This document provides complex coverage of global events from 16 – 22 April 2013 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.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED/Demining</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Iraq

In days leading up to the 20 April provincial elections, waves of deadly bombings and political assassinations persisted across Iraq, according to CNN. Four blasts in the Baghdad area killed three and wounded sixteen others on 17 April. That evening in Fallujah, Maarouf Ahmed al Kobaisi, a provincial candidate, was assassinated in a drive-by shooting. Denise Natali, an Iraq expert from the National Defense University, indicates that the violence is driven by internal political disputes and deep political divisions in Iraq, raising concern that Iraq’s armed forces may not have the political support and “unity of force” to secure the country, reports Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). On 18 April United Press International (UPI) reported that a Mosul car-bomb attack left three Iraqi army soldiers dead and five others wounded.

Electoral turnout for the 20 April provincial elections stood at 51 per cent, in the country’s first elections since the withdrawal of US troops in December 2011, according to The Daily Star. The Wall Street Journal reports voter turnout was “a far cry from the 73 per cent” in the 2009 elections, according to Iraq’s Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC). Ramzy Mardini, a fellow at the Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies, said, “the fact that these elections are taking place means very little for Iraqi democracy”. Voting took place in twelve of Iraq’s eighteen provinces, according to Al Jazeera. In Baghdad, turnout was reported at 33 per cent. More than 8,000 candidates ran for nearly 450 provincial seats. Preliminary voting results will be announced on 24 April. An estimated 15.5 million Iraqi citizens and approximately 650,000 military and police
forces, are eligible to vote, reports RFE/RL. No elections took place in the three Kurdish provinces while elections were postponed in other Iraqi provinces as a result of insecurity. Al Jazeera reports there were isolated incidents of polling violence. Four people were injured after bombs and mortars hit a polling station in Latifiya, south of Baghdad, and explosions struck at least four other towns without injuries.

In other security news, on 17 April Iraqi forces failed to capture Izzat Ibrahim al Duri, Saddam Hussein’s Vice President and the highest ranking fugitive of the Saddam regime, after receiving information that he was hiding in the town of Dur in Salaheddin province, reports Agence France-Presse (AFP). Over the past year, Duri has re-emerged and made rare public announcements.

On 16 April, the Shi’ite-led government of Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki executed 21 convicted terrorists, contributing to a total of 50 executions carried out year-to-date, according to UPSI. In response, the United Nations urged Iraq to suspend the use of the death penalty, noting that only China and Iran have higher capital punishment rates in the world, according to Reuters. Martin Kobler, UN Special Envoy to Iraq states, “I regret that repeated calls of the United Nations to suspend the implementation of death sentences were not heard”, urging the Iraqi government once again to “immediately suspend all pending death sentences and to apply without delay the moratorium”.

After the completion of a pipeline connecting Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey, expected in the third quarter 2012, Kurdistan will be capable of exporting its crude directly to world markets, reports Reuters. Crude from the Genel Energy Taq Taq oilfield will enter the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline at Fishkhabur pumping station near the Turkish border, from which it will flow directly to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. The move will help Kurdistan increase oil exports but may further exacerbate tensions with Iraq’s central government. The Kurdish region is already at odds over the constitutionality of its recent policies regarding oil rights.

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reports that development and humanitarian indicators for Iraq show “a decade of fits and starts, with progress in one area met by stagnation in another”. While noting that statistics in Iraq are often “wrong, simply not available or politically misused”, IRIN states the best available data offers a complex picture of a country that has seen improvements in the past decade but is still largely struggling. A review of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Iraq shows significant progress in eradicating poverty; however, there is slow progress in primary education enrolment which continues to lag behind 1990 levels. Also, one million Iraqis remain refugees and over one million continue to be internally displaced. Women and girls, who once enjoyed more rights than other women in the region, are now regularly excluded from school and work. IRIN concludes “there is no easy narrative” to describe Iraq’s progress over the past ten years.

Mali

The United Nations Security Council will likely approve a peacekeeping operation (PKO) before the end of April, reports Reuters. A draft resolution for a 12,600-strong PKO force was introduced on 15 April and circulated throughout the council last week for review of the mission’s mandate. Agence France-Presse (AFP) informs the proposed PKO will be named the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), comprising 11,200 troops and 1,440 police. Troop deployment could begin as early as 01 July, but the date is contingent on security conditions, as “blue helmets” are not expected to engage in counter-terrorism operations. French troops will intervene when MINUSMA peacekeepers fall “under imminent and serious threat and upon the request of the secretary-general”. MINUSMA will be the fourth largest UN PKO at an annual cost of USD 800 million. African countries are expected to contribute the vast majority of troops. Withdrawn last week from Mali, Chadian forces will likely re-engage under a UN mandate. In addition, Mauritania committed 1,800 troops on 18 April, according to Reuters. European Union (EU) ministers met on 22 and 23 April, where EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton reported on EU funding for the African-led International Support Mission for Mali (AFISMA). Ministers also discussed preparations for a 15 May donor conference on Mali and technicalities surrounding the expected transfer of the AFISMA mission to a UN PKO.

Economic and political factors figured heavily into the decision by Chad’s government to withdraw its troops from Mali, according to an analysis by African Arguments. From the onset, two-thousand Chadian soldiers were deployed to Mali in January 2013, but Chadian President Idriss Deby began withdrawing troops from Mali on 15 April, reports BBC. Deby said the soldiers, trained in desert combat were not prepared for urban guerrilla warfare which will likely constitute the remaining combat operations. According to the African Arguments report, the deployment generated positive public relations by bolstering Chad as a regional power, improving its relations with France, as well providing justification for the administration’s decision to reallocate USD 600 million of oil revenues, earmarked for social programmes, to the purchase of military equipment. However, Chadian troops suffered 30 casualties and the country spent EUR 90 million (USD 117 million) to date. Parliament Member Rhakis Saleh explained the government had increasing needs.

1 “Blue helmet” is the term commonly used to describe military personnel deployed by the UN Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO), in reference to their identifiable blue helmets.
difficulty in justifying the costly mission to Chadian citizens. “Of course the cause is noble, but the hundreds of billions of CFA francs we have spent in this war could have helped to solve many of our own problems”. The African Arguments analysis predicts that Chad will likely re-join a UN-funded PKO, which would maintain the country’s image as a regional power. Canadian forces also ended their mission to Mali in early April with no official announcement or explanation, reports Ottawa Citizen.

The Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA) captured Ber, a town of 9,000 people located 50 kilometres east of Timbuktu, according to AFP. The MAA purports to back France against National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) militants. Mohammad El Maouloud Ramadane, spokesperson for the MAA, said that as many as 200 fighters from the Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA) attempted to wrest control of the town on 19 April; however, these numbers are unconfirmed. According to the Associated Press (AP), the invading force was limited to five vehicles. MIA, a militia that consists of ethnic Tuaregs, recently splintered from the al Qaeda-linked Ansar Dine Islamist group after the French invasion. Ansar Dine fighters suffered another loss when a leader of the organisation surrendered in Algeria after an attempt on his life, according to The Washington Post. Senda Ould Boumanna, a spokesperson for Ansar Dine, contacted the North African media outlet Nouakchott Information Agency (ANI) after surviving an alleged assassination attempt and marching eighty kilometres to the Algerian border. He seeks extradition to his native Mauritania.

In northern Mali, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reports that locals are requesting Malian government officials to return to their posts; many fled to Bamako when fighting broke out and have yet to return from the country’s south. In Kidal, the rebel MNLA group has named a governor and advisors while state officials responsible for health, education, energy and planning have yet to return.

The UN faces a significant “funding gap” as it seeks to accommodate 457,000 people displaced from the Malian conflict and international organisations, meanwhile, warn of the deteriorating humanitarian conditions during Mali’s “lean season” from April to June, according to AFP. The World Food Programme (WFP) reported that one in five northern families already face extreme food shortages, a figure that will likely increase. WFP country director, Sally Haydock, said access to household goods dried up in early April. According to Haydock, “The areas around Timbuktu are unsecured and difficult to access, markets are not functioning properly, food prices are high, fuel prices are high, and there is a lack of liquidity, which means that people are not able to buy the basic necessities”. On 19 April, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) warned that it faced a critical shortfall from donors, having received just thirty per cent of an emergency request for USD 144 million. USAID’s FEWS NET continues to predict a food crisis in April 2013. Further, the UN reports that only 26 per cent of requested emergency humanitarian response funds have been met. Finally, the UN Security Council published a list of militias responsible for rape and sexual violence, according to AP. It condemned Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), MNLA and Ansar Dine for perpetrating war crimes and using rape as a “tactic of war”. Zainab Hawa Bangura, a Special Representative for the Secretary General delivered the report, saying, “We stand in solidarity with the many thousands of victims and survivors around the world”.

Syria

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) António Guterres stated there had “not been an inch of progress towards a political solution” in Syria, reports The Guardian. Guterres warns that more than half of the Syrian population will likely require humanitarian aid by the end of 2013. Since February 2013, 8,000 Syrians flee daily across the Syrian border seeking assistance. Additionally the UN reports there are an estimated 3 million internally displaced Syrians, many with limited means to provide for themselves or their families. UNHCR reports that refugee camps in Jordan, southern Turkey and Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley are overwhelmed with daily arrivals. While addressing the UN Security Council on 19 April, the UNCHR head, who led the organisation through the worst of the refugee crises in Afghanistan and Iraq, asserts, “[t]here is a real threat to Lebanon and Iraq. Jordan is under serious economic stress. We have the Palestinian/Israeli question and the fact that the Syrian army has withdrawn from the Golan Heights. In the context of the Sunni-Shi’ite divide, all the key actors are involved. Even compared to Afghanistan the geopolitical implications and the threat to global stability are profound. It’s the most dangerous of all crises”. In other humanitarian news, a brief cease-fire on 16 April allowed aid workers in Aleppo to gather thirty-one decaying bodies from the rubble of the conflict’s front line, reports Reuters. It was the first truce between the warring groups in months.

The UN Security Council accused Syria’s army and intelligence agency, along with the pro-government Shabiha militia, of being “sexual war criminals” for rape and assaults against women and children, according to The Daily Star. The declaration came after the completion an investigation in Syria from 2012 and 2013 by an independent international commission of inquiry.

A riot in Jordan’s largest refugee camp, Zaatari, on 20 April resulted in the injury of ten Jordanian security officers and temporarily restricted water deliveries to refugees, according to The New York Times (NYT). The camp is the scene of daily demonstrations from
residents who wish to leave and others who protest over the alleged assault of women by security officers. Zaatari is currently home to an estimated 500,000 Syrian refugees. The Washington Post reports that anti-Syrian refugee sentiment is festering in Jordan. In the early days of the conflict, Syrians were welcomed in Jordan as “brothers”. However, as the Syrian population swells and refugees continue to “put down roots in Jordan”, the strain on resources has transformed the goodwill to hostility.

The Daily Star reports that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov “slammed the Friends of Syria group”, comprising Western and Arab countries, for undermining dialogue that could end the two year old conflict. Lavrov’s comments came days before the 20 April meeting of the group in Istanbul. NYT reports that US Secretary of State John Kerry was travelling to Istanbul to attend the meeting. Kerry seeks to identify “what accelerants to Assad’s departure might make the most sense”, adding that the opposition was making steady progress. While attending the Friends of Syria meeting, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle called for the Syrian opposition to distance itself from extremist forces in Syria and re-iterated Germany’s reluctance to arm rebel fighters, according to Reuters. The US pledged an additional USD 123 million in continuing non-lethal aid to Syrian rebels, but stopped short of supplying weapons to opposition groups, reports Al Jazeera. Kerry reported that the distribution of all non-lethal aid and assistance would occur through FSA General Salim Idris, which is considered a major step forward in assuring aid did not fall into the hands of more extremist groups fighting against the Assad regime, according to Voice of America (VOA). Meanwhile, the Syrian opposition reacted angrily over the US and Western allies’ decision not to arm rebels, resulting in the resignation of Syrian National Coalition leader Ahmed Moas al Khatib, reports The Guardian. AFP reports that shortly after Khatib’s resignation, the coalition named veteran dissident George Sabra as caretaker leader until leadership elections can be held later in 2013.Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) is set to ease its oil embargo against Syria, in favour of opposition groups within the country, reports AFP. The measure enables EU companies on a case-by-case basis to import Syrian crude and export oil production technology and investment cash into rebel-held areas of Syria. It is hoped the move will assist in meeting humanitarian needs, restore normal life, provide for basic services, begin reconstruction and resume economic activities.

On 18 April, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended his country’s right to prevent weapons from falling into the “wrong hands in Syria”, according to BBC. Netanyahu maintains that if terrorists seized anti-aircraft or chemical weapons it could be a “game changer”. He also iterated Israel’s desire to avoid military confrontation within the region. On 22 April, Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon “implicitly confirmed Israel was behind a January strike on a weapons convoy in Syria”, according to AFP. Also, UPI reports on 22 April that Jordan agreed to allow Israel use of its airspace in efforts to monitor the Syrian conflict and possible weapon transfers. Tensions in the Golan Heights are at their highest since the 1973 Yom Kippur War cease-fire agreement, reports The Washington Post. Gunfire and mortar rounds launched from Syria have landed on the Israeli side of the border. Fire has been returned by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) five times since November 2012. IDF Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner states “[within Syria] we see a deterioration of the general chain of command”, adding “that’s why we’ve had a number of incidents from people who took the initiative and shot a couple of rounds”. The US army is deploying 200 soldiers, mostly operational planners, to Jordan to help contain violence at the Syrian border and “plan for any operations needed to ensure the safety of chemical weapons in Syria”, reports the AP.

In what activists deem an empty gesture, Syrian President Bashar al Assad offered rebel fighters amnesty terms on 16 April, reports AFP. In hopes to persuade rebel fighters to cease hostilities, Assad states “the death penalty will be replaced with a life sentence of hard labour” for those fighting against the Assad government. However, those who financed rebels or who committed acts of terrorism would not be exempt from the death penalty. On 17 April, Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon, Ali Abdel-Karim Ali denied receiving a letter of complaint from Lebanon’s Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour protesting the recent cross border attacks in Lebanon, according to The Daily Star. Mansour, tasked earlier in April to send a letter of complaint to Syrian authorities, said “[I] was preparing to file an official complaint”. The internationally recognised Syrian National Coalition asked Lebanese leadership to control its frontier border with Syria on 16 April, according to The Daily Star. The request came after Syrian rebels reported they had returned fire across the border days earlier in retaliation against Lebanese–Hezbollah attacks. At the same time, the coalition called on Free Syrian Army battalions in Homs province to show restraint and to “respect the sovereign borders of Lebanon”. Meanwhile, Hezbollah leadership states that its organisation has every right to defend Lebanese citizens living in Syrian border villages calling it a “national and moral duty”, reports The Daily Star. Finally, on 22 April, The Daily Star reports two Lebanese Salafist sheikhs called for a jihad in an effort to defend “Sunnis in war ravaged Syria”. According to the report, the call for jihad is a direct result and reaction to Hezbollah’s involvement in the Syrian conflict. The declaration came after a series of reports that Hezbollah fighters were taking the lead in Assad regime’s battle against Sunni rebels in the town of al Qusayr. Sheikh Ahmad Assir moved to establish what he termed “Free Resistance Brigades” starting from Sidon and urged Sunni scholars to endorse his decision.

In Homs village, near the Lebanese border, Syrian government rocket fire killed an estimated twelve people on 17 April, reports The Daily Star. Also, fierce fighting continued in the northwest province of Idlib as Syrian forces attempt to capture a vital highway linking Aleppo with Damascus. After five days of heavy fighting, on 22 April, Syrian government troops seized Jdaidet al Fadl, a town near Damascus, killing over 200 people including women and children, reports UPI. Additionally Syrian forces carried out mass arrests as residents attempted to bury the dead. The recent government victory comes as it attempts to break a ring of rebel-held areas around the country’s capital city. On 21 April, Syrian activists also reported that government forces killed 350 people in Artouz, south-west of Damascus, reports The Guardian. Activists indicate that the most recent clashes between opposition and government forces have included assistance to Assad forces by Lebanese Hezbollah fighters and Shabiha militias. The Telegraph reports recent
advances by Assad troops near the rebel-held town of al Quasyr on the Lebanese border are led by Hezbollah fighters. NYT reports that two Syrian archbishops, Yohanna Ibrahim and Paul Yazigi, were abducted on 22 April while travelling outside of Aleppo. No group has claimed responsibility for the kidnappings.

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 16 to 22 April 2013.

GLOBAL NEWS

India: In Bangalore, a low-intensity IED strapped to a motorbike detonated, injuring at least sixteen people, reports The Times of India.

Iraq: A bomb detonated in a Shi’ite mosque on 19 April killed eight and continued to fuel tensions in Iraq ahead of elections scheduled for 20 April, reports Reuters.

Thailand: A bomb found along a road in Bacho district Narathiwat province exploded, killing four Thai marines, reports Associated Press (AP). The marines had safely transported the bomb to the military base to study it when it detonated.

For more IED & Demining news click here or click on the map above.