

# Complex Coverage



19 March 2013

Comprehensive Information on Complex Crisis

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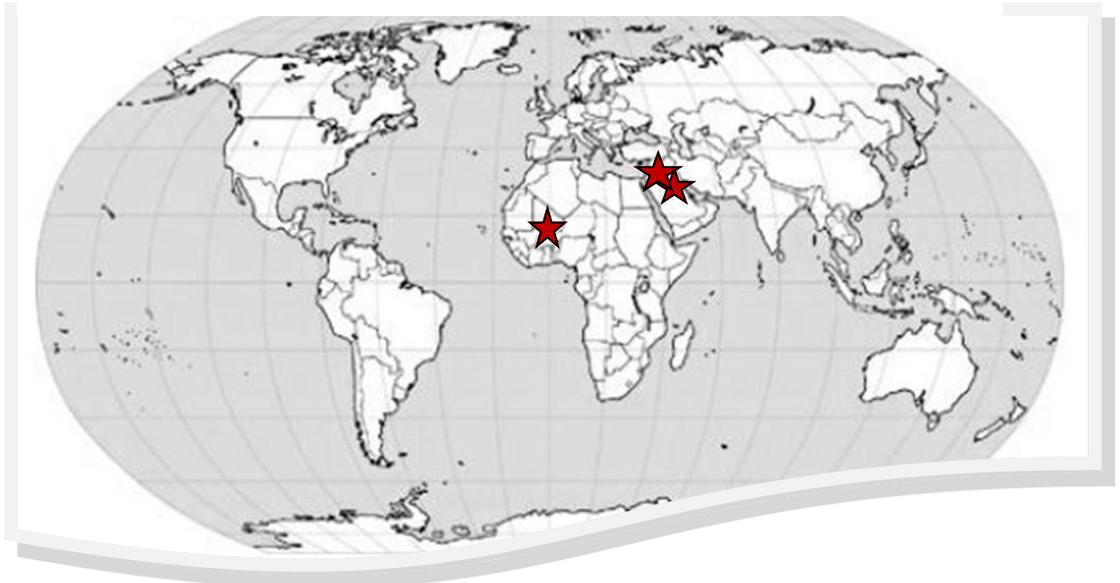
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This document provides complex coverage of global events from 05 - 18 March 2013 with hyperlinks to source material highlighted in blue and underlined in the text. For more information on the topics below or other issues pertaining to events in the region, contact the members of the Complex Coverage Team or visit our website at [www.cimicweb.org](http://www.cimicweb.org).



## Iraq

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According to the Iraq Body Count, an Iraqi casualty database, bloodshed and [death rates](#) in Iraq have increased since the departure of US troops in December 2011, reports *The Telegraph*. In 2012, 4,570 civilians were killed compared to 4,147 in 2011. The increase is attributed to the resurgence of al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). According to estimates by Iraqi officials, AQI's membership has increased from 700 in 2011 to 2,500 today. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) [ramped up](#) its collaboration with Iraq's Counterterrorism Service (CTS) in order to better fight al Qaeda affiliates along the shared Iraqi-Syrian border, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. The move comes as Syrian violence is increasingly spilling into Iraq. Most recently, an estimated fifty Assad soldiers were ambushed and killed in Iraqi territory after seeking safety from rebel fighters. Iraqi officials say that the attack bore the hallmarks of AQI. Shortly after, on 12 March, the *Associated Press* (AP) reports AQI [claimed responsibility](#) for the ambush along the shared border.

In Ramadi, protests continue as [thousands of Sunni Iraqis](#) line the highway standing in "long neat lines praying on coloured prayer mats" in an effort to block the main highway linking Iraq to Jordan and Syria, reports *The Guardian*. Tent cities have sprung up in major Sunni-dominated cities such as Ramadi, Mosul and Fallujah. The tents provide support and shelter for protesters. Sustained protests have facilitated reconciliation among Sunni insurgent groups and tribal leaders who have "put aside their differences to mount a common front against Baghdad". One Sunni insurgent, Abu Saleh, states that a truce with the tribal sheikhs, other factions and even moderate elements in al Qaeda, "has united Sunnis like never before". Saleh added, "The politicians have joined us and we have the legitimacy of the street". On 15 March, hundreds of Sunni protesters clashed with Iraqi [police attempting](#) to prevent demonstrators from reaching Abu Hanifa, the most venerated Sunni-mosque in Baghdad, and the location of weekly protests against the Shi'ite led government, according to *The Daily Star*. Witnesses

at the scene reported that Iraqi riot police used batons and water cannons to stop worshippers from assembling at the Sunni mosque. Also, in western Anbar province, masked men arrived at the scene of demonstrations in Fallujah, raising the Syrian Rebel flag and a black banner that mimicked the AQI banner. *Trend* reports that tens of thousands of [Shi'ite protesters](#) in southern Iraqi took to the streets on 16 March to protest the sectarian violence in the country. Led by Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al Sadr, the protest also marked the tenth anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq.

A series of [coordinated attacks](#) rocked Baghdad on 14 March killing an estimated 24 people and wounding dozens of others, according to *Voice of America (VOA)*. The attacks concentrated in the Allawi district, which hosts several government ministry offices. AQI later [claimed responsibility](#) for the attacks, reports *Reuters*. On 15 March, militants gunned down [eight Iraqi soldiers](#) reporting for work in a town north of Baghdad, according to *Daily Star*. On the same day, gunmen in the city of Baquba forced their way into the house of a local Sahwa<sup>1</sup> anti-al Qaeda leader, killing him and his three sons. On 18 March, a car bomb killed ten people on the outskirts of the [southern Iraqi city of Basra](#) while earlier that morning, another bomb detonated in the city centre, reports *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*. On the same day, a suicide bomber driving an explosive-rigged truck wounded three police officers near Baiji in northern Iraq. Finally, on 18 March, Iraqi officials report that two bombs, including a [sticky bomb](#), attached to the undercarriage of a bus, killed four people in a western Baghdad suburb, according to *AP*.

On 13 March, Kurdish militants released eight Turkish captives who had been held since 2011 and 2012, reports *The New York Times (NYT)*. The former captives met their families at a Turkish-Iraqi border crossing. The release is the latest sign that [peace talks](#) between Turkey and Kurdish rebels are gaining momentum. Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK<sup>2</sup>) leader Abdullah Ocalan, imprisoned in Turkey since 1999, is in discussions with Turkey. The release of the captives "[is] the first tangible result of the talks, and paves the way for more success", said Umit Firat, a prominent Kurdish intellectual.

Iran and Iraq [signed an agreement](#) that expands cooperation between the naval forces, reports *Trend*. The agreement will include mutual exchanges and joint drills in the Persian Gulf. Also, Iraq's Oil Ministry announced that [seven international oil companies](#) qualify to bid for developing the 4.4 billion-barrel Nasiriyah field and constructing 300,000 barrels per day (BPD) refinery nearby, according to *AP*. The field is located in Thi Qar province, approximately two hundred miles south of Baghdad.

The [Kurdish Genocide](#) International Conference began in Erbil, Kurdistan on 14 March, according to *Gulf News*. The three day conference seeks to raise international awareness about the massacres carried out by Saddam Hussein's forces against the ethnic Kurds in northern Iraq. On 16 March, Kurds commemorated the [25th anniversary](#) of the Halabja massacre, in which an estimated 5,000 died in a chemical attack on the northern city, reports *VOA*. The massacre was part of a broader genocide campaign called the "Anfal"; some 182,000 Kurds were killed at the hands of the Iraqi government.

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## Mali

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German Defense Minister, Thomas de Maziere, [visited](#) Mali ahead of the commencement of several German training programmes for Malian troops and security professionals, reports *Deutsche Welle (DW)*. De Maziere met with President Dioncounda Traore in Bamako before traveling to Koulikoro, a region north of Bamako that stretches to the Mauritanian border. Germany pledged several hundred soldiers to support security assistance training programmes for Malian troops in the coming months. It currently contributes four aircraft, based in Senegal, which provide logistical support to ongoing operations. De Maziere's visit took place less than ten days after French troops found an alarming number of [weapons caches](#) in northern Mali, according to *Reuters*. The caches included heavy arms and material used for making improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In response to the discovery, French Minister of Defence, Jean-Yves Le Drian stated the rebels sought to make Mali "a terrorist sanctuary".

A 24-year-old French corporal killed by a [roadside bomb](#) on 17 March in the Adrar des Ifoghas Mountains, marked the fifth French military casualty since the intervention began, according to *Agence France-Presse*. Earlier in March, President of France Francois Hollande [announced](#) that French troops will begin pulling out of Mali in April, reports *Voice of America (VOA)*. In a statement made in Poland, Hollande said the intervention was in its "ultimate phase". At the United Nations, talks regarding a peacekeeping mission in Mali are underway. Speaking from Bamako on 16 March, Assistant Secretary-General Edmond Mulet said that a [UN peacekeeping operation](#) could take over the African-led support mission (AFISMA) as early as June or July 2013. The UN Security Council must first approve such a mission.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a report on 12 March that found widespread human rights violations, especially in the form of [reprisal attacks](#), have surged in northern Mali since the start of the French-led intervention. An excerpt from the report concludes, "While the violations by the extremist groups have largely been stopped, there have been

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<sup>1</sup> Sahwa fighters are Sunni militias organized during the Iraqi Insurgency to work in conjunction with US forces to expel al Qaeda from Iraq. Sahwa fighters are revenge targets by AQI.

<sup>2</sup> The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States, the European Union and NATO.

widely reported allegations of serious human rights violations taking place in the recovered territories”. The OHCHR went on to say that government soldiers perpetrated numerous instances of ethnic-based violence, particularly against Arabic and Tuareg groups.

In a positive development, *Radio France Internationale (RFI)* reports, Boukary Daou, the editor of Mali’s *Le Republicain* newspaper was [released](#) on 15 March after ten days in jail without trial or charge. Daou was arrested on 06 March when his newspaper published an editorial scandalising the salary of Captain Amadou Sanogo. The retired captain reportedly receives USD 8,000 per month, a salary considered exorbitant by Malian standards, especially for an “ex-head of state”. Sanogo seized power during the coup but later relinquished control of the government. President Traore initially supported the decision to arrest Daou; however, Mali’s government reversed its stance after media protests [erupted](#) throughout the country and international outlets [condemned](#) his detention, reports *Reuters*.

In France, hundreds of protesters [rallied](#) in Paris, Marseille, Nimes, and Nantes demanding the release of four French hostages kidnapped in 2010 while working in Niger, reports *RFI*. Relatives of the hostages, expressed concern that the French intervention in Mali has placed the hostages at greater risk; the families demanded action to secure their release. The French government believes the hostages are alive; some experts suggest they may be held in the current conflict zone in northern Mali by militants affiliated with the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) insurgency.

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## Syria

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As the Syrian crisis enters its third year, UK Prime Minister David Cameron signalled his country would [consider vetoing](#) an extension to the European Union (EU) arms embargo on Syria, according to *BBC*. Cameron’s announcement comes after the government pledged armoured vehicles and body armour to opposition forces in Syria in order to “help save lives”. France also supports the easing of restrictions. Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel indicated that Germany would proceed “very cautiously” in [considering easing](#) the weapons embargo, reports *Bloomberg*. On 14 March, Turkey announced its [support](#) of French and British calls to arm the Syrian opposition, according to *World News*. However, on 15 March, EU leaders dismissed calls to lift the arms embargo, saying it feared that doing so would [spark an arms race](#) with Russia, according to the *Daily Monitor*. Regardless, French President Francois Hollande said that France is ready to “take its responsibilities” and [supply weapons](#) to Syria’s rebels even if it could convince EU countries to lift the current arms embargo, according to *EU Business*. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen [declined to comment](#) on the EU arms embargo issue on 18 March, indicating the issue was an EU question, reports *World News*. While denying any plans for a major-coordinated evacuation from Syria, [Russia airlifted](#) 103 of its citizens from Syria on an Il-62 airplane leaving from Latakia airport, according to *Gulf News*.

The opposition Syrian National Coalition is launching its most serious attempt yet to [form a rival government](#) to President Bashar Assad’s regime, according to *AP*. Coalition members convened in Turkey on 18 March to select an interim prime minister for the rebel-held areas. Twelve candidates already identified include economists, businessmen and a former Syrian cabinet minister. Late on 18 March, the coalition announced the election of [Prime Minister](#) Ghassan Hitto to lead the opposition government, reports the *New York Times*. Hitto, a Syrian living in exile in the United States, travelled to the Middle East in the fall of 2012 to learn more about the region and never returned to the US, instead committing himself to the service of Syria.

US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told the US Senate Intelligence Committee that Assad’s hold on power is “increasingly beleaguered”, which could make use of [chemical weapons](#) more attractive to the Syrian President, according to *United Press International (UPI)*. On 14 March, [Israel’s military intelligence](#) chief warned that the embattled Assad regime was preparing to use chemical weapons, reports *AP* and on 19 March *Reuters* reported a chemical attack on the village of [Khan al Assal](#) southwest of Aleppo. The Assad government contends rebels fired a Scud missile from Nairab, a rebel-held region. However, *BBC* reports that a senior rebel commander and spokesman for the Higher Military Council in Aleppo Qassim Saadeddine denied government allegations and instead placed responsibility for the attack on the Assad regime. Saadeddine stated “we were hearing reports from early this morning about a regime attack on Khan al Assal and we believe they [Assad forces] fired a Scud with chemical agents...then suddenly we learned that the regime was [turning these reports](#) against us. The rebels were not behind these attacks”. US President Barack Obama has warned Assad that any use of chemical weapons would be a “red line”. Israel threatened military action if chemical weapons were diverted to Hezbollah. A Foreign Office spokesperson for the UK stated, “The UK is clear that the use or proliferation of chemical weapons would [demand a serious response](#) from the international community and force us to revisit our approach so far”, according to *Reuters*.

President Assad defiantly announced on Syrian state news on 14 March that Syrian forces [may strike at rebels](#) hiding in neighbouring Lebanon if the Lebanese army failed to act to address the situation, according to *Reuters*. Syria again called on Lebanon to [stop arms smuggling](#) and the flow of gunmen into Syria from Lebanese territory. Syria indicated it would attack “armed gangs” in Lebanon if incursions into Syrian territory continued. Syria accused Jordan of opening its border to [jihadist fighters](#) to allow smuggling of weapons supplied by Saudi Arabia travelling through Croatia, reports *AFP*.

On 13 March, [mortars launched](#) from Syria on border villages in Akkar, Lebanon wounded one man, according to *The Daily Star*. The villagers reported they also faced machine-gun fire from the Syrian side of the border. On 15 March, a fuel tanker [exploded in Tripoli](#) injuring four people after gunmen torched the truck in an attempt to halt it from reaching Syria, reports *The Daily Star*. Militants also set fire to three trucks, including the tanker, at Tripoli's Abu Ali roundabout. On 16 March, *The Daily Star* reported that Assad forces again [opened gunfire](#) on a number of Lebanese villages near the border. In Beirut, [four Sunni Muslim](#) scholars were attacked on 17 March, according to *Reuters*. A group of men attacked two scholars in the Shi'ite-majority district of Khandak al Ghamik while two others were assaulted in Shiyah, another Shi'ite district in southern Beirut. The same day, mourners in southern Lebanon buried the body of a [Hezbollah member](#) killed in fighting in Syria, according to *AFP*. Sources close to Hezbollah said that the man died "while carrying out their jihadist duty". While Hezbollah acknowledges its members living in Syrian villages along the border with Lebanon have battled "armed groups" in self-defence, the organisation refuses to address allegations by Syrian rebels that it has sent fighters from Lebanon to bolster Assad's forces. On 18 March, Syrian jetfighters launched [three rockets](#), hitting empty buildings near the Lebanese town of Aarsal, according to *CNN*. There were no injuries, but the attacks risked igniting sectarian clashes in Lebanon. *AFP* reports that the UN Security Council expressed "grave concern" over [cross border attacks](#) between Syria and Lebanon in a united declaration on the Syrian conflict. The UN expressed concern over the numerous deadly clashes occurring along the shared border, as fighting is threatening to spill over the border. Meanwhile, Lebanese [citizens](#) are criticising Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict, according to *The Daily Star*.

Fighting continues in Syria as Assad troops shell rebel strongholds on the edge of Damascus from [multiple rocket launchers](#) situated on nearby hilltops, and battles for control of the Aleppo international airport intensified on 13 March, according to *The Daily Star*. Also, regime forces ambushed and killed an estimated thirty Syrian Army deserters as rebel fighters escorted the group to the safety of a rebel-held district. Later, on 16 March a [high-ranking Syrian general](#) defected from the Assad army, according to *NYT*.

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) António Guterres, the number of refugees leaving Syria has increased [from 3,000 to 8,000 per day](#) as the crisis continues, reports *CNN*. Guterres described the two-year-old Syrian crisis as an "existential threat" to Lebanon, according to *The Daily Star*. Visiting the cities of Beirut, Mount Lebanon and Tripoli, Guterres described the refugee situation in stark terms and called for more to be done in order to avert a looming humanitarian and political crisis in Lebanon. On 14 March, Amnesty International once again called on the UN Security Council to refer war crimes committed by both sides of the [on-going conflict](#) to the International Criminal Court (ICC), reports *AFP*. *Reuters* reports that the Syrian regime is expanding the [use of cluster bombs](#). According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Assad regime used 156 cluster bombs in 119 locations across the country over the past six months. Cluster bombs pose a threat to civilians as often the scattered smaller bomblets do not detonate immediately. Most countries have banned their use because of their on-going threat to civilian populations.

## IED & Demining

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*The CFC publishes a weekly IED and Demining Events map. This global compilation identifies and links to articles pertaining to IED events and demining efforts. This report covers 12 to 18 March 2013.*

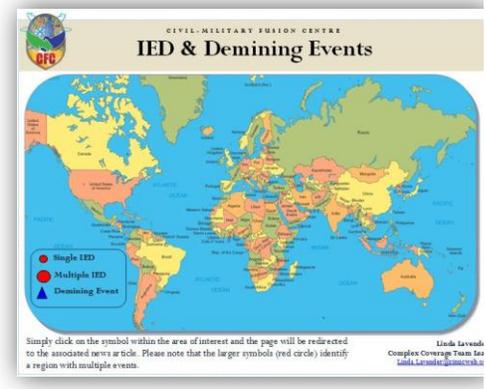
### GLOBAL NEWS

**Greece:** Greek anarchist [claim responsibility](#) for a bomb that went off at a local courier company. The blast damaged some vehicles parked outside the firm, according to *Reuters*.

**Somalia:** A [suicide bomber](#), targeting a senior Somali official, detonated his car in central Mogadishu killing at least ten people and missed the intended target, reports *Reuters*.

**United States:** Police found an explosive device, assault rifle, and pistol at a [Florida university](#) as they investigated the apparent suicide of a student in a college dormitory, according to *The Guardian*.

For more IED & Demining news [click here](#) or click on the map above.



[Lebanon At Risk: Conflict in Bekaa Valley](#)



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