we put an end to them", emphasising that they will not be safer in Darfur than Mali, despite their alignment with Sudan's militias.

President Omer Hassan al-Bashir met with Iran's President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) in Cairo on 06 February, according to the *Sudan Tribune*. The two leaders were in Egypt attending the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit. Sudan's Foreign Minister Ali Karti indicated that the meeting came "in the context of a framework of communication and consultation on common themes between the two countries". Karti indicated that there exists a long standing relationship between the two countries based on mutual consultation on regional and international issues. Following the meeting, Ahmadinejad announced an offer of a "big credit line" to aid the country's struggling economy.



Horn of Africa

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Ethiopia

An anonymous Ethiopian military source revealed the country developed its [first drone](#), reports *Sudan Tribune*. Test flights were performed over Ethiopia's massive hydropower dam project in the Blue Nile area along the Sudanese border. In 2011, Ethiopia's government signed a deal with Bluebird Aero Systems, an Israeli manufacturer of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), to acquire the technology. Purportedly equipped with Global Positioning System (GPS) and cameras, the UAV will support border security, conduct geophysical surveys and monitor natural disasters. The official stated, "[w]ith Eritrea-backed rebels and Somalia's *al-Qaeda* linked *al-Shabaab*, terrorists repeatedly posing threats to national security, using UAVs will be crucial for Ethiopia to avert planned attacks".

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) separatist group [warned Africa Oil Corporation \(AOC\), a Canadian](#) oil company, to cease exploration activities in the country's eastern Ogaden region until a peace agreement is reached, reports *Sudan Tribune*. ONLF issued a statement accusing the oil firm of conspiring with the Ethiopian government to exploit oil resources in the region. The group seeks an [independent state](#) in south-eastern Ethiopia. Intermittent talks surrounding a peace agreement have been held in previous years with limited success. In 2007, 74 people were killed when the ONLF attacked a Chinese-owned oil instalment. In 2010, the Ethiopian government reached a settlement with one major ONLF faction; however, the group has splintered into three or more cells since that time. Minister of Communications Shimeles Kemal dismissed the ONLF statement, claiming the Ogaden region is safe for foreign companies.

Kenya

The Kenyan [High Court](#) cleared the way for Uhuru Kenyatta to participate in the [04 March elections](#) when it refused to rule in a case that would have barred his participation, informs *BBC*. The five-judge panel issued a statement on 15 February stating: "The High Court lacks jurisdiction to deal with a question relating to the election of a president". The news broke as several embassies in Nairobi joined the growing [chorus](#) of leaders and international organisations expressing concerns about the candidacy of Kenyatta and William Ruto in the face of [indictments](#) by the International Criminal Court (ICC), reports *Reuters*. The US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Johnnie Carson, [urged Kenyan voters](#) to carefully consider their presidential options. The French Ambassador to Kenya, Etienne de Poncins, [reiterated](#) his country's policy to maintain only "essential contact" with individuals indicted by the ICC. Meanwhile, Britain warned that it does not have any contact with ICC suspects.

Economists continue to offer projections about the [Kenyan economy](#), should Uhuru Kenyatta win the upcoming presidential election, according to *Standard Digital*. The head of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) team, Domenica Fanizza, analysing the situation in the country told *Standard Digital* that Kenya's economy will not "suffer massively". Fanizza cited independence from European trade and domestic sectors, saying "Growth is driven by the emergence of the middle class and investments in areas like [Information and Communication Technologies] ICT and infrastructure. I don't see a direct impact on economic growth". Despite the positive assessment, other politicians remain sceptical the country's economy would be unscathed. Pointing to the likelihood of Western trade restrictions, Osman Mwandaro, a political writer in Kwale County, suggests that funding would likely be cut from HIV/AIDS and education programmes. Mwandaro also argues sectors vital to the [national economy](#) such as agricultural exports and tourism will suffer, as they rely heavily on trade with the United States and Europe.

In humanitarian news, Kenya's [urban refugee](#) predicament continues to worsen, reports *The Guardian*. Fears have mounted in Nairobi's Eastleigh neighbourhood where individuals report instances of [police brutality](#) and extortion. In December 2012, the government ordered that all urban refugees relocate to camps in northern Kenya. A court temporarily halted the move, but *The Guardian* notes that refugees, many of whom are Somali, remain targets of police persecution. In the northern Rift Valley, over one thousand families fled their homes since December 2012 as [tensions increase](#) between Tugen and Pokot communities. The displacement stems from inadequate security as local thieves engage in cattle raiding. *All Africa* reports that there are too few police in the region and gangs of young men responsible for stealing livestock are aware of the small police force and their limited resources. Tugen sources claim that politicians have encouraged Pokot communities to engage in cattle raiding because they are assured of winning upcoming elections. The raids have led to displacement, which will further increase the likelihood of Pokot success at the polls and reduce the chances of convictions for those who carried out raids.

Somalia

As the United States encourages an end to United Nations (UN) sanctions, including an arms embargo against Somalia, a UN monitoring group told *Reuters* that *al-Shabaab* militants [receive arms](#) from Iran and Yemen. [Iran rejected](#) the claims, calling them "absurd fabrications". The UN report highlights an increasing international rift between three unstable states in the region. In January, a weapons cache from Iran was [intercepted](#) off Yemen's coast, and Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi requested that Iran cease smuggling weapons through the country. According to the UN [monitoring group](#), which investigates Eritrea and Somalia, most weapons traced to Somalia are trafficked through autonomous Puntland and Somaliland in the North, after arriving in the country from Yemen.

The [Somali National Army](#), supported by Ugandan troops deployed under the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), captured three strategically important positions in the [Lower Shabelle](#) region southwest of Mogadishu on 14 February, reports *The Independent*. The sites along the Shabelle River had been held by *al-Shabaab* fighters. The group is seeking to refortify its position after suffering heavy losses in recent months. According to Brigadier Michael Ondogo, who led the operation, the joint AU and Somali force met little resistance. The attack disrupts an important communications and transportation channel used by the militants and better positions the peace enforcement operation to defeat the insurgents in their stronghold Buur hakaba. In recent weeks, the rebel fighters had aggravated the local population, restricting their freedom of movement, as they attempted to increase their area of control.

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[President Afewerki](#), who also led the fight for independence from Ethiopia in the 1990s, has repressed dissent and established a security state that ensures his [complete control](#) of all aspects of Eritrean culture, media, education, judiciary, economy, religion and foreign affairs, writes *Somaliland Sun*. There have been no elections since 1993 and the 1997 constitution has yet to be implemented. Afewerki reportedly surrounds himself with a close inner circle, maintaining an extremely intimate relationship with military leadership. However, the network remains highly secretive and almost unknown both within and outside the country. The president reportedly harbours a deep sense of mistrust and has established an [intricate system](#) of control so that no one can tell who is second-in-command, according to *Addis Fortune* news. According to HRW, abuses are widely reported; estimates of [political prisoners](#) range from 5,000 to 10,000. The first signs of discontent became visible in 2012, when a number of high level defections occurred amongst military and government officials, the most notable of which was the defection of the [Minister of Information](#) in November 2012, according to *Somaliland Sun*.

The 21 January incident highlighted government's tight control over the media; weeks after the incident, [exact details](#) concerning the events remain elusive, according to Ethiopian news source *Tigray Online*. *Reporters Without Borders* has labelled the country one of the [world's most closed countries](#); the country ranks last in the organisation's press freedom index (lower than even North Korea), has no privately-owned media outlets, is home to the continent's largest prison specifically for journalists (holding at least thirty), and since 2010 has forbidden entry of foreign press correspondents. The 2013 coup attempt was first reported by a Paris-based radio station called Radio Erena, established in 2009 and run by exiled Eritrean journalists. The radio station can be heard in Eritrea despite reported attempts by the government to block the signal. *Al Jazeera* also quickly picked up the story, and the news channel was subsequently blocked in Eritrea as a result.

The attempted coup was reportedly led by [junior military officers](#), supported by a small number of tanks. The cause of the revolt is suspected to be a result of widespread dissatisfaction within the military, according to Reporters Without Borders. A US-based website *Awate.com*, claims the group of officers was led by army commander [Saleh Osman](#), a veteran soldier and war hero, who may have been attempting to reengage the government in the democratisation process that had stalled, reports *Al Jazeera*. However, Selam Kidane, an Eritrean human rights activist and director of the organisation *Release Eritrea*, points to economic factors. Kidane said that while details of the events were still unclear, those who participated were not senior personnel, but rather young officers frustrated with the situation in the country, especially economic hardships. According to *Mail & Guardian*, the country has maintained a strict [conscription policy](#) since 1995, which includes a mandatory eighteen month service for both [men and women](#), beginning as young as 12-years-old. This conscription can continue for up to ten years and often includes forced labour in government departments or party-owned businesses, reports *Al Jazeera*. HRW recently published a report documenting the use of conscripts in the burgeoning [mining sector](#), including gold mines operated by international mining firms. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that [over 1,000 Eritreans](#) cross over to Ethiopia and approximately the same number flee to Sudan each month to avoid conscription and indefinite military service. According to *Sudan Tribune*, at least [70,000 Eritrean refugees](#) are currently residing in twelve camps in Sudan. Many of the Eritreans who leave the country become victims of [human trafficking](#) in the Sinai Peninsula and Yemen, reports *CNN*.

Furthermore, according to the *Somaliland Sun*, the military is constantly reorganised and the authority of senior ranking officers has gradually been eroded, leading to serious [disciplinary problems](#). Economic challenges that have affected the entire country have led to corruption and smuggling amongst the ranks. In 2012, a number of officers defected, including two air force pilots in October, who commandeered the only presidential jet. The Eritrean officers flew to Saudi Arabia and requesting political asylum. Estimates regarding the size of the military vary but reporting suggests the country has the largest army in sub-Saharan Africa with [200,000 to 300,000 troops](#), according to *Sudan Tribune*. However, according to former soldiers the [Eritrean Defence Force](#) units are only operating at 25 per cent capacity (or lower). The overall strength of the army may be less than 80,000, reports *Mail & Guardian*. The [Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization](#) (RSADO) chairman Ibrahim Haron told *Sudan Tribune* in 2012 that there is a growing divide among political and military leaders following increased corruption in the poorly-funded military. According to Haron, corruption is motivating some Eritrean soldiers to carry out unprecedented protests against the government.

According to *Time*, the failed coup could be indicative of a [power struggle](#) that is already underway or forthcoming. On 11 February, President Afewerki addressed the public for the first time since the 21 January incident, attempting to [dispel fears](#) of unrest in the country. He attributed the attack to "bankrupt enemies" and said his administration had chosen to remain silent to avoid "serving the ploys of bankrupt enemy quarters". While the president did not elaborate as to who was precisely behind the plot, he indicated that further details would be released "at an appropriate time", reports *Reuters*. The incident did, however, ignite protests both within and outside the country amongst Eritrean exiles. In Europe, protests were held in London, Rome and in other cities in close proximity to Eritrean Embassies in support of the soldiers' coup attempt. In Asmara, the members of [Freedom Friday Movement](#) posted flyers around the city on 07 February calling for street protests against the regime and in support of the soldiers of the "Forto 2013 movement", referring to the area of town where the Ministry of Information is located in Asmara, according to *Indepth Africa*. The group also reportedly made several thousand telephone calls, prompting citizens to take to the streets in protest, promising to continue the calls until people begin to protest or the demands of Forto 2013 are met. One Asmara-based diplomat stated that "this [disturbing development](#) belies the government's claim that it represents stability and it is one event among many others in an on-going process that may already be taking place", writes *Somaliland Sun*.

