This document provides complex coverage of global events from 26 March – 01 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.

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1 The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States, the European Union and NATO.
own differences with its own Kurds will be naturally more disposed [to] establishing alliances with Kurds in the region, be it in northern Iraq or be it in Syria”, adding, “So, in a way, Turkey [is] becoming an even more assertive, influential and confident player regionally”, said Ulgen. On 28 March, Turkish officials indicated they had fired artillery shells into areas of northern Iraq in efforts to deter PKK rebels from entering Turkey, reports AFP.

In other diplomatic events, after US Secretary of State John Kerry publicly criticised the Iraqi government for “turning a blind eye” to Syria-bound Iranian over flights, the Maliki government announces that it will step up searches of Iranian aircraft, according to Al Jazeera. While Malaki’s spokesman detailed stricter restrictions on Iranian flights to Syria, the head of Iraq’s civil aviation authority, Nasser Bandar, indicated that searches on Iranian aircraft had not occurred in nearly six months. Further, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird arrived in Iraq on 01 April to open a diplomatic mission serving as an offshoot of Canada’s embassy in Amman Jordan, according to UPI. Baird’s is the first Canadian minister to visit Iraq since 1976.

March was Iraq’s deadliest month since August 2012, reports Middle East Online. Security-related events reported within the last week are summarised below:

- A powerful car bomb killed two local officials and wounded another in the northern town of Tuz Khormato on 26 March, reports Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Both victims of the bombing were candidates in the now-suspended 20 April elections.
- Two attacks in southern Iraq killed five people on 27 March, reports Associated Press (AP).
- Four Shi’ite mosques in Baghdad were bombed on 29 March resulting in fourteen deaths. In Kirkuk, a suicide bomber drove his explosive-laden car into a group of worshippers after Friday prayers, according to AP.
- A series of attacks on 31 March resulted in the deaths of seven people in Baghdad and Fallujah. Assailants also targeted security forces in Basra and the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul, according to Al Jazeera.
- On 01 April, three people were killed, and two oil workers were abducted in Akkas gas field, in Anbar province near the Syrian border. The field is operated by Korean gas company, KOGAS, according to Al Jazeera. No group claimed responsibility for the attacks on the field but Iraqi officials suspected the attack was conducted by Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). On the same day, a suicide bomber in a fuel tanker packed with explosives drove into a local government compound and killed at least nine people in the northern city of Tikrit, according to VOA.
- Finally, on 01 April, Iraqi authorities executed four senior al Qaeda leaders convicted of terrorism according to CNN. Manaf Abdul Raheem Abdul Hameed al Rawi, the leader of the ISI in Baghdad, was among the four executed.

Western oil companies are increasingly losing interest in Iraqi oil reserves, according to UPI. This is primarily due to growing frustration over the “bloated” bureaucratic government, corrupt bureaucracy, increasing political instability, poor contractual terms and infrastructure bottlenecks. The Financial Times reports that the business climate [in Iraq] has soured. The few US companies that secured oil contracts with Baghdad became so reluctant to continue investments in southern Iraq they have migrated north to Iraqi Kurdistan where profit margins are far greater and conditions more stable. As a result, the national government is developing an oil relationship with China, which has a “higher tolerance for risk” as evidenced by their oil work in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, according to Gal Luft of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security in Washington.

Media activists report that Iraqi journalists face increasing obstacles to free reporting, according to VOA. Ziad al Ajili, head of the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, states, “this year’s [report on media freedom in Iraq] is the worst ever” adding, “The government has made new rules to pressure journalists and prevent us from working freely”. Now, journalists in Iraq must obtain numerous permissions to cover even the most routine events. Also, British archaeologists have discovered a previously unknown palace or temple near the biblical city of “Ur”, reports Christian Science Monitor (CSM). The size of the structure is “breathtaking” with walls measuring almost nine feet thick. Ur is considered the birthplace of the prophet Abraham.

Mali

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Mali’s interim government announced ongoing preparations for the nation’s post-military operation stage by making a commitment to hold legislative and presidential elections on 21 July and 07 July, respectively, reports Magharebia. French President Francoise Hollande expressed his support for the July scheduled Malian elections and emphasised France’s lack of bias towards any one candidate. “The days when France chose Africa’s heads of state for it are over”, Hollande said in an interview on French television. He also discussed the reduction of French troops in Mali to 1,000 by the end of 2013, down from the current 4,000. Speaking at the Global Growth Conference in Rabat, Morocco, Malian Minister of Communications Manga Dembele claimed that an end to the conflict is in sight, and noted that members of the interim government would not run in the upcoming elections.

02 April 2013
UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presented a report to the UN Security Council (UNSC) calling for the establishment of a peacekeeping force comprising up to 11,200 troops in Mali, reports Al Jazeera. The proposed force would be integrated with the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) forces already operational. The combined peacekeeping operation would protect major regions determined to be at highest risk and collaborate on counter-terrorism missions after the withdrawal of French forces. Ban proposed that current AFISMA operations, backed by the UN, would transition into a peacekeeping force once major combat ceases to confront expected residual threats in the post-conflict environment. A second option identified by Ban, if the UNSC rejects the creation of such a force, would take the form of increased emphasis on the UN’s new political mission in Mali, permitting AFISMA to engage in security operations outside UN control.

Militants temporarily breached the northern town of Timbuktu on 31 March, committing multiple suicide attacks and guerilla-style assaults, reports Reuters. A communiqué issued by the Malian government claimed twenty-one Islamist rebels had been killed, with at least one Malian dead and four injured in the clash. Describing the events, Malian army Captain Modibo Naman Traore said fighting ignited following an unsuccessful suicide car bomb attempt meant to distract the military, while a group of armed jihadists penetrated the city from other fronts. The conflict came to an end late on 31 March, with Malian troops performing door-to-door searches for remaining armed militants.

British troops arrived in Mali on 26 March to train Malian soldiers and provide logistical support to French troops in the West African nation. A total of 40 troops from the UK will engage in the training mission, as part of the 500 staff from 22 EU Member States supporting the force protection mission. The training will take place north-east of the nation’s capital Bamako for approximately 15 months.

Human Rights Watch has issued a press release calling on the Malian government to investigate allegations of torture committed by government soldiers in Léré, a town near Timbuktu. Seven suspected supporters of armed Islamist groups were held in military custody from 15 February to 04 March, allegedly victims of physical torture, reports HRW. The detainees, all ethnic Tuareg’s, may have been tortured for providing support to Islamist rebel groups responsible for the seizure of northern Mali in 2012. A senior researcher at HRW stated: “The use of torture by the very soldiers mandated to restore security in northern Mali will only make a difficult situation worse. The Malian government should promptly and impartially investigate these and other allegations of abuse or face an increasingly unaccountable military and deepening communal tensions.” These allegations are not the first. HRW has documented of abuses committed by Malian soldiers on suspected Islamist rebels as the organisation has recently identified instances of summary executions, torture, and forced disappearances.

The Malian Agricultural Competitiveness and Diversification Project received a financial award of USD 20 million by the World Bank Board of Executive Directors on 28 March, according to a World Bank press release. Ousmane Diagana, the organisation’s Country Director for Mali, announced “The project will help improve the performance of agriculture and livestock businesses in which Mali has a comparative advantage in domestic, sub-regional and international markets. The World Bank will help to accelerate commercial agriculture in rural areas of Mali.” With the aim of promoting increased cooperation between agribusiness and commercial financing, the second phase of the initiative will establish more profitable local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the open the international market for Malian mangos.

Syria

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon named Swedish scientist Ake Sellstrom, head of the UN Syrian chemical weapons investigative team, which currently lacks experts from Russia and China, according to Reuters. Russia asserts that the investigative team should include Russian and Chinese experts. The UN investigation will focus on recent allegations of chemical weapons use near the northern city of Aleppo, disappointing Western countries who sought a probe that would consider other claims of chemical weapons use. On 28 March, the UN Security Council voiced concern over repeated violations of the Syrian-Israeli ceasefire in the occupied Golan Heights, reports Reuters. The UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) is tasked with monitoring the “area of separation” which has increasingly become insecure with the “presence of armed members of the opposition in the area of separation”. Earlier in March, Israel stated that it could not be expected to “stand idle as Syria’s civil war…spilled into the Golan Heights”.

On 26 March, in what is considered to be a major diplomatic blow to the Assad government, Syrian rebel representatives led by Mouaz al Khatib took Syria’s seat, typically reserved for Assad representatives, at an Arab League summit in Qatar, according to Reuters. Khatib attended the summit meeting to request more US aid for the opposition, despite his recent resignation as leader of the deeply divided rebel coalition. Also, Reuters reports that Syrian opposition leadership opened its first embassy in Qatar. Mouaz al Khatib used the ribbon cutting ceremony as an opportunity to voice frustration with the failure of world powers in assisting the Syrian opposition. In other diplomatic events, on the same day, Syrian President Bashar al Assad sent a letter calling on Brazil, Russia, India,
China and South Africa (BRICS nations) to help end the country’s war, reports Al Jazeera. According to the Israeli news source Haaretz, as the situation in Syria continues to worsen, Israel has been forced to raise its profile. Israel has stepped up its humanitarian actions by accepting wounded Syrians, on a limited basis, for medical treatment. In addition, Israeli extended an apology to Turkey in order to promote renewed cooperation with Ankara in addressing regional insecurity.

France changed course from just two weeks ago when it signalled it would begin arming Syrian rebels, according to TREND. President Francois Hollande indicated, “[a]t the moment, we do not have a guarantee” that weapons would not fall into the hands of terrorists. However, AP reports suggest a carefully prepared covert operation, involving Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar, is currently arming rebels. Conducted in consultation with the US and other Western governments, the operation facilitates an increase in weapons supplies to rebels.

Notable security-related events reported in Syria over the last week are summarised below:

- Mortars struck an outdoor café at Damascus University on 28 March, killing fifteen students, according to AP. It was unclear whether rebel or Syrian forces carried out the attacks; however, Elizabeth O’Bagy at the Institute for the Study of War said it “appeared to fit the regime’s pattern of escalation”, adding, “in other aspects of the war, such as the use of airstrikes or Scud missiles, the regime has gone from trying to target rebels to more indiscriminate attacks on civilians”.
- Rebels captured a strategic town near the Jordanian border on 29 March after a day of fierce fighting which resulted in 38 deaths, according to AP. Large areas of Dara’a province are now under rebel control and according to Syrian Observatory for Human Rights head Rami Abdel Rahman, the rebel advance in the South is escalating.
- On 30 March, VOA reports that Syrian rebel forces killed another pro-government Sunni cleric Sheikh Hassan Seifeddine in the northern city of Aleppo and reportedly mutilated the cleric’s body.
- On 31 March, Syrian and rebel forces accused one another of a “massacre” in the town of Tal Kalakh in southern Syria that killed children and women, reports AFP.
- The Syrian News Agency (SANA) said on 01 April that rebels set fire to three oil wells in the eastern province of Deir al Zour, reports AP.
- Residents of Lebanon’s northern border town of Wadi Khaled said gunmen attacked a bus carrying Syrian workers into Lebanon, on 01 April, beat the driver and kidnapped eight Syrian Alawites, reports Reuters. The gunmen stated they would release their hostages when a Lebanese-Sunni man, Mohammed Hussein al-Ahmad, whom residents say is being held by Syrian forces, was freed. The Syrian regime issued an ultimatum to kidnappers of the eight Syrian Alawite workers, threatening to destroy the region of Wadi Khaled in north Lebanon if the hostages were not released by 02 April midnight, reports Al Bawaba.

In Syria, Daily Star reports the emergence of the Islamic Tawhid Party, a coalition of several Salafist opposition groups. The coalition, launched in Istanbul, seeks to implement Sharia law in the country once the Assad regime is toppled. The party’s general secretary, Ibrahim al Zoghbi, states that they have established an Islamic Salafist political framework modelled after the Free Syrian Party. The group indicates that the option for a Caliphate should be offered – but not imposed upon the Syrian people. Meanwhile, the LA Times reports that rebels who have fought on the frontlines against the Assad regime resent the expatriates, the better-educated and others vying for political control of Syria. Fighters say that they deserve leadership roles in the civilian government of a post-conflict Syria.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that March 2013 was the bloodiest month in the Syrian conflict with an estimated 6,000 deaths, reports Al Jazeera. The human rights organisation added that the death toll was likely incomplete because both the Syrian and rebel groups often underreport their casualties. According to TREND, hundreds of Syrians protested along the Jordanian-Syrian border on 01 April over the lack of humanitarian aid. Protestors called upon UN agencies and the Jordanian government to facilitate the transfer of basic aid through a stretch of the shared border. Recently, rebel forces allegedly captured a 30-kilometre stretch of the border with Jordan, a favoured crossing point for refugees fleeing violence. Free Syrian Army members claim Jordanian forces continue to prevent the influx of arms, aid and refugees over the shared border. Also, growing violence, including direct attacks on World Food Programme (WFP) trucks and warehouses, is preventing crucial aid from reaching millions of Syrians across the country. As of 24 March, UNICEF reports that only 29 per cent of the Syrian Humanitarian Response Plan had been funded. Additionally, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that the Syrian government continues to control access into the country as only the UN and ten international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) are permitted to operate. Blockades, curfews, active hostilities and conflict-related damage impede access to affected Syrian populations. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are largely concentrated in Aleppo and Ar-Raqqa governorates while Homs, Hama, and Damascus are also experiencing significant displacements. A detailed regional analysis of the humanitarian situation in Syria is available by the Assessment Capabilities Project (ACAPS).
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 26 March to 01 April 2013.

GLOBAL NEWS

China: A Chinese man in Guangdong province found a live, three pound bomb inside the belly of a three-foot long squid at a fish market, reports UPI.

Greece: On 27 March, a bomb exploded near the Acropolis in central Athens, according to Al Jazeera.

Thailand: A roadside bomb and gun attack killed two Thai military rangers on 30 March 2013, reports AFP.

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