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CONTACT THE CFC

For further information, contact:

Complex Coverage Team Leader
Linda Lavender
linda.lavender@cimicweb.org

Complex Coverage Desk Officer
Angelia Sanders
angelia.sanders@cimicweb.org

This document provides complex coverage of global events from 23 – 29 October, 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.

Iraq

Linda Lavender  »  linda.lavender@cimicweb.org

While travelling through Iraqi airspace on 27 October, an Iranian cargo plane bound for Syria was forced to land for inspection, reports the Associated Press (AP). Iraqi authorities reported after the inspection that the Iranian plane carried medical supplies and “foodstuffs” and was permitted to continue on to Syria. The move appeared to be aimed at easing US concerns that Iraq has become a route for shipments of Iranian military supplies intended to support the Assad regime. This is the second time in the past month that Iraq has ordered an Iranian cargo plane to land for inspection. Recently, the Iraqi government banned a North Korean plane from using Iraqi airspace on suspicion that it was carrying weapons to support the Syrian government.

Waves of attacks throughout Iraq on 28 October left 31 dead and nearly 100 others wounded during the second day of the Muslim festival of Eid al Adha, according to CNN. Sadr City, a Shi‘ite Baghdad neighbourhood, experienced two car bombs and a roadside bomb near an outdoor market that killed at least 14 people and wounded 52 others. On the same day, five Shi‘ite pilgrims were killed when their minibus struck a roadside bomb while on route to visit al Askariya, also known as “The Golden Mosque”. In the Shi‘ite Baghdad neighbourhood of al Mamel, a roadside bomb killed five people. Simultaneous explosions near a village market in the southeastern city of Madain killed three people. Also, in Mosul five people were killed and seven wounded during gun attacks and explosions targeting those from the Muslim minority sect Shabak. In an Internet statement, a Sunni extremist group with links to al Qaeda called the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), claimed responsibility for the wave of weekend attacks in Iraq, according to CNN.
Kurdistan’s oil has begun to reach international markets via oil deals which circumvent the central Iraqi government, in a development largely understood to have exacerbated tensions between Kurdistan and Baghdad, reports Reuters. The move paves the way towards greater Kurdish autonomy while raising the specter of diplomatic conflict with Baghdad, which has long maintained its sole right to market Iraqi oil and gas products. However, the involvement of two of the world’s largest trading houses, Trafigura and Vitol, could make it difficult for Baghdad to retaliate. A spokesperson for the Iraqi government likened the Kurdistan actions to smuggling. In other economic news, the Iraqi Ministry of Energy has plans to build power stations that operate on solar and wind generated energy in a number of provinces across Iraq, according to al Shofa, an Iraqi news service. The development of these stations will meet the needs of people living in the remote provinces of Basra, Anbar, al Muthanna and Thiqar who lack access to Iraq’s traditional energy grid. The renewable energy initiative will help Iraq to fulfill commitments stipulated in the international Kyoto Protocol environment agreement that Iraq ratified in 2009.

The Iraqi parliament has postponed debate on a controversial amnesty law that could potentially facilitate the release of thousands of convicted and suspected killers, reports the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). Opponents of the law point to a similar law passed four years earlier that released criminals and killers “who went on to commit more crimes”. Aqūk ak Turayhi, Inspector General of the Iraqi Interior Ministry, questioned why some of Iraq’s worst criminals should be released “en masse”. Some critics believe the push for the amnesty law by Sunni Arab political factions is politically motivated, as most of those currently detained are Sunni insurgents. Both Shi’ite and Sunni lawmakers who support the law state that anyone convicted of a terrorist attack would not be eligible for release.

A recent study suggests that Iraqi children in Basra and Fallujah are among the youngest casualties of war, according to Foreign Policy. The study, funded by the University of Michigan, found an “astonishing increase in the number of birth defects in a Basra maternal hospital” in the war’s aftermath when compared to rates before the war. From October 1994 to October 1995 there were 1.37 birth defects at the Basra Maternal Hospital for every 1,000 live births. By 2009, the same hospital “witnessed a staggering 48 birth defects per 1,000 live births”. The study posits that exposure to mercury and lead is to blame for the rise in birth defects. Some theorise that fighting in the region in 2004 compromised infrastructure which may have allowed heavy metals to leak into local water and sewage systems, thereby impacting the local community, according to the Christian Science Monitor. In other humanitarian news, Iraqi Kurds living in the United Kingdom have begun an advocacy campaign to raise awareness over the mass murder of the Kurdish people in Iraq in the late 1980s and to receive formal genocide status, according to BBC. The advocacy campaign is petitioning the UK government to declare the mass killings genocide and to press other European Union countries to follow suit.

Angelina Sanders ➤ angelia.sanders@cimicweb.org

A MSNBC World News report suggests that international security experts now frequently refer to northern Mali as “the new Afghanistan”. Western officials, however, do not expect a military intervention to reclaim northern Mali from Islamic extremists, supported by troops from neighbouring countries and other African Union states, to begin until next year, it could take months to prepare for an engagement and secure a UN Security Council resolution to authorise the action, reports al Jazeera.

An anticipated offensive by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to reclaim northern Mali has resulted in the migration of hundreds of al Qaeda affiliated jihadists to the region from Algeria and Sudan, according to United Press International (UPI). Islamists arriving in the northern city of Gao have been reporting to the Islamic police of the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), reports AFP. MUJAO has confirmed it was receiving the support of foreigners and at least one resident reported that he had seen about ten pickup trucks packed with armed fighters driving up to MUJAO’s main office in Gao. French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian stated, “the Sahel is becoming a sanctuary for terrorism… [and] the safety of Europe and of France is at stake here”. A major military intervention in Mali is likely to produce heavy fighting that could potentially exacerbate political, social and economic turmoil in the region still recovering from the Arab Spring. Intelligence sources report that Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) has established airstrips, military bases, army dumps and training camps in addition to having the capacity to recruit disillusioned and desperate young adults throughout the world.

Meanwhile, the United States has stepped up intelligence gathering operations in the region through the use of spy drones. A French defence official stated that France plans to move two surveillance drones from Afghanistan to West Africa by the end of the year, reports AP. France will also hold talks with the US in Paris this week on intelligence gathering and security in the Sahel region, including Mali. Reuters reports that France has placed ground vehicles and three light aircraft in neighbouring Burkina Faso to monitor events in northern Mali. Guido Westerwelle, Germany’s Foreign Minister, echoed France’s call for European support in Mali, stating that “Europe must help restore security in Mali”, and that Germany would participate in training Malian troops, reports Reuters. Finally, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton travelled to Algeria on 28 October to meet with Algeria’s president to discuss the crisis in Mali, reports AP.
In other diplomatic developments, the African Union (AU) has lifted sanctions against Mali that were imposed after the March 2012 military coup, reports BBC. The AU went further, endorsing a plan that calls for new elections and a return to law and order in Mali. Algeria recently gave its tacit approval for military intervention in northern Mali despite concerns it may push al Qaeda militants and Malian refugees into its southern territory, reports Reuters. Algeria has indicated however, it will not directly support the mission.

US and Swiss officials report that, although governments deny they pay ransoms for kidnapped expatriates, the reality is that ransoms are frequently paid to militant groups, driving a multimillion dollar kidnap and ransom industry in West Africa, according to NBC News. Militants boast that “it is the Western countries that are financing terrorism and jihad through their ransom payments”. Western and regional security officials indicate that the kidnapping/ransom industry has netted AQIM tens of millions of US dollars. Ransoms have facilitated operations for the jihadists groups who use the money to buy food, fuel, weapons and support from local populations.

In humanitarian news, at the conclusion of a three-day visit to Mali and Niger, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) president Peter Maurer cautioned that military intervention and renewed hostilities in the region would only exacerbate the current humanitarian crisis. Food, water and medicine are already needed in significant quantities in order to address current needs. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that 4.6 million people are at risk of food insecurity. More than 410,000 people have fled Islamic extremists in the north and approximately half of those have sought refuge in in neighbouring countries. Also, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) reports that, as families impacted by the drought in the Sahel struggle to recover from the food crisis, tens of millions of locusts threaten the new harvest. To counter the threat, WFP has air lifted thousands of litres of insecticide to Sahel countries.

Syria

More than 360,000 Syrian refugees are in need of humanitarian assistance as winter approaches, with those numbers likely to increase to 710,000 by year’s end, reports the New York Times (NYT). UN officials say that preparations for the approaching winter are being complicated by a lack of funding for countries hosting refugee populations. Only one-third of the USD 488 million required to support refugees with food, housing and clothing has been raised. Ron Redmond a spokesman for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that 4.6 million people are at risk of food insecurity. More than 410,000 people have fled Islamic extremists in the north and approximately half of those have sought refuge in in neighbouring countries. Also, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) reports that, as families impacted by the drought in the Sahel struggle to recover from the food crisis, tens of millions of locusts threaten the new harvest. To counter the threat, WFP has air lifted thousands of litres of insecticide to Sahel countries.

No casualties were reported after an anti-aircraft shell fired from Syrian territory struck a Turkish health clinic across the border in Hayat province on 23 October, according to Reuters. Since 03 October, when a stray mortar killed 5 Turkish citizens, the Turkish military has fired on Syria 87 times, killing 12 Syrian soldiers and destroying a number of tanks, in retaliation for continued Syrian mortar attacks on Turkey. According to Turkey’s Chief of Staff General Necdet Ozel, Turkish troops would begin to respond “with greater force” if Syrian shellings continued. In the wake of violence that broke out after the assassination of Lebanese General Wissam al Hassan on 19 October, the Lebanese Army has been working to restore order in the country, reports Reuters. As of 23 October, the Lebanese army said it had secured a ceasefire in the northern city of Tripoli after at least ten people were killed and 65 others were wounded in recent violence, mostly between Sunni and Alawite Muslim communities.

Linda Lavender ➤ linda.lavender@cimicweb.org

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Source: Syrian Revolution Martyr Database as of 29 Oct 2012

Death Toll in Syria (as of 29 Oct 2012)
UN-Arab League envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi announced on 23 October that the Syrian government, along with many rebel leaders, had agreed to a ceasefire during the Muslim holiday of Eid al Adha, according to AP. However, preparations for the ceasefire suffered a significant setback when Jabhat al Nusra, an al Qaeda-affiliated militant group, rejected the ceasefire proposal and by 24 October, the truce had broken down and fighting resumed. As Eid al Adha began, scores of people were killed when a car bomb detonated in Damascus, reports Agence France-Presse (AFP). Throughout the Muslim holiday, Syrian fighter jets bombarded a rebel stronghold in Damascus, while explosions, mortar attacks and gunfire could be heard throughout the country’s largest city Aleppo, reports al Jazeera. AP reports that twenty-two people were killed in clashes between Syrian rebels and Kurdish militia men in Aleppo. Fighting broke out after rebels moved into the largely Kurdish area of the city. Kurds have attempted to steer a middle course in the Syrian conflict and rebels had assured Kurds they would not bring fighting into Kurdish neighbourhoods in Aleppo. On 29 October, Damascus shook with loud explosions as Syrian war planes pummelled the city. Reports indicate that the attacks were the most severe the city has experienced. Shortly after the air attacks, a car bombing in the predominately Christian and Druze area of Jaramana outside of Damascus killed at least ten people, reports the Telegraph. According to AP, Chinese news agencies are reporting that Chinese Muslims from the ethnically tense, northwestern region of Xinjiang are fighting with al Qaeda and other rebel groups against the Assad regime in Syria. The Chinese report has not immediately been verified.

In other news, after decades of oppression under the Assad government, the Syrian conflict has allowed the Kurdish population to taste autonomy and freedom, reports NBC. The largest ethnic group in the world without a homeland, the Kurds in Syria are experiencing a burgeoning civil society after Syrian troops retreated from the northeastern region of Syria, known as Rojava, three months earlier.

**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 – Five people were arrested in Nasr City, Egypt suspected of hiding weapons and explosives in a building, according to Egypt Independent. The arrests yielded the discovery of seventeen bombs, four RPGs and huge amounts of ammunition. It was not known if the individuals were members of al Qaeda or another militant group.

Israel – Israeli authorities indicated that in any future war with Hezbollah, it would use fewer cluster munitions than it did in the 2006 conflict with the Lebanese-based group, according to Reuters. The disclosure confirms that Israel has detailed plans for an offensive against the Iranian-backed organisation.

Japan – Flights were cancelled and the Sendai airport closed after a 250 kg bomb was uncovered during construction near a runway, reports The Guardian. The American-made device appeared to have a working detonator and bomb experts were determining whether to remove the bomb or to detonate it in place. It was anticipated the airport would reopen 31 October.

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