This document provides complex coverage of global events from 13 – 26 November, with hyper-links 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.

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**Iraq**

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The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq has deployed additional military reinforcements to the disputed area of Iraq¹ where Kurdish troops are currently involved in a standoff with the Iraqi army, reports Reuters. In mid-November, Baghdad’s establishment of the Dijla Operations Command along the Kurdistan border has been viewed by the KRG as a threat to Kurds. Kurdistan’s President Massoud Barzani has declared Baghdad’s actions as unconstitutional and tensions between Baghdad and Kurdistan are high, according to EKurd, an online Kurdish News Agency. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki defends his actions stating that the military Dijla Operations Command is necessary to keep order in one of the most volatile parts of the country where terrorism against Shi’ites is on the rise. In an effort to diffuse tensions, Muqtada al-Sadr, head of the Sadrist Trend², attempted to arrange a meeting in Najaf where Barzani and Maliki could discuss the current crisis, reports Iraqi News. Declining the invitation, Barzani stated that he appreciated “Sadr’s call and confirms that the disputes between him and Maliki are not personal rather they are related to the problem of rule represented by neglecting the constitution and the concluded agreements”. Reuters reported that one person has already been killed in clashes between Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Iraqi troops on 16 November in Tuz Khurmato located in the disputed region of Iraq. Maliki warned the

¹ The disputed area of Iraq is an oil rich territory along the internal border of Iraq that demarcates the Kurdish region from the rest of Iraq.

² The Sadrist Trend was established by Moqtada al-Sadr in 2003 after the ouster of Saddam Hussein. In 2005, the Sadrist Trend won 30 seats in parliament.
Kurdish forces “not to change their positions or approach the (federal) armed forces”, after the deadly clash, according to Agence France-Presse (AFP). According to AFP, a Kurdish delegation was travelling to Baghdad on 27 November with the aim of reaching an agreement between the parties.

Rivals of Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki have started campaigning for term limits to the office of prime minister in an attempt to block Maliki’s run for a third term in 2014, reports Daily News. Kurdish parties, the Sunni-backed Iraqiya bloc and even some rivals within the Shi’ite coalition have submitted a proposed law in parliament that would stipulate a two term limit as prime minister. According to reports, Abbas al Biyati, a member of parliament from Maliki’s coalition said, “We will challenge it [term limits] and even if it is passed we will appeal in Federal Court”. The announcement by the Iraqi Cabinet to abolish the food ration card system in the country met with stiff resistance, reports Iraqi Business News. The card, which assists Iraqis with household staples, has been in place for over twenty years. The abolishment of the ration card has long been suggested by economic analyst; however, five days after the Cabinet’s controversial announcement, the decision was reversed.

The Iraqi government denied on 13 November that its decision to cancel a USD 4.2 million arms deal with Russia was influenced by consultations with the United States, reports Rita Novosti. Instead, Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki cited concerns over corruption as justification for the cancelling of the contract. The Iraqi government is considering signing a contract with General Dynamics for as many as 30 Stryker eight-wheel combat vehicles, Iraqi Business News reports. The USD 25 million deal would need to be submitted to the US Congress for final approval. The total value of all agreed and proposed military arms and equipment sales to Iraq from the US could be as much as USD 19.1 billion, this according to Stuart Bowen, US Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR). Approved agreements include a first installment of Lockheed Martin F-16 fighters and C-130J transports, General Dynamics M1A1 tanks, 35M Patrol Boats, Textron IA 407 Helicopters and maintenance, sustainment and training for those systems.

According to the Olive Group, 137 violent incidents occurred in Iraq from 12 to 18 November 2012. This is above the 2012 weekly average of 118 and surpasses the 123 incidents from the previous week. On 14 November, a series of coordinated bombs on the eve of the Islamic New Year killed at least fifteen people and wounded scores more, according to Middle East Online. On 17 November, a car bomb killed 7 people while 25 others were injured when a suicide bomber rammed his vehicle into two buses of Shi’ite pilgrims in the city of Tikrit, according to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). In the town of Khalis, a suicide car bomber drove his car into a police checkpoint on 19 November, killing two civilians and one police officer, reports Gulf Today. Also, a high ranking police officer was injured when an improvised explosive device (IED) targeting his patrol detonated north of Kirkuk, according to KUNA. Meanwhile, the commemoration of Ashura, one of the holiest days in the Shi’ite Muslim tradition, passed in Iraq without significant violence, according to CNN. Iraqi troops and police were on alert in Baghdad and the city of Karbala where two million Shi’ite pilgrims converged for the festival over the weekend.

Mali

Tuaregs aligned with the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA) rebel group attacked fighters from the Islamist group Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in the northern town of Gao on 16 November, according to Agence France-Presse (AFP). The defeated MNLA suffered about twelve causalities. In preparation for a possible new MNLA offensive, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which has links to MUJAO, sent reinforcements of about 300 fighters from Timbuktu to Gao. On 19 November, MUJAO and AQIM drove MNLA fighters from the northern town of Menaka, reports AFP. The MNLA planned to use the town, located close to the border of Niger, for their base of operations as they seek to reconquer areas currently held by MUJAO and AQIM.

It will take at least six months to train, equip and deploy a foreign-backed Malian military force to oust Islamist militants in the North of the country, reports Reuters. This preparation time allows for negotiations with rebels but also risks giving them an opportunity to refortify their positions. Once launched, military operations are expected to last 120 days. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has received support from the European Union, the United Nations, the United States and others in its efforts to combat extremism in Mali. A French defence minister stated that neither the French nor the rest of Europe will intervene militarily to oust Islamist militants in northern Mali but will support operations by providing intelligence and training, reports the Associated Press.
General Carter Ham of US Africa Command (AFRICOM) stated that they are ready to review requests to provide assistance in intelligence and logistics for the ECOWAS military force once ECOWAS presents its plan for military intervention to the UN Security Council on 26 November. According to US intelligence, any military intervention force will encounter an estimated 800-1200 “hardcore” fighters as well as “supporting entities and sympathisers”. In other defence news, aerial reconnaissance and targeted drone strikes are not as likely to be as successful as they would have been one year ago because Islamist fighters, previously located in desert camps or in the mountains, are now living in villages, towns and cities, reports the Guardian. Their numbers have also increased due to the “arrival of foreign fighters, recruitment of economically impoverished locals and the forced recruitment of children”. Finally, a militant cell that was training youths in Morocco to later fight in Mali was broken up by the Moroccan government on 24 November, reports Reuters.

There are conflicting reports on the recent announcement by Ansar Dine, that it will no longer impose Sharia law in northern Mali. An Ansar Dine official, Hamada Ag Bibi, was quoted as saying that the group is “waving application of Sharia law across the entire Mali territory” except in the city of Kidal, report Voice of America (VOA) and AFP. However, a spokesman for the Ansar Dine delegation in Burkina Faso, Mohamed Ag Aharid, later denied the group has changed its position on Sharia law and that the words spoken “are not the words of Ansar Dine”, only of the man who spoke them. Ansar Dine is responsible for at least three executions as part of efforts to impose a strict form of Islamic law. The group shares power in the North with foreign Islamist groups AQIM and MUJAO. Ansar Dine, however, has been in negotiations with Malian government officials and has sent envoys to Burkina Faso and Algeria in a bid to negotiate an end to the crisis, reports AFP. The group has called on other fighters in northern Mali to join them in political dialogue and has stated that they are ready to assist in ridding the region of terrorism and foreign groups. Unlike their AQIM and MUJAO counterparts, Ansar Dine comprises primarily Malian Tuareg and have stated that they “don’t agree with taking hostages and drug trafficking”.

A detailed report on the humanitarian situation in Mali published by the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) states that priority concerns within Mali include access to food, water and sanitation, protection of human rights, provision of education and access to health care. Needs are high for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in remote rural areas and for the newly displaced. Insecurity and increased violence have limited humanitarian access for both humanitarian actors and the affected population. Constraints include “road blockages, checkpoints, attacks on humanitarian personnel and goods as well as kidnapping for ransom of international staff”. Humanitarian access has improved slightly in areas with government presence and where access has been negotiated between the government and armed groups.

In Timbuktu, northern Mali, a local official said AQIM arrested dozens of women on 15 November for not wearing a veil, reports AFP. The women were taken from their homes and are being imprisoned at an abandoned bank. AQIM militants have vowed to crackdown in the city, which it shares with Ansar Dine. MUJAO has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of a French citizen on 21 November in south-western Mali near the Mauritanian border, reports al Jazeera. The kidnapping brings the total number of people held by force in Mali to thirteen, seven of whom are French nationals. The victim, identified as 61-year-old Jules Berto Rodriguez Leal, appeared in a video made available 26 November asking the “French government to satisfy the demands of MUJAO”, reports the Associated Press (AP).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has reached a USD 18 million loan agreement with Mali that is subject to approval by IMF’s board early next year. The loan is a part of the IMF’s Rapid Credit Facility which quickly distributes funds to impoverished countries recovering from natural disasters or conflict. Mali’s economy has suffered as a result of conflict since a military coup in March 2012 and a poor harvest.

Syria

40,000 people have been killed in Syria’s twenty month long conflict, reports Reuters. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights asserts that half of the casualties are civilian while the other half comprises both government and rebel fighters. Save the Children, an international humanitarian organisation, is concerned that 200,000 Syrian refugee children are at significant risk of exposure from the impending winter, reports BBC. Over two million internally displaced persons (IDPs) are also at risk, lacking proper shelter and clothing while approximately 400,000 Syrian refugees have been officially registered by the UN in neighbouring countries. The UN anticipates the number of refugees to reach 700,000 by the end of 2012. According to the New York Times (NYT), humanitarian efforts have been hampered by lack of access to unsecure regions of Syria as well as significant funding shortfalls. While the UN’s Syrian appeal seeks USD 487 million, only thirty-five per cent has been collected. Aid agencies report that as least twenty areas within Syria are inaccessible because of fighting. The Syrian government has allowed eight foreign aid agencies to operate within the country, all of which were already working within the country when the conflict erupted. The Syrian conflict has devastated the country’s...
Turkey scrambled fighter jets to its south-eastern border with Syria on 14 November in response to a renewed Syrian air assault of the rebel-held frontier town of Ras al-Ain, reports Reuters. Syrian President Bashar al Assad’s air force has been bombing Ras al-Ain for days, trying to dislodge anti-Assad rebels who overran the town last week during an advance into Syria’s mixed Arab and Kurdish northeastern regions. Also, on 15 November, shots were fired from Syria towards Israeli soldiers stationed in the occupied Golan Heights, reports Reuters. NATO’s Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told reporters on 21 November that the organisation would consider Turkey’s request for the deployment of Patriot missiles along the Turkish-Syrian border “without delay”. In the days ahead, a NATO joint team will visit Turkey to conduct a site-survey for the possible deployment of Patriots. Turkey has requested the missiles for defensive purposes only. In response, Russian leadership warned against NATO’s possible missile deployment asserting that introducing missiles into the region would not promote stability, according to Voice of America (VOA). On 23 November, the Syrian government joined with Russia in condemning Turkey’s request to NATO stating that it was “a provocative” move by Ankara, according to Reuters. Iran called Turkey’s request for Patriot missiles “counterproductive”, according to AFP.

European Union (EU) foreign ministers stated that they view the newly-formed National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as “legitimate representatives” of the Syrian people, reports al Jazeera. The coalition, formed on 11 November and headed by Ahmad Mouaz al Khatib was first recognised as the sole representative of the Syrian people by the French government on 13 November. Italy also recognised the coalition’s legitimacy on 19 November. Meanwhile on 20 November, the United Kingdom formally recognised the National Coalition as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people, reports the Guardian. Additionally the UK pledged USD 1.6 million in communications equipment to the opposition and intends to deploy a “stabilisation response team to help the NC [National Coalition] meet people’s basic needs in opposition-held areas”. As of 14 November, according to Bloomberg, the US was not ready to recognise the National Coalition as the government in exile. Meanwhile, Qatar has asked the National Coalition to name an ambassador to the Gulf State, according to Reuters. Qatar, along with five other Gulf States, has fully recognised the new coalition. BBC reports that al Nusra Front and Liwa al Tawhid, jihadist groups fighting within Syria and among the armed opposition, have rejected recognising the coalition, instead stating that they seek to institute an Islamic state.

Kurdish fighters loyal to the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) which has close ties to the militant Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)3 in Turkey have been engaged in fighting against the jihadist group al Nusra Front and allied Ghuraba al Sham in Ras al-Ain on the border with Turkey, according to AFP. The two Kurdish organisations determined to join forces in combatting jihadist fighters who communicated their intent of taking the provincial capital of Hasakeh, which is predominantly Kurdish. In July 2012, Assad forces withdrew from the largely Kurdish north and northeastern Syrian region. While largely opposing the Assad regime, most Kurds have sought to remain neutral in the conflict. According to VOA, Kurdish leadership have been hesitant to join opposition efforts saying that opposition groups have not given adequate support for Syrian Kurdish autonomy in a post-Assad Syria.

Seizing three Syrian military bases in less than one week has yielded a large number of weapons for rebel forces, who have been in desperate need of supplies, according to the Guardian. The base seizures highlight the difficulty the Assad regime faces securing its outposts from rebel force encroachment. In recent days, rebel forces have worked to cut off access to Aleppo from Assad forces throughout neighbouring Raqa province while Syrian forces seek to destroy rebel strongholds in the capital of Damascus, according to AFP. On 26 November a cluster bomb dropped by government warplanes in Damascus landed in a playground killing ten children, according to BBC. The bombing, caught on video, is a serious violation under the Geneva Convention. Finally, in a sign of growing confidence, rebel officers have formed the Free Officers Assembly to begin the work of forming a future army and to begin liaising with the Syrian political opposition.

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3 PKK is considered by NATO, US, EU and Turkey as a terrorist organisation.

27 November 2012
IED & Demining

The CFC now publishes a weekly IED and Demining Events map. This global compilation identifies and links to articles pertaining to IED events as well as demining efforts.

GLOBAL NEWS

Egypt – In Cairo, the offices of satellite broadcaster *al Jazeera* was firebombed on 21 November during the third day of violence protesting the presidential decree made by President Morsi earlier in the week that granted him sweeping new powers, reports *all Africa*.

Nigeria – Two bombs, detonated inside a church, killed eleven people and wounded thirty others in Jaji, Nigeria on 25 November, reports *CNN*. Two suicide bombers drove separate vehicles into the church facility where they detonated. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack although it is suspected that it was the work of jihadist group Boko Haram.

Poland – *The Guardian* reports that a Polish university researcher has been arrested on suspicion of planning to detonate a four tonne bomb in front of the Polish Parliament building in Warsaw. The plan was discovered while investigators were looking into possible Polish links to the Norwegian mass murderer, Anders Behring Breivik.

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