This document provides an overview of developments in the Mediterranean Basin and other regions of interest from 14 August — 27 August, with hyperlinks to source material highlighted and underlined in the text. For more information on the topics below or other issues pertaining to the region, please contact the members of the Med Basin Team, or visit our website at www.cimicweb.org.

In Focus: The Syrian Refugee Crisis
By Linda Lavender and Ida Benfield

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that as the conflict in Syria has intensified, so has the number of civilians fleeing to neighbouring countries and beyond, according to BBC. More than 200,000 refugees are seeking shelter outside Syria, already more than the UNHCR projection of 185,000 refugees by year’s end. The number of Syrians registered with UNHCR has increased fivefold since April 2012 when refugees in the region numbered 40,000, according to Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). Community-based relief organisations report the actual numbers are even higher than what UNHCR reports, as there are many more people who have not registered either because they are afraid or they are far from registration centres and see no benefit in registering. Of those refugees registered, approximately 75% are women and children.

The current number reflects a sharp increase of 30,000 over the previous week alone, with a record 2,300 people crossing into northern Jordan’s Za’atri camp on 24 August, Reuters reports. Turkey’s Disaster and Emergency Management Directorate reports that more than 3,500 people crossed into Turkey on 22 August, one of the highest daily refugee flows since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011.
Algeria

Algerian security forces thwarted a suicide attack planned by the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)’s. The group had intended to attack the Cherchell Joint Military Academy on 14 August, reports Magharebia. In other security developments, the Associated Press (AP) reported that Necib Tayeb, the head of AQIM’s judicial commission was arrested along with two other militants on 15 August.

Libya

Libyan fighters are joining Syrian rebels, reports Reuters. According to Hussam Najjar the rebels are “poorly armed and disorganized” and are “far more repressed and downtrodden under Assad than Libyans were under Gaddafi”. Two car bombs exploded in Tripoli on 19 August, killing at least two people and wounding three others, reports the New York Times. Following an initial blast near the Interior Ministry, the two car bombs went off outside a former police headquarters currently used by the Defence Ministry. An unexploded bomb was found near the Interior Ministry. Libyan authorities arrested 32 people who are members of a network loyal to former leader Moammar Gaddafi, reports BBC, after having established a link between the group and the bombing incidents. Only a day after the twin car bombings in Tripoli, a bomb exploded under the car of the Egyptian consulate’s first secretary Abdul Hamid Rifai; however, no one was injured, according to Reuters. In addition, nearly 30 rocket launchers and over 100 tanks were seized on 23 August during a raid on the camp of the “Brigade of the Faithful Loyalist” Gaddafi group. One person was killed and a number of others were injured, while 13 were arrested and three militants managed to escape. Officials said the group was behind the 19 August car bombings.

Factional strife between two tribes in the central Libyan town of Zlitan left 12 dead and several others injured, according to the AP. After two days of deadly clashes in Zlitan, an Islamist group destroyed the tomb of 15th century Sufi scholar Abdel Salam al-Asmar, and burned a historic library in a nearby mosque, informs Vision Foundation International. Gunmen arrested for their suspected involvement in the incidents later confessed that they were Gaddafi loyalists aiming to cause unrest in the region.

Mali

Mali’s interim authorities announced a new government on Monday, 20 August, reports AP. Five of the new government’s 31 ministers have close ties to the coup leader Amadou Sanogo, who has not totally given up power despite handing it over to a civilian authority while none of the appointed ministers are linked to the spokes democratically-elected president who was ousted in March. Mali’s minister for communication and government spokesman, Hamadoune Toure, said that hard-line Islamists who are seeking to impose Sharia law in the North of the country “are not welcome” in the new government, reports Voice of America (VOA). According to Toure the new government seeks to liberate northern Mali and re-establish the territorial integrity of the country, and to organise elections. The government will ask for the assistance of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union and the United Nations.

Islamists in northern Mali banned all music on private radio stations except the singing of the Koranic verses, according to Agence France-Presse (AFP). Western music is considered “satanic”, said Oussama Ould Abdel Kader, a spokesman for the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), declaring that music must be replaced with Koranic verses, as demanded by Sharia law.

The harsh application of Sharia law in northern Mali has prompted Malians to take to the streets in protest, AFP reports. People in the three main northern towns of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal are forming a “coalition of indigenous people of the north against those they see as the invaders”. Meanwhile, Malian Army Chief of Staff Ibrahim Dahirou Dambele said that Mali will lead the fight against the rebels, but welcomed training, equipment, air support and logistical support from ECOWAS, which offered an international force of 3,000, according to VOA.

Unrest in Mali has displaced approximately 436,000 people so far, reports AFP. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA), there are 261,624 registered Malian refugees in neighbouring countries and 174,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Mali as of 10 August. In addition, the Guardian informed that over 40,000 Malian refugees who fled to Niger are now facing a food crisis in their host country. Moreover, aid agencies are facing large funding shortfalls, which have impeded the provision of assistance to the Malian refugees, reports IRIN.

Since the beginning of July, 147 cases of cholera and 12 related deaths were reported in the northern Malian towns of Gao and Ansoo, reports VOA. The number of cases was falling in the beginning of August, but is now on the rise again. Aid agencies, in part-
nership with the government, are airing a new prevention campaign address the outbreak. Islamist militants in control of the North objected to the musical background in the initial radio broadcasts. InterAction, the largest alliance of US-based international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), recently sent a cargo of relief supplies to Mali, which included water purification kits, medical kits, tents and high energy biscuits for malnourished children, to control the cholera outbreak.

Morocco
US Senator Joe Lieberman said the peaceful political reform and fast implementation of Western Sahara’s autonomy could contribute to the regional stability, following his meeting with Moroccan Foreign Minister Saad Dine El Otmani in Rabat on 22 August, according to PR Newswire. However, the international community is becoming increasingly alarmed about growing infiltration of al-Qaeda linked forces within Mali and neighbouring countries. In particular, the refugee camps run by the Polisario, a group trying to liberate Western Sahara from Morocco, have become a recruiting ground for the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO); many young people from these camps have joined the militant group and there have been recent cases of hostage-taking of aid workers in the refugee camps.

Nigeria
Habu Mohammed, who claims to be Boko Haram leader Sheikh Abubakar Shekau’s deputy, said that the group engaged in direct talks with the Nigerian government to “initiate peace moves”, according to VOA. Although there was no official confirmation, some senior Nigerian officials confirmed the talks on condition of anonymity. However on 23 August, Boko Haram announced that they will not hold peace talks with the Nigerian government, reports Reuters. Boko Haram spokesman Abu Qaqa said: “We are telling the government to understand that if it is not ready to embrace sharia (Islamic law) and the Koran as the guiding book from which the laws of the land derive, there shall be no peace.” Meanwhile, a spokesman for Nigeria’s president informed on 27 August that the government is holding peaceful “backroom negotiations” with the militant group, according to VOA.

Tunisia
Salafists obstructed a stand-up comedy show by a Tunisian actor on 15 August, on the basis that it offended Islam, according to AFP. The security forces were not authorised to intervene. The Ministry of Culture called the act an attack on the freedom of expression. Just a day after the incident, Salafists protested the appearance of an Iranian group at the Sufi festival on the basis that their “Shiite chanting violated sacred values.” Authorities had intervened to halt the protests, but the Iranian group then refused to perform.

AFP informed that hundreds of radical Islamists assaulted the city of Sidi Bouzid on the evening of August 22, wounding at least seven people. According to the residents, the clashes started Monday night, when a group of Salafists tried to seize a drunken man to punish him for violating Muslim law. A spokesman for the city police said the police did not intervene “to avoid aggravating the situation”, however, residents of the city confronted the assailants.

About 60 demonstrators ransacked a police station and burned a car in Sfax region on 24 August, according to AFP. They demanded the release of three people arrested for fighting members of the ruling Ennahda party, whom they accused of trying to take over a local association.

Women in Tunisia protested for gender equality on 14 August, reports BBC. The protests came after the introduction of a draft constitution, which stated women are “complementary to men”. In addition, on 21 August, the United Nations Working Group on Discrimination against Women reminded the Tunisian government that it should comply with its international obligations regarding the rights of women. The working group is concerned that the new draft constitution “[fails] to establish the basis for full independence and empowerment of women”.

Journalists from Tunisian dailies Essabah and Le Temps protested the government’s controversial appointment of Lotfi Touati as the new director for the Dar Assabah press group, according to Middle East Press. They accused the government of trying to take control of the media by appointing the former editor in chief of a rival publication, known for his ties to Ennahda. The Tunisian national journalists’ union (SNJT) supports the protest and plans to call a national journalists’ strike.

Have a question on North Africa?
Submit an RFI or recommend a topic for future In Focus coverage.
Contact us at Med.basin@cimicweb.org or visit us online at www.cimicweb.org.
We look forward to hearing from you!
Egypt
After a border attack on 05 August by Islamist militants, Israel encouraged Egypt to take a tough stance against those responsible and allowed Egypt to use helicopters in the crackdown on militants, reports Reuters. The 1979 Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel requires Egypt to obtain Israel’s permission to use heavy military equipment in the Sinai Peninsula; however, some Egyptian military forces have been recently deployed in parts of the Sinai without Israel’s prior approval, reports Haaretz. According to security sources, Egypt is preparing to use aircraft and tanks in the Sinai for the first time since the 1973 war with Israel. In response to Egypt’s recent actions, an Islamist group operating in the Sinai warned the Egyptian army that it would attack Egyptian forces if Egypt continues with its military crackdown. In an effort to prevent continued conflict, an Egyptian presidential delegation met with a number of tribal elders and extremist Islamists on 25 August to convince the groups to cease violent activities, reports al Masry al Youm. Moderates fear militant Salafists in Gaza and Sinai are joining forces and could create an environment conducive for an al Qaeda base, according to Reuters.

The Egyptian cabinet and the World Bank signed an agreement for USD 200 million aimed at creating 250,000 jobs through projects on water, sanitation, energy and reliable transportation, as well as social services. Egypt’s Finance Minister, Muntaz al Saeed, said the country will seek a USD 4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) this month, reports Reuters. Foreign banks and traders have begun withholding credit and are charging Egypt higher premiums amid growing concern over the country’s financial and political instability, thus making it more difficult for Egypt to import fuel. Despite the high cost of fuel, it is likely that the high fuel subsidies will continue during the first few months of President Morsi’s tenure over fears that a cut could lead to unrest. In its fiscal year ending 30 June, Egypt subsidy spending “ballooned” to almost USD 16 billion nearly twenty-percent of its entire budget.

According to presidential spokesman Yasser Ali, President Mohamed Morsi does not intend to reinstate the dissolved People’s Assembly, Egypt’s lower house of parliament, reports Ahram. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) dissolved the assembly on 14 June after a court ruled it unconstitutional. Furthermore, President Morsi will not transfer legislative authority to the Shura Council, Egypt’s upper house of parliament, informs al Masry al Youm. Yasser Ali informed that President Morsi will temporarily hold legislative power until a new parliament is elected going further to state that President Morsi’s 12 August constitutional declaration returning executive authority to the president was constitutionally valid, reports Ahram. SCAF had previously issued a constitutional addendum that curtailed executive authority. Lawyer Mohamed Salem has challenged President Morsi’s 12 August declaration in an administrative court, according to Reuters. Other legal challenges to the decree may emerge. The courts have proved crucial in settling struggles between the newly-elected Islamist government and the military. In other political news, President Morsi has appointed a “Christian intellectual, a female university professor and two Islamists as presidential assistants”, reports BBC.

Following the arrests of two journalists, President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) have been accused of cracking down on criticism in the media, reports Reuters. President Morsi used his legislative powers on 23 August to pass a law banning the pre-trial detention of journalists in a move viewed as an effort to deflect criticism of his handling of the media.

South Sudan
South Sudan launched a forum to address the numerous human rights violations in the country, as documented by national and international human rights groups. The forum includes civil society organisations, government institutions and the United Nations (UN), as well as diplomats. The government-led initiative has received praise from the international community as well as national human rights organisations. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has expressed concern about “the recent increase in serious human rights violations allegedly committed by some undisciplined elements” within the military during the disarmament programme in Jonglei state that began in March. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has called on South Sudan’s government to take concrete steps to end human rights violations by soldiers carrying out a civilian disarmament operation in Jonglei state and to punish those responsible for offenses”. Witnesses reported rape, beatings, and acts of torture throughout the campaign. HRW believes that there are many incidents that have not been reported to county authorities. The head of the campaign in Jonglei, Kuol Dim Kuol, rejected the report and called it “not realistic”, reports Reuters.

Flooding has displaced thousands and destroyed crops in Warrap, Unity, Upper Nile, Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria states, reports Miraya FM. Within Jonglei state, 2,600 farms have been destroyed by the flooding and it is expected that the floods will likely lead to food shortages next year. The South Sudan Red Cross reports that 34,000 people’s homes have been destroyed across Jonglei state and the Commissioner of Pibor County has reported that people are using boats to access the market and hospital.
At least 24 South Sudanese soldiers were killed in a rebel ambush led by David Yau Yau in Jonglei state, reports BBC. Yau Yau first rebelled against the government after losing in the 2010 elections. He later signed a peace deal, which he subsequently broke and took up arms again in April 2012. In other security news, UNMISS and the national Ministry of Interior signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the transformation of the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS). Under the agreement, United Nations Police (UNPOL) advisers will train mid-level officers in the areas of traffic management, border policing, immigration and use of auxiliary force. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the government of Japan signed an agreement on 20 August for a USD 5.4 million programme to help South Sudan develop its capacity to manage and police its borders and improve national and regional security.

Paulino Matip, deputy commander in chief of South Sudan’s national army and key figure in the recent civil war, died from “long illness” in Kenya, reports Reuters. Matip had split from the South Sudan rebel group Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) during the war and was backed by Khartoum; however, Matip re-joined the SPLA in 2006 under President Salva Kiir’s “big tent” policy of reconciliation.

Sudan

Thirty-two people, including a Sudanese minister and other government officials, were killed when their plane crashed in the mountainous Talodi region in the south of the country, reports Reuters. Ghazi al Sadeq, the national minister of guidance and endowments, as well as three state ministers of South Kordofan were killed in the crash.

Approximately 20 Sudanese civil society organisations have demanded an investigation into the response by security authorities to peaceful protests in South Darfur on 31 July that resulted in the deaths of 13 people, reports the Sudan Tribune. According to the memo released by the organisations, women detained by NISS were subjected to sexual harassment and threats of rape. The memo also noted cases of murder, torture and forced disappearances of men and women. The head of the government-controlled Union of Sudanese Journalists (USJ), Mohi Al-Din Titawi, announced on 21 August that all journalists arrested during weeks of protests in the country have been released, reports the Sudan Tribune. Activists claim that some protestors are still being detained. Following diplomatic pressure from the US, Radwan Daoud, a permanent resident of the US who was born in Darfur, was released from custody on 17 August after being re-arrested by Sudanese security forces on 13 August, informs Reuters. Daoud was first arrested in July and is accused of possessing materials calling for protests against Sudan’s government.

Rebels clashed with Sudanese government forces in South-Kordofan state during the week of 21 August, reports Reuters. Both sides claimed victory with the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) saying they killed 30 government troops. Sudan’s military spokesman Al-Sawarmi Khalid denied the rebel account and stated that 20 rebels were killed and that government troops suffered only some injuries. Rebels in South Kordofan state have accused the government of attacking villages in order to “stymie” an international aid plan to help those caught in the fighting, reports Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Political and Humanitarian Issues along Sudan and South Sudan Border

The UN announced it has begun food airdrops to the Maban refugee camp in South Sudan. The current rain season prevents access to many parts of South Sudan. Fighting between SPLM-N and Sudan government forces in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile states has caused more than 170,000 to flee into South Sudan. The current rain season prevents access to many parts of South Sudan. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has stated that the health situation of the refugee population “has become a matter of alarm” and that many people are suffering from respiratory tract infections, diarrhoea and malaria.

Sudan and South Sudan have postponed African Union-brokered talks until the beginning of September because of the funeral for Ethiopia’s former prime minister, according to the African Report. Both countries are expected to come under international pressure to reach at least a partial deal on border security during the next round of talks. Following a visit to Juba by top level Chinese special envoy on African Affairs, Zhong Jianhua, China reiterated its support for the two countries to arrive at a negotiated settlement, reports the Sudan Tribune. Sudan and South Sudan have struck an interim deal on the export of South Sudanese oil and South Sudan expects oil output to restart in December, reports Reuters. Sudan, however, has stated that it wants a border security agreement before oil flows resume.
Ethiopia
Prime Minister Meles Zenawi died on 20 August in a hospital in Belgium from an “undisclosed illness”, reports Associated Press (AP). His death has sparked concerns of possible instability in Ethiopia and the region. Meles was a major US ally and received praise for his economic achievements, gains in the education sector and establishment of more rights for women in Ethiopia. However, he has also been accused of arbitrary detention, torture, surveillance and killings of opposition members inside the country. Human Rights Watch has called on the new Ethiopian leadership to “demonstrate its commitment to human rights reform by taking urgent steps to amend or repeal some of the most damaging legislation.” The outlawed Ethiopian rebel group Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) issued a statement proclaiming that Meles’ death can be an opportunity for peace and freedom, going further to state his death “may usher a new era of stability and peace in Ethiopia and in the Horn as a whole”. ONLF, an opposition group, consists mostly of ethnic Somalis who have clashed with Ethiopian forces in the past. Jose Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission, expressed concern about the state of democracy in Ethiopia and hopes that the country “will enhance its path of democratization, upholding of human rights and prosperity for its people, and of further regional stabilization and integration.” Thousands are mourning as Meles’ body lies in state at the National Palace in Addis Ababa awaiting a state funeral on 02 September, informs BBC.

In a rare peaceful handover of power, Hailemariam Desalegn, deputy prime minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, is expected to succeed Meles and remain in the post until elections are held in 2015, informs AFP. It remains to be seen how Desalegn will handle the ethnic and religious conflicts within Eritrea and the possible effects in the region, writes the International Crisis Group.

Abune Paulos, the influential leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church since 1992, died on 16 August at the age of 76, reports BBC. Orthodox Christians comprise about half of the country’s population and several thousand people attended the patriarch’s funeral in Addis Ababa. Abune was a close ally of late Meles.

Human Rights Watch urged the Ethiopian government to immediately release 17 prominent Muslim leaders arrested during peaceful protests in Addis Ababa. The Muslim community, which accounts for about 30% of Ethiopia’s population, protested against the government’s interference in Muslim affairs (see Mediterranean Review from 24 July 2012). The detainees are without legal counsel and currently being held at the Federal Police Crime Investigation Department, also known as Maekelawi prison, which is associated with serious human rights violations.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) Humanitarian Bulletin from 21 August states that heavy rains have caused severe floods affecting 5,000 people the Gewane district of the north-eastern Afar region. People lost their shelter, crops and some livestock. “The overflow of the Awash River has also increased the risk of water-related disease outbreaks”.

Inter-communal conflict in the Moyale area of southern Ethiopia has displaced 46,000 people, who are in need of food assistance and emergency relief supplies, according to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Horn of Africa Fact Sheet from 23 August.

Kenya
Aboud Rogo Mohammed, a radical Islamist cleric, was killed in a drive-by shooting in Mombasa, reports BBC. Rogo, accused of being the “main ideological leader” of the insurgent group al-Hijra, viewed as a close ally to al-Shabaab, had recently been placed on the UN and US sanctions lists for his financial, material, logistical or technical support to the extremist group. Following the killing protests erupted in Mombasa leading to one death and attacks on churches. On 24 August, the UN Security Council added the Kenyan Abubaker Shariff Ahmed to its list of people subject to travel bans, asset freezes and targeted arms embargo for his alleged involvement with al Shabaab. Ahmed had close ties to Rogo.

Ethnic violence erupted in Coast Province when the Orma and Pokomo groups clashed, killing 31 women, 11 children and six men, who were hacked to death with machetes or burned alive when their huts were set on fire, reports BBC. Four more people later died from wounds. A dispute over grazing rights is likely to blame for the clash; prior clashes involved disputes over water rights. This attack marks the worst single incident since the events following the elections in 2007, which resulted in 1,200 deaths and 600,000 displaced persons.

Toyota Tsusho Corporation made a USD 5 billion bid for the construction of the Lamu-Juba oil pipeline, linking the Lamu port in Kenya with Juba in South Sudan, reports Standard Media. The pipeline project is expected to be the largest of its kind in the region.
and will include the participation of Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan and Ethiopia. The development project will also include construction of an oil refinery, power stations, jetties and other infrastructure facilities.

The Kenyan government has made repeated calls for residents of the Dadaab refugee complex to return home to “so-called safe areas” in southern Somalia; however, aid agencies and the refugees themselves have described the government’s proposal as unrealistic, informs Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the conditions in Somalia should be conducive and sustainable for voluntary repatriation. According to Kenyan officials, the 500,000 Somali refugees living in the complex create a serious security threat to Kenya and the region, with a recent increase on attacks by al-Shabaab sympathisers targeting Kenyan police and aid workers in the camp.

Somalia

Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops captured the port city of Merca from al Shabaab forces, reports BBC. Merca is the third largest port in southern Somalia and its seizure will help support the operation to take Kismayo – the largest town still under al Shabaab control. Kenyan forces, under the auspice of AMISOM have begun their advance to Kismayo. This initial offensive has already caused civilian casualties and the displacement of people from their homes, reports IRIN. Human Rights Watch voiced concerns about the lack of humanitarian access and has called on the Kenyan government to investigate the civilian casualties caused by naval gunfire and airstrikes.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the inauguration of the new Somali Federal Parliament on 20 August as a major milestone, reports the UN News Centre. During the ceremony, 215 of the 275 members of parliament were sworn in, allowing parliament to convene with a functioning majority. However, concerns persist since the remaining members of parliament still have to be selected before they will choose a new Somali president, reports AP. The Technical Selection Committee (TSC) rejected more than 70 former politicians who had applied to be members of parliament, but did not fit the criteria, informs Garowe Online. The UN envoy for Somalia urged the parties involved to finalise the list of the new parliamentarians to prevent further delays.

A Ugandan activist group, Citizen Coalition on Somalia, threatens demonstrations if the military does not pull its troops out of Somalia, reports AP. Uganda is the largest contributor to AMISOM with 6,000 troops. Following the crash of three Ugandan army helicopters en route to Somalia, the activist group has criticised the government about the lack of information concerning the mission, and raising fresh questions regarding Uganda’s involvement in the troubled Horn of Africa nation.

Piracy

The Lords EU Committee says the EU’s operation ATALANTA should continue beyond its 2014 mandate, attributing the reduction of kidnappings off the coast of Somalia to the EU naval presence, reports BBC.

The committee welcomed the EU operation’s attacks on pirates’ land bases and the increase in trials and imprisonment of pirates, but also recommended a focus on rehabilitation of the pirates and increased aid to reduce poverty in the country. Other findings in the report included:

- Root problems in Somali must be addressed before piracy can be completely eradicated;
- EU efforts to increase aid to Somali are encouraged and should focus on providing alternative livelihoods as incentives to help the Somali people reject piracy activity;
- The Committee revised its view on the use of armed guards on ships since the original report and is now supporting the initiative;
- To date, no ship has been pirated while using armed guards and the use of armed guards has not increased violence;
- Acknowledgement of the high degree of international cooperation between national navies of Russia, China and India; this unified effort should be modeled in military operations in other theaters which include EU-NATO relations; and
- China’s role is opportune and demonstrates an increasing cooperation with international community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Number of Hostages</th>
<th>Vessels Held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU NAVFOR/NATO</td>
<td>177 as of 07 August 2012</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMB*</td>
<td>212 as of 16 August 2012</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia Report</td>
<td>250 as of 14 August 2012</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For further information on piracy-related topics please visit our Horn of Africa page.

* The number of hostages and vessels held can vary from entity to entity. For example, EU and NATO statistics account vessels hijacked for ransom, while IMB includes fishing vessels and dhows hijacked for reasons other than ransom.
Iraq

Iraqi Minister of Communications Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi has quit his post, accusing Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki of “political interference” in ministry affairs, reports Agence France-Presse (AFP). Allawi’s resignation is the first by a cabinet member since the formation of Iraq’s national unity government in December 2010. Months earlier, Reuters reported that opponents of Maliki attempted to remove the prime minister with a vote of no-confidence, but were unable to raise the required number of votes.

Spill-over violence from Syria is of primary concern to the Iraqi government struggling to overcome its own legacy of sectarian violence, reports Reuters. Iraqi troops protecting the porous Iraqi-Syrian border were targeted by two rockets from Syria near the al Qaim crossing on 25 August and again on 26 August. Earlier in the month, a stray Syrian army shell landed in the Iraqi city of al Qaim. Reuters reports that the potential rise of a hard-line Sunni government in Syria has Iraq’s Shi’ite-led government concerned. Baghdad has consistently resisted calls from Sunni Arab Gulf states to take a tougher position against Assad. During his visit to Iraq on 22 August, top US General Martin Dempsey and Prime Minister Maliki discussed regional and security issues including the situation in Syria that risks further destabilising Iraq, reports Associated Press (AP).

In July, US President Obama barred a small Iraqi bank, Elaf Islamic Bank from dealings with the American banking system because the Iraqi bank has been helping Iran skirt economic sanctions imposed on Tehran, according to the New York Times (NYT). The bank is only part of a network of financial institutions and oil-smuggling operations that, according to Iraqi banking experts, has allowed for the flow of dollars to the ailing Iranian economy. Reuters reports that Baghdad declared its financial dealings with Iran, compliant with international law, and rejected the US allegations. Iraq’s Shi’ite-led government has allied itself with Iran since 2003 and Iran is now Iraq’s main trade partner.

The Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an organisation comprising a number of insurgency groups, has claimed responsibility for a wave of 43 attacks throughout the country this summer, according to AP. The ISI says their campaign included roadside bombings, sticky bombs, mortars and rockets, booby trapped homes and shootings of Iraqi security forces from late June through the later portion of July. Attacks during the holy month of Ramadan killed 409 people and injured 975 others, reports AFP. Historically, extremists are “more intent on conducting these [suicide attacks] during the holy month of Ramadan because it is a period associated with martyrdom and self-sacrifice”. On 27 August, Iraqi officials confirmed that gunmen killed Brigadier General Abdul Hussein Mohsen of the army border forces outside Baghdad while two civilians were killed in separate car bombings elsewhere in the country, according to AP. In another AP report, eight police and soldiers were killed in Baghdad and Fallujah on 26 August. In Mosul, separate shooting incidents left three dead on 25 August, reports Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Friday prayers were interrupted in Baghdad as twin blasts, one exploding beside a pulpit, killed at least three and wounded six other people on 24 August, reported Reuters. On 18 August, gunmen in Mosul raided two homes killing six people, according to AP. A string of attacks across the country on 17 August killed over 90 people and wounded many more in what became the second deadliest day in Iraq since the departure of US troops in December 2011, reports AP.

Suspected sabotage resulted in a fire on the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline in Turkey’s Sirnak province near the Iraqi border on 27 August, according to Reuters. Oil flows were stopped and officials stated it was not immediately clear when the pipeline would resume operations. The pipeline, which exported 300,000 barrels of oil a day, is a frequent target of sabotage and was last closed on 06 August as a result of fire. The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), an armed group fighting the Turkish military, has targeted the oil pipeline in the past.

Syria

Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi told UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon that he was “honored, flattered, humbled and scared” at the task of heading international efforts to broker peace in the Syrian conflict, according to Reuters. The 24 August meeting between the parties was their first since Brahimi agreed to replace Kofi Annan as the UN and Arab League joint special representative on Syria. UN observers ended their mission in Syria on 19 August in the face of escalating violence, reports al Jazeera. Created in April 2012 to support the Annan peace plan, much of the mission operations were suspended in June when both sides continued to violate the ceasefire.

Officials from Britain, France and the United States met on 22 August to discuss how to bolster the Syrian opposition, reported Reuters. Both the British Prime Minister David Cameron and US President Barack Obama agreed that the use or threat of chemical weapons use by Syria was “completely unacceptable” and would force them to “revisit their approach” to the conflict. Meanwhile, al Jazeera reports that Syria assured Moscow it will not use or move chemical weapons stockpiles and Russian deputy foreign minister
Gennady Gatilov stated that Moscow was working closely with Damascus to safely secure Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles. On 15 August, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) suspended Syria’s membership at a summit of Muslim leaders in Mecca, citing President Bashar al-Assad’s violent suppression of the Syrian revolt, reports Reuters. Also, France signalled its willingness to participate in the enforcement of a limited no-fly zone and suggested that such actions could be accomplished without the UN Security Council where Russia and China would likely veto the move, according to the Telegraph. French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Brian called for the creation of an “international coalition” to implement the no-fly zone. Turkey and the United States have already discussed the possibility of a no-fly zone to protect Syrian civilians. Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu dismissed claims by the Assad regime of shipping weapons to Syrian rebels, reports CNN. Davutoglu told reporters that “no regime fighting its own people can survive long. [The al-Assad regime] has months, and maybe even weeks—not years”.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar advised their citizens to leave Lebanon on 16 August, after armed gunmen from the Lebanese Shi’ite Meqdad clan kidnapped more than 20 people in retaliation for the capture of one of their kinsmen in Syria, according to al Jazeera. The Meqdad clan’s retaliatory kidnapping sought to put pressure on the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to release clan member Hassan al-Meqdad by targeting Syrians that are part of the rebel force and citizens of Turkey; one of the rebels’ regional supporters. The kidnappings have reignited sectarian violence in the Lebanese city of Tripoli and have many concerned over the effects of the Syrian conflict in the region, reports to Reuters.

Clashes between Sunni Muslims and Alawites have killed 16 people since 20 August with some fearing that the violence cannot be contained. Hezbollah leadership have accused the Lebanese March 14 Party, a coalition of anti-Syrian regime political parties, of fuelling tensions in Lebanon and Syria adding that the coalition has brought Lebanon into the Syrian crisis, reports the Daily Star.

Opposition activists reported more than 440 people were killed on 25 August, making it the single deadliest day in the country’s civil war, according to CNN. August is already the deadliest month in the Syrian conflict, according to opposition activists. The Assad regime’s assault on the opposition appears to be intensifying with reports of indiscriminate bombings from jets and rocket attacks targeting known civilian areas. Opposition activists claimed that 10 missiles targeted Idlib province with Syrian warplanes opening machine gun fire on civilians, reports CNN. Additionally, opposition activists accused the Syrian regime of carrying out a massacre that killed over 200 Sunnis in the outskirts of Damascus, reports the Guardian. In what Assad termed a “counter-terrorism” operation, Syrian troops stormed the poor-Sunni community of Daraya in southwestern Damascus. Activists dispute the regime’s account of the attacks stating that one eyewitness saw an eight year old girl, Asma Abu al Laban, shot by snipers in a car as her family fled the raid.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) Undersecretary-General Valerie Amos, as many as 2.5 million Syrians are in need of assistance due to the widening impact of the crisis on the economy and people’s livelihoods. During her recent visit to Syria on 14 August, Amos reported that over a million people had been uprooted and faced destitution and that over a million more have urgent humanitarian needs. The number of refugees from the Syria conflict is now at 200,000 people, according to the Washington Post (see this week’s In Focus on the refugee crisis in Syria).
In recent developments, Syrian refugees have begun to seek assistance beyond the region. The Algerian Ministry of Interior shared that an estimated 12,000 Syrians have entered Algeria, with some estimates placing the number at 25,000. Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, reported that an average of 1,000 Syrian asylum seekers have been arriving in Europe each month since January 2012, according to IRIN.

The exodus from Syria has heightened tensions in the Middle East, according to the New York Times (NYT). Syrian government forces have also dropped leaflets encouraging people to flee, especially from Aleppo, suggesting that President Bashar al-Assad may be trying to use refugees to punish Syria’s neighbours. “It is a way for Assad to put pressure on Turkey,” said Ayman, a Syrian activist working with refugees at the Turkish border.

Turkey is a vocal opponent of the Assad government and has become the primary host country for fleeing Syrians. With more than 80,000 registered refugees as of 27 August, Turkey is fast approaching its self-declared limit of 100,000, raising questions from the international community about what happens when that figure is reached, reports the NYT. Turkish officials have suggested establishing a UN buffer zone inside Syria to shelter refugees and have indicated they will attend a 30 August meeting of the UN Security Council to study the humanitarian situation in Syria and neighbouring countries in hopes to spur action, according to Agence France-Press (AFP). Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated that the Syrian crisis “constitutes a security risk for the neighbouring countries” and called on the UN to “intervene in accordance with its mission”. Davutoglu told reporters that as his country carries out its humanitarian duties, the increasing numbers are “becoming burdensome”. The spike in refugees has some 10,000 Syrian refugees waiting on the Syrian side of the border as Turkey rushes to build four more camps to accommodate the influx, according to the Associated Press (AP). Additionally, tighter security checks at border crossings have slowed refugee movement, as Turkish officials fear Kurdish rebel fighters may be trying to enter Turkey through Syria.

On 26 August, Jordan called upon the international community to boost humanitarian assistance to some 160,000 people, according to AP. Jordan opened its first refugee camp in late July 2012; a separate camp also hosts deserters from Syrian security forces, reports the Washington Post. The recent defection of former Syrian Prime Minister Riyab Hijab and his family to Jordan, reflects the country’s shifting position away from the Syrian regime, despite the government’s continued diplomatic engagement, according to the Financial Times. Jordanian officials are concerned that Syria could fracture into tribal or ethnic enclaves that could “tug on the allegiances of tribal groups” along the border. Of further concern is the possibility that Syrian soldiers and agents may infiltrate the refugee camps and cause trouble that would increase insecurity in the region.

The Syrian refugee crisis is a particularly sensitive issue in Lebanon, reports IRIN. Politically, Lebanon has several pro-Assad factions in parliament and the government has been hesitant to set up refugee camps for Syrians, fearing the camps could become volatile, as seen in Palestinian refugee camps. Spill-over violence, as evidenced by a series of sectarian clashes in Tripoli, has been exacerbated by the presence of Syrian refugees, according to al Jazeera. Even with the establishment of a centralised registration centre in Tripoli to better capture refugee data, Lebanese community-based humanitarian organisations report the number of refugees in Lebanon is closer to 90,000 people, up from UNHCR’s refugee figures, according to the Daily Star. While many displaced Syrians have found shelter with host families, the recent spike in the number of refugees arriving has caused sharp competition for housing. Many refugees have been forced to find alternative shelter. Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) reported that thousands are living in overcrowded conditions in Wadi Khaled and Bekaa Valley while in Tripoli, the organisation reported many families were living in rented storage units. Also, UNHCR stated that the rise in refugees sheltering in schools was posing a problem as the start of school was approaching. On 18 August, UNHCR reported that several Lebanese border villages in the North were reaching maximum capacity amid growing security concerns.

After a brief border closure earlier in August, Iraq has once again opened its borders to refugees from Syria, according to Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Iraqis returning from Syria after fleeing sectarian violence in 2006-2007 will receive USD 3,000 to cover living expenses. Iraq’s already existing Domiz camp is located in Iraqi Kurdistan, where shelter, education and healthcare are provided to 2,500 Syrian Kurds, reports IRIN. There are also plans to erect 200 tents in al Kasik, 50 km from the Rabi’a border-crossing. Meanwhile, UNHCR and the Iraq Red Crescent are in the process of establishing a new camp in the city of al Qaim. The Iraqi government is concerned that the sectarian violence in Syria will fuel a resurgence of al Qaeda violence in Iraq as evidenced by the spate of recent attacks in the country, according to Reuters. IRIN reports that some Syrian refugees are receiving military training from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), causing alarm in the region. The KRG justifies its training of refugees as preparation for the fall of the Syrian regime which could create a security vacuum. However, some are concerned that Syrian-Kurd refugees may sympathise with the Kurdish Worker’s Party (PKK), the Iraqi militant separatist group, raising the possibility of inflaming tensions with Turkey over Kurdish autonomy.

European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid Kristalina Georgieva stated that it was time for major governments to place Syria’s “rapidly worsening humanitarian conditions” on top of their agendas, according to the Wall Street Journal. Georgieva shared that ability to assist those in Syria has worsened and cautioned the international community that “the impact on Syria’s neighbours as the refugee numbers rise is becoming very serious”. The swelling numbers of Syrian refugees has added many new stresses to its neighbours and risks destabilising the Middle East, reports Reuters.