

Complex Coverage



26 February 2013

Comprehensive Information on Complex Crisis

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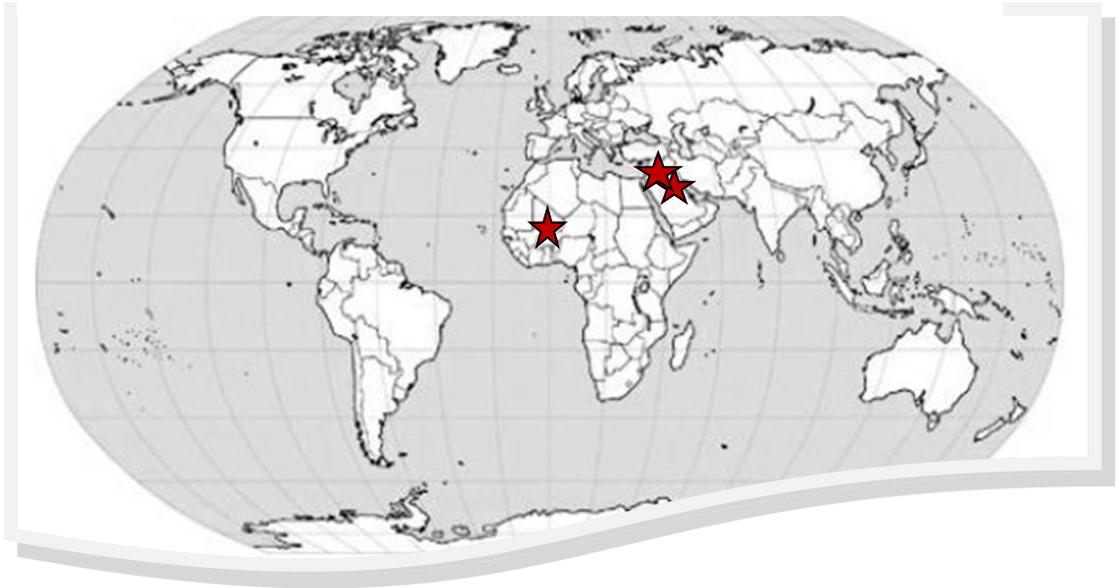
CONTACT THE CFC

For further information contact:

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

Foard Copeland
Desk Officer
foard.copeland@cimicweb.org

This document provides complex coverage of global events from 12 – 25 February 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.



Iraq

Linda Lavender ► linda.lavender@cimicweb.org

Protests which have continued within Iraq over the past two months have now spread to encompass Sunnis, protesting against the Shi'ite-led government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, and Shi'ites, who supporting Maliki. Tensions between Muslim sects further escalated when Wathiq al Batat, the head of Hezbollah in Iraq, [announced the formation](#) of the *al Mukhtar Army*, according to *Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)*. The Iraqi Hezbollah leader threatened that the militia would fight against Sunni protesters if they became infiltrated by al Qaeda in Iraq or any other Sunni terrorist groups. Batat stated, "Kurds have their militia to protect them, Sunnis have al Qaeda; and Shi'ites have nothing...[t]hat is why we are forming this army-to protect Shi'ites and Iraqis in general from al Qaeda and the Free Iraqi Army". After his announcement, Baghdad issued a warrant for his arrest. In response, Sunni protesters in Anbar refrained from chanting Ba'athist slogans and some even carried flags of Iman Hussain and other Shi'ite leaders. However, *Time* reports that [fliers](#) began surfacing in some Baghdad neighbourhoods with a chilling message to Sunnis; "Get out now or face great agony soon". The leaflets were signed by *al Mukhtar Army* and added; "[t]he zero hour has come. So leave along with your families...you are the enemy". [Another round](#) of protests occurred after Muslim prayers concluded on 15 February in the cities of Fallujah, Ramadi, Samarra, Mosul, Kirkuk, and in areas of Baghdad under heavy security, according to *Voice of America (VOA)*.

For the second time since December 2012, Iraqi officials in Kirkuk [denied a Turkish plane](#) permission to land as it attempted to transport 75 Kurdish victims from the assault in Tuz Khurmatu, according to *United Press International (UPI)*. The air ambulance was transporting victims for medical treatment to Ankara, Turkey. While relations between Iraq and Turkey have deteriorated since Turkish officials signed an oil deal with the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan, Iraqi officials said the plane was denied landing due to inclement weather. Baghdad has suspended all private planes flying into

the semi-autonomous Kurdish region. Eight F-16 fighter jets were deployed to the Kurdish region of Iraq from Diyarbakir, Turkey on 12 February to [strike](#) militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK¹) locations, reports *UPI*. Meanwhile, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan engaged in dialogue with jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to explore peace initiatives with the terrorist organisation. Again on 21 February, Turkish jets were sent across the border to bomb [twelve PKK targets](#) in the Kandil Mountains, according to *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*.

On 13 February, the People's Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK), an Iranian dissident group, [accused Iran's](#) supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei of ordering the 09 February attack on MEK members residing in Camp Liberty near Baghdad, according to *AFP*. The MEK claims that the forty attackers who entered the camp were members of the Shi'ite militant group *Ketaeb Hezbollah* and "technical agents" from Iran's elite al Quds. Rockets and mortars used in the attacks, the MEK claims, were transported in vehicles belonging to the Iraqi police and the Iraqi interior ministry. Maliki's spokesman Ali Mussawi told *AFP*, MEK's "presence in Iraq is [illegal and illegitimate](#)". A number of violent incidents were reported across Iraq over the past few weeks, including those summarised below:

- On 14 February, attacks largely [targeting Iraqi security](#) forces north of Baghdad killed seven people, according to *AFP*. Gunmen killed a policeman and soldier outside Mosul while a roadside bomb detonated near Mosul killing two policemen. Separate shootings and bombings in Balad and Dujail left three dead, including two *Sahwa*² fighters.
- A suicide bomber in Tal Afar, northern Iraq, killed a senior Iraqi [intelligence officer](#) along with three of his bodyguards on 16 February, reports *al Jazeera*. On the same day, a senior judge was killed north of Baghdad by a sticky bomb³.
- A [series of car bombs](#) killed at least 26 people in largely Shi'ite neighbourhoods across Baghdad on 17 February, according to *Reuters*. Days later, al Qaeda in Iraq claimed responsibility for the [attacks](#).
- Also on 17 February, *Reuters* reports that attackers bombed and [disabled a pipeline](#) carrying oil south to Baghdad from Ninevah province. The pipeline was disabled for a [second time](#) on 20 February following another bomb attack, reports *Reuters*.
- According to *UPI*, a bomb detonated 20 February in Baquba near the [train station](#), killing five people. On 21 February, Iraqi officials say gunmen attacked a [security checkpoint](#) north of Baghdad in Duluiayah, killing four soldiers and wounding four others, reports *Associated Press (AP)*.
- Mosul saw more violence on 21 February when three suicide bombers killed [three policemen](#) at a security checkpoint, according to *Reuters*.
- Gunmen dragged *Sahwa* fighters from their homes in [Tuz Khurmato](#) on 22 February, killing seven of them and seriously wounding one other, according to *Reuters*.

Bakhtiar Omar al Qadhi, deputy chief of Iraq's Justice and Accountability Committee, tasked with purging government ranks of [former Ba'athists](#), removed Iraq's top judge Medhat al Mahmoud from the Supreme Judicial Council, reports *AP*. Qadhi indicated that there was strong evidence to support the decision. However, on 18 February, an Iraqi judicial panel rejected the decision to remove the Chief Judge after Mahmoud [filed an appeal](#), successfully arguing that there was not enough evidence to remove him, reports *AP*. Also, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on the Iraqi government to conduct an [investigation into](#) the January shooting of protesters in Fallujah, according to *UPI*. Joe Stork, deputy director of HRW's Middle East programmes, stated, "Iraqi authorities seem to think that announcing an investigation is all that's required when security forces kill protesters". HRW maintains that Iraqi forces fired on protesters after the troops were hit with stones. Nine protesters were killed and another 45 were injured in the incident. Finally, Nadir Dendoune, a French journalist [detained](#) by Iraqi authorities for taking unauthorised pictures in the country's capital, was released on 14 February, according to *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*.

The ongoing dispute between Baghdad and Kurdistan over [oil rights](#) has led to delays in finalising the national budget and is jeopardising major infrastructure projects and payments to regional authorities, according to *Reuters*. While Iraq's cabinet approved a USD 118.6 billion in October 2012, infighting among Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish members of parliament resulted in the failure to pass draft legislation. The budget, which forecasts a deficit of USD 15.5 billion, includes USD 45.5 billion for much needed investment projects and has apportioned USD 644 million for companies in Kurdistan. Kurdistan, which has its own regional government and armed forces, contributes its oil to national exports and relies on seventeen per cent of Baghdad's national budget. This week Prime Minister Maliki's State of Law coalition, Sunni-backed Iraqiya Bloc, and other political blocs called for Kurds to receive no more than twelve per cent of the national budget, claiming they are a minority population. Additionally, Exxon Mobil has decided to move forward with its [controversial decision](#) to develop oil fields in Kurdistan in defiance of Baghdad's opposition to the move, reports *UPI*. *Middle East Economic Digest* says, "[i]f Exxon Mobil starts drilling operations, Baghdad will have no option but to try and stop them". Baghdad has declared the Exxon deal illegal and maintains that Kurdistan has no authority to sign oil agreements – a privilege reserved for the central government. Meanwhile, Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani met with the head of Russian oil giant [Gazprom](#), Alexei Miller, in Moscow to discuss oil and gas cooperation in the semi-autonomous region, according to *UPI*. Discussions focused on the "potential for cooperation in geological exploration, development and operation of oil and gas fields". *UPI* reports that Baghdad has consented to a preliminary agreement to [build oil](#) and gas pipelines from Iran to Syria. Gas from the project would come

¹ The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States, the European Union and NATO.

² *Sahwa*, also known as the "[Sons of Iraq](#)", are the pro-government Sunni militias that fought against al Qaeda during the US-led war in Iraq.

³ "Sticky Bombs" are magnetic explosive devices that [stick to metal](#) (often placed on vehicle undercarriages) widely used by the Iraqi insurgency.

from Iran and help support electricity for the Iraqi and Syrian markets. An oil pipeline would run from the southern Iraqi port of Basra and deliver approximately one million barrels of oil per day to the Red Sea port city of Aqaba, Jordan. Tehran has long been interested in a westward-bound pipeline.

In other news, the Iranian-backed Shi'ite group *Asaib Ahl al Haq* – the League of the Righteous – which carried out many of the [attacks against US forces](#) in the final years of the Iraq war, is evolving into a political organisation, according to *The Washington Post*. The group is rapidly expanding and gaining support throughout Iraq as it opens offices and is providing a plethora of social services to widows and orphans and launching religious schools. Maliki welcomes the group's foray into the political arena and sees the group as a potential counter-weight to Shi'ite adversary Muqtada al Sadr. Finally, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, convalescing in Germany from a stroke, is reportedly making [solid progress](#) and has regained his speech, according to *Reuters*.

Mali

Foard Copeland ► foard.copeland@cimicweb.org

French and Malian troops [struggled](#) last week to exert control over the country's North, including the town of Gao, which had been held by the Malian army for almost three weeks, reports *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*. On 21 February, forty rebels [converged](#) on Gao, situated along the Niger River, taking control of the mayor's office and engaging in an hours-long fire fight. The French engaged the insurgents with helicopters and heavy firepower after Malian troops [failed to repel](#) the militants, according to *Al Jazeera*. Four Malian soldiers and two French soldiers were [wounded](#) in the Gao offensive that also resulted in the deaths of fifteen Islamists. On the same day, a car bomb [detonated](#) in the northern town of Kidal near a camp that houses French and Chadian forces. Two civilians were killed and several more were [injured](#) in the attack, informs the *Associated Press (AP)*. On 22 February, [65 insurgents](#) were killed in a battle in the Adrar des Ifoghas mountains that also took the lives of 13 Chadian soldiers. Fighting in the area continued over the weekend, and an additional [10 Chadian soldiers](#) were killed as they stormed a rebel base. After the fire fight, 28 insurgents were reported dead and at least 30 wounded. Chad deployed over 1,800 troops to Kidal earlier in February and has suffered more casualties than any country with a presence in Mali. The conflict also expanded to Tessalit, according to the *AFP*, where the Movement for the Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) [confirmed](#) responsibility for a suicide bombing that killed at least three Tuaregs in retaliation for the recent Tuareg split from MUJAO. The infighting indicates the fractious dynamics that continue to play out between various rebel groups in northern Mali. Finally, French President Francois Hollande [announced](#) the death of the second French soldier since the invasion began last month; a legionnaire in the 2nd parachute division killed during clashes that took place in the northern Adrar des Ifoghas mountains, informs *The Guardian*. A helicopter pilot was [killed](#) in January during the first week of the French offensive, according to *France24*.

In the increasingly international conflict, several major developments took place between regional partners, including the following:

- The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) appointed a Nigerian officer to lead the regional body's mission in Mali. Subair Olusola Kamar, a Nigerian police officer who trained in Paris, will [oversee](#) the African-led International Assistance Mission to Mali (AFISMA). Kamar previously supported UN peacekeeping operations in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)⁴ and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; he takes up his post at the end of the month.
- German Chancellor Angela Merkel approved a plan to [send 330 troops](#) to Mali, according to *The Washington Post*. The contingent will train Malian forces and provide technical assistance. Government forces will not be authorised to participate in combat operations and must still be approved by the German parliament. The decision came one week after the European Union (EU) agreed to [launch](#) a European Union Training Mission ([EUTM](#)) of 500 soldiers to Mali, according to an EU press release. The mission has a fifteen-month mandate, and as many as seventy personnel were immediately [dispatched](#) to Mali to prepare for the larger contingency.
- The EU released a [stabilisation package](#) worth EUR 20 million (approximately USD 26 million) to provide emergency support to the country, according to *Europa*. The funds will support law enforcement and justice initiatives. In the coming months, the EU plans to release another EUR 250 million (approximately USD 328 million) to support long-term stabilisation.
- Russia's Foreign Ministry [announced](#) it was sending aid to Mali, citing concerns about the spread of militant Islam in the region and numerous political transitions in recent months, according to *Reuters*.

US President Barack Obama announced on 22 February that approximately 100 US troops had been deployed to Niger in order to support [French-led military](#) operations, through intelligence-gathering, against al Qaeda and other extremists groups in the northern regions of Mali, reports *The Washington Post*. According to a US defence official, US military operations include establishing a base of operation to support drone flights. The drones will initially be based in the capital city of Niamey and may eventually be moved further north to Agadez, which is closer to the Mali region infiltrated by al Qaeda. It was unclear whether predator drones were being

⁴ Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia by its constitutional name.

used in the surveillance operation. Finally, two senior UN peacekeeping officials [announced](#) that a mission in Mali was a “very real possibility”, informs the *UN News Centre*. The UN [endorsed](#) AFISMA in December 2012.

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reported on the potential for instability in Mali to spill into [regional neighbours](#), particularly those countries from which fighters are believed to have originated. The exact number of rebels in northern Mali remains uncertain; however, experts suggest that fewer than 3,000 insurgents are still active. Jeremy Keenan, professor at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, estimates the number might be one thousand or fewer. Yvan Guichaoua, a Mali expert at the University of East Anglia, predicts a possible fragmentation among Islamist fighters. In such a scenario, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) could withdraw into North Africa, relying on [networks](#) it established after the fall of Moammar Gaddafi’s regime in Libya. *IRIN* reports the organisation possesses large weapons caches in Tunisia. MUJAO fighters may seek haven in Gao or their home countries of Niger, Nigeria, Mauritania, and perhaps even Algeria, Morocco, and Western Sahara. Finally, the *Sudan Tribune* reports the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), a prominent militia in Sudan’s Darfur region, claimed on 18 February that Malian Islamists [entered Sudan](#), led by an army captain named Adam Osman.

OCHA released an [assessment](#) that found 4.3 million people in Mali were in need of humanitarian assistance. Aid activities remain limited in the north as a result of continued insecurity including [mine incidents](#). [Food](#) is also becoming scarce as the entire Sahel region braces for a potential [food crisis](#) in 2013. According to Zlatan Milisic, Mali’s country director for the World Food Programme (WFP), “We are worried that food is being consumed faster than it can be replaced”. Mali’s agricultural season starts in May, and the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) [stressed](#) the need for farmers to return to their lands. FAO Director-General, José Graziano da Silva, outlined challenges that farmers will face, even if violence does not prevent them from returning to their fields. Many have lost seed, tools and livestock necessary for agricultural production. As of 22 February, only four per cent of the humanitarian appeal for USD 373 million had been provided by donors. A number of other humanitarian updates were reported over the past few weeks including the following:

- *AFP* reported the Malian army was [accused of torture](#) and carrying out summary executions. While unconfirmed, the allegations hint at reprisal attacks against Muslim citizens in the country’s North.
- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced that [humanitarian conditions](#) in northern Mali are particularly grave. The organisation said that most of the displaced persons are not returning to their homes, leaving them susceptible to heightened insecurity. A shortage of teachers in the North, many of whom fled, has caused schools to close for 700,000 students.
- Armed groups have [recruited children](#), according to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). “From the north, we have heard horrifying reports of human rights violations, recruitment of children and rising sexual violence”, said Jens Laerke spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN [OCHA](#)).

Syria

Linda Lavender ► linda.lavender@cimicweb.org

The Syrian government signalled its readiness to send a minister [abroad for talks](#) with the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) leader Moaz al Khatib, according to *The Guardian*. However, differences remain over the shape of any political transition between Damascus and the opposition. In a surprise move, the SNC said it would suspend its participation in the upcoming Friends of Syria conference in Rome, in “protest of the [shameful](#) international position” regarding the conflict, according to *CNN*. Adib Shishaky, representative of the SNC, said, “enough is enough. The whole world is not doing anything. We are not going to more conferences. We are not going to Rome. We are not going to Moscow”. Shishaky also asserted that Scud missiles were used in an Aleppo attack that killed over fifty civilians on 22 February. The SNC announced plans on 22 February to form a provisional government in rebel-held regions of Syria following a meeting in Cairo in which opposition leaders debated whether to [engage in peace talks](#) with the Assad government, according to *VOA*. The SNC provisional government will meet 02 March in Istanbul to select a Prime Minister.

French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Brian, on 16 February, called for urgent action to facilitate a [power transfer](#) in Syria that would exclude a role for Syrian President Bashar al Assad, according to *AFP*. On 18 February, the European Union [renewed sanctions](#) targeting the Syrian regime, while amending provisions in order to protect Syrian civilians, according to *RFE/RL*. The renewal of sanctions for an additional three months enables greater “nonlethal support and technical assistance for the protection of civilians”, said EU foreign policy Chief Catherine Ashton. On the same day, *AFP* reports that EU foreign ministers remain split on meeting the UK’s demand to lift an [arms embargo](#) on Syria.

On 14 February, Syrian rebels claimed to have near-total control of the strategically important Hasaka province in the Northeast where the few remaining [domestic oil facilities](#) that supply the Assad government are located, according to the *New York Times (NYT)*. Battling for control over the [Aleppo](#) international airport, 150 rebels and government troops have been killed in recent days, according to a 15 February *Time* article. On 19 February, a missile strike levelled an [Aleppo neighbourhood](#), according to *The Guardian*. A day later, two mortars fired by rebels exploded close to one of Bashar al Assad’s presidential palaces in Damascus and the [Tishreen football](#) stadium was struck by mortars killing a Syrian footballer and wounding four others. *AFP* reports that three surface-to-surface

missiles fired by Syrian regime forces in the northern city of Aleppo on 22 February have left [58 people dead](#), among them 36 children. Opposition forces report on 24 February they have captured a [nuclear reactor site](#), now being used as a Scud launch base, according to *Reuters*. Turkish officials confirmed that a Syrian mortar shell was fired from Syria and fell in the town of Yayladagi in [southern Turkey](#), according to *UPI*. Turkey responded by striking against Syrian army targets.

AFP reports that a new jihadist group, *Ahrar al Sham*, has emerged as [a key player](#) in northern Syria, espousing its nationalist roots and a more moderate form of Islam. Operating in Idlib, Aleppo, and central Hama, the group comprises former political prisoners who were detained in the infamous Sednaya prison near Damascus. Meanwhile, Iran and Hezbollah are building a [network of militias](#) inside Syria to fight alongside Syrian government forces in order to support the Assad government, according to *The Guardian*. A senior US government official cited Iranian claims that Tehran was backing as many as 50,000 militiamen in Syria. Syria's ambassador to Lebanon, Ali Abdel-Karim [Ali, denied Hezbollah](#) was involved in the Syrian conflict, according to *Daily Star*. However, on 14 February, Iranian Revolutionary Guard Commander Hessem Khoshnevis was [killed inside Syria](#) by rebels, according to *Reuters*. The attack was carried out near the Syrian town of Zabadani, close to the Lebanese border. *RFE/RL* reports that Russia's state arms exporter claims that Moscow is still [providing weapons](#) to Syria. Russian deliveries include anti-missile air-defence systems. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov indicated that Russian troops were not in Syria and Russia was [not delivering arms](#) to the Assad government. Lavrov stated that, "the [military equipment](#) that we [Russia] have delivered to Syria is designed to protect Syria against outside aggression", according to *UPI*. Meanwhile, Finnish authorities have launched an investigation into an alleged attempt to [smuggle arms](#) to Syria from Russia through a Helsinki port after a Russian ship was intercepted carrying spare tank parts in January, reports *al Jazeera*. *AFP* reports that four more [Russian warships](#) have been deployed to the Mediterranean Sea to possibly facilitate a larger evacuation of its citizens.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay told the fifteen-member UN security council (UNSC) that the death toll in Syria is "probably now [approaching 70,000](#)" and repeated her call to the UNSC to refer the Syrian conflict to the International Criminal Court (ICC), according to *Reuters*. UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon said that "Syria is self-destructing". Ki-moon noted that, "[f]ighting rages. Sectarian hatred is on the rise. The catalogue of war crimes is mounting". On 13 February, *BBC* reports that a member of the UN special envoy's team completed the first field visit in several months with the intent of additional follow-up visits in the coming weeks. A UN independent team [investigating war crimes](#) in the Syrian conflict reports that "Syrians in leadership positions who may be responsible for war crimes including killings and torture have been identified along with their units", according to *al Jazeera*. Both sides stand accused of war crimes in the 23-month old conflict.

On 15 February, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) reported that the "situation in Syria is nothing short of [catastrophic](#)". After a four-day visit to Syria, ICRC director of operations Pierre Krahenbuhl stated that millions have been displaced and thousands have gone missing or been arrested. On 19 February, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that the number of Syrian refugees has [exceeded 850,000](#).

At Bab al Salama [displacement camp](#) in northern Syria, more than 10,000 Syrians are struggling to survive, according to *VOA*. The size of the tent city has blossomed in recent months as violence has continued. Most people in the camp are waiting to be relocated to Turkey, but the process to enter has slowed. Those living in the camp, report lack of food, medical assistance, and sanitation. Compounding the displacements, fighting in the eastern oil-producing province of Hasaka has forced an estimated [40,000 civilians](#) to flee the region, says the World Food Programme (WFP). The first [detailed survey](#) of the humanitarian crisis in northern Syria by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) declared Syria the "largest IDP crisis in the world", according to *McClatchy Newspapers*. While UNHCR released figures showing 2.08 million people in six northern provinces of Syria urgently need assistance, the IDMC's survey placed the number at 3.2 million in the same provinces. Also, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that an estimated 2,500 people in northeastern Deir al Zor province have [typhoid](#) fever, a contagious, potentially fatal disease, according to *Reuters*. Elisabeth Hoff, Syrian WHO representative, indicated that the number of those infected was very high and was spreading with the movement of people. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Aleppo have reportedly brought the disease to the port city of Tartus.

The Daily Star reports that more than 25,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria have approached the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) for assistance in [Lebanon](#). UNRWA reported that 31 per cent of Palestinian refugees from Syria were staying in the Sidon area, followed by 22 per cent in Bekaa, 17 per cent in Beirut and 15 per cent in Tyre and Tripoli. On 25 February, rioting broke out at the [Zaatari refugee](#) camp in Jordan, leaving two Syrian refugees and a Jordanian policeman injured, reports *AP*. The rioting was sparked by rumours that Jordanian police had sexually harassed three female refugees. Also, Russia announced it was sending two planes, carrying 46 metric tonnes of [humanitarian aid](#) to Syria, while also taking the opportunity to transport Russian citizens that would like to leave the country, reports *Reuters*.

Spillover Violence in Lebanon

A [recent eruption](#) of Sunni-Shi'ite clashes across Lebanon "has heightened the risk of chaos in Lebanon and another conflagration with Israel", warned David Schenker of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, according to *UPI*. Islamist militant cells linked to al Qaeda appear to be proliferating in Lebanon, spurred in part by the growing presence and military successes of Sunni rebels fighting in Syria. *VOA* reports that there is growing concern in Lebanon that the country will be [dragged into](#) the mayhem of

neighbouring Syria's increasingly sectarian violence". In the tense Bekaa Valley, protesters sympathetic to Syria rebels threatened to block the passing of [eleven Syrian tanker](#) trucks loaded with fuel from Beirut headed to Syria via the Masnaa border crossing, according to the *Daily Star*. Similar protests broke out earlier in February in north Lebanon as residents blocked trucks heading toward the Arida border crossing. *AFP* informs that a "security vacuum" has befallen northwestern Syria, where more than [300 people were abducted](#) in tit-for-tat kidnappings on 16 February. An estimated 40 civilians, from majority-Shi'ite villages, were kidnapped by armed groups in Shi'ite villages. Then, hours later, more than seventy people from Sunni areas were kidnapped by gunmen from nearby Shi'ite villages. Subsequently, on 22 February, *AP* reports that over 200 of those abducted were released, [easing tensions](#) in the region.

On 17 February, Lebanese Member of Parliament Khaled Daher stated that trucks loaded with dozens of [tonnes of explosives](#) traversed the Masnaa border-crossing; similar transfers have been occurring regularly since May 2012, reports *UPI*. Daher maintains that the arms transfers have occurred with the knowledge of the Lebanese armed forces and army intelligence. *The Daily Star* reports that, on 18 February, three Hezbollah fighters and twelve Syrian rebels were killed in [fierce battles](#) in Qusayr along the Syrian-Lebanon border. The same day, shelling from Syria fell on several northern [Lebanese towns](#), according to *Daily Star*. Residents of the border town of Arida blocked the [Arida border crossing](#) to protest the shelling of their town. Meanwhile, the *BBC* reports that Syrian rebels have accused [Hezbollah of attacking](#) three Syrian villages close to the Lebanese border. Hezbollah claims that three Lebanese were killed in the clashes. On 19 February, March 8-affiliated parties⁵ - [threatened to confront](#) Salafist Sheikh Ahmad Assir if he resumes protests against trucks transporting diesel to Syria from the Zahrani refinery, raising tensions in the village of Sidon, according to *Daily Star*. Several politicians said that Assir's call for demonstrations against the diesel-carrying trucks threaten to undermine political and religious coexistence in Sidon. The *Daily Star* also reports that March 14 officials⁶ and the Progressive Socialist Party leader [denounced](#) Hezbollah's involvement in Syrian violence while Hezbollah defended its foray into Syria, stating it was defending villages in Syria inhabited by Lebanese Shi'ites. In response, General Selim Idriss, the Free Syrian Army chief of staff, warned on 19 February that his forces would [target Hezbollah](#) in Lebanon if the militant organisation continued shelling territory in Syria held by rebels, reports *AFP*. On 22 February, thousands of Syrian protesters took to the streets in the Turkish border town of Ain al Arab to vent their frustration over perceived inaction by world leaders, and [Hezbollah's involvement](#) in the conflict, according to *AFP*.

IED & Demining

Linda Lavender ► linda.lavender@cimicweb.org

The CFC 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. (Reporting period from 13 – 25 February 2013).

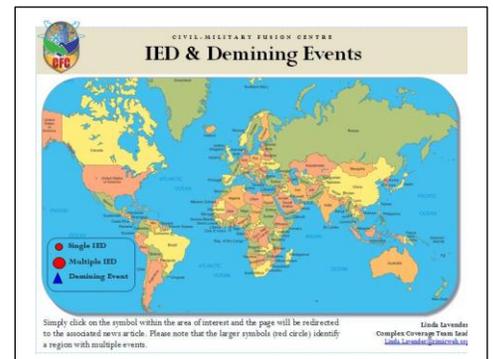
GLOBAL NEWS

Bahrain: Bahrain police identified a bomb planted on a [busy causeway](#) linking the island to Saudi Arabia, reports *Reuters*.

Dagestan: A suicide car bomb attack in the volatile [Russian Caucasus](#) region of Dagestan killed three police officers and wounded six other people, according to *Agence France-Presse*

Ireland: Police in Northern Ireland say a suspicious object found near a school in Belfast was a [pipe bomb](#), reports *United Press International*.

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



The CFC is pleased to announce the launch of its [2013 Kenya Elections](#) webpage providing detailed coverage of the upcoming Kenyan elections.



IRAQ
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MALI
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SYRIA
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Have a Question?
ASK US

⁵ Lebanon's [March 8 Alliance](#) is a coalition of opposition, mostly Shi'ite Muslim and Syrian-backed parties led by Hezbollah and the more moderate Amal party.

⁶ Lebanon's March 14 Alliance is a [Sunni-Druze-Christian](#) coalition. The group is currently led by the Future Movement.

Complex Coverage *In-Brief*

Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan

By Trista Guertin

As the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate, the number of people fleeing the [Syrian civil war](#) has increased at a much faster pace than the international community first anticipated. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that as of 19 February, [857,712 refugees](#) have fled Syria since 2012, most of whom are [women and children](#). However, the [actual number](#) is likely much higher, as many refugees have not officially registered with either the United Nations (UN) or host country authorities. Neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey are struggling to meet the demands of the growing refugee crisis. The UN predicts that refugee numbers in the region could reach [1.1 million](#) within the next several months.



Source: [New York Times](#)

Refugees are arriving in [record numbers to Jordan](#), which currently hosts the largest number of displaced Syrians; more than 89,000 have arrived in the kingdom since 01 January. On 22 February, more than [4,000 refugees](#) arrived within one 24-hour period. Refugees enter Jordan through 45 crossing points along the 373-kilometre border; travelling mainly on foot, they are usually guided by Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebels and met on the other side by Jordanian soldiers. UNHCR reports that as of 25 February, it has [registered 242,162](#) Syrian refugees in Jordan, with another 54,805 still in process, while the Jordanian government reports it is hosting [over 350,000](#) Syrians, and expects their numbers to reach 700,000 by June. The government further reports that less than a third of these have sought accommodation in camp Zaatari, which currently holds approximately [122,000 people](#), of whom 60,000 have arrived since 01 February. The majority of the displaced persons, approximately seventy per cent, are urban refugees, residing in [cities along the shared border](#). A second camp will soon open, and the government announced plans for the construction of a [third camp](#) on 23 February. UNHCR officials estimate that Jordan will need [four more camps](#) within the next few months to meet the needs of the anticipated 300,000 additional refugees by mid-year.

The influx of refugees into Jordan, and the entire region as a whole, has severely strained already [limited resources](#). Jordan continues to be highly [dependent on aid](#). The kingdom faces chronic shortages of both water and energy, and possesses few natural resources. Its fragile economy is the smallest in the Middle East. The response to the refugee crisis in Jordan is being led by UNHCR, in coordination with the Jordanian government. The UN [Regional Response Plan](#) (RRP) for Syrian refugees has appealed for USD 1 billion to cover the needs of 1.1 million Syrian refugees in the entire region from 01 January to 30 June 2013. However, in January, feeling the stress of the burgeoning refugee population, [King Abdullah II](#) made an appeal for additional international aid. The Prime Minister, Abdullah Ensour, said that if the Syrian government falls, “[Jordan would not accept more refugees](#) but would use its military to create safe havens inside Syria for those displaced by conflict”, reports *The New York Times*. The [Jordanian Armed Forces](#) reports spending more than USD 350 million since mid-2012 to assist the refugees, and expects that figure to double in coming months.

The increasing numbers have also placed a heavy burden on host communities, as refugees [compete for jobs](#), and place growing demands on already limited public services such as water, health care and education. Tensions amongst the refugees within camp Zaatari have also flared, as riots have frequently broken out, mainly over the [inadequate living conditions](#). UNHCR, along with the government, and local and international implementing partners, provides basic amenities within the camp.

Children, who comprise nearly [sixty per cent](#) of the camp population, require vital services, including schooling and medical care, as well as [trauma counselling](#), provided by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children. Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières ([MSF](#)) in coordination with the Jordanian Ministry of Health plan to open a hospital for Syrian children in Zaatari at the end of February.

The World Food Programme (WFP) provides [ready-to-eat meals](#) to Syrians arriving at the camp; soon after, the refugees are provided food rations to cook in communal kitchens. WFP is currently distributing over [eighteen tonnes of bread](#) each day in the camp. Needs assessments indicate that food is the top priority for the refugees, and WFP is increasing operational support in order to provide food assistance to 750,000 people by mid-year, a drastic increase from the 100,000 refugees assisted now. However, the UN reports that it is experiencing [critical funding shortfalls](#) for its response in Jordan, as only twenty per cent of requested funding has been received, warning that if additional support is not forthcoming, life-saving interventions will be reduced.