



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

Debate on 13 July: Recent Developments in the Middle East

This Library Note provides background material in advance of the debate in the House of Lords on 13 July on the Middle East. It provides a brief summary of recent developments in selected countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen). It also contains statistical information about the region as a whole and a short note on recent elections in Egypt.

This Note updates information provided in House of Lords Library Note LLN [2012/008](#) *Recent Developments in the Middle East* (9 March 2012).

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1. Introduction

This Library Note provides background information in advance of the debate in the House of Lords on 13 July 2012 on the Middle East. As with the previous Note published in March 2012, given the size of the region and the speed with which developments are unfolding in many countries, it is not possible to provide comprehensive, up to date briefing on all the issues that fall within the scope of this debate. This Note therefore provides a brief summary of recent developments in selected countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen), together with links to further reading on these countries. It also includes a table providing statistical information about the Middle East and North Africa as a whole, and an Election Briefing Note on recent elections in Egypt. Election results in Libya are not available at the time of writing.

2. Bahrain

On [14 June 2012](#), the High Criminal Court of Appeal in Manama upheld the conviction of nine medics in Bahrain, received for their alleged involvement in last year's anti-government protests. Although the medics had their sentences reduced, and nine others were acquitted, Amnesty International saw it as a "[dark day for justice in Bahrain](#)". The organisation claimed that there was no evidence of any crime, and raised allegations that the medical health professionals were also subject to torture whilst being detained. Amnesty viewed the charges as politically motivated.

The convictions related to the large-scale pro-democracy protests that took place within the country in February and March 2011. [Human Rights Watch](#) estimated over 40 people had died in events connected to the protests ("including four who died in custody in April from torture or medical neglect") and that more than 1,600 people had been detained. On 15 March, the King of Bahrain, King Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa, [declared](#) a three-month state of emergency. Over the following days, state forces [forcibly cleared](#) Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain's capital, Manama, often seen as the focal point of the demonstrations.

Reaction to the Bahraini government's handling of the protests was highly critical. The US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, and the United Nations both issued [statements](#) during the demonstrations expressing their concern over the levels of violence initiated by the state. There were also reports of a number of Bahraini officials [resigning](#) over the clashes, including MPs from the Shia-led Al-Wefaq party, members of the judiciary and Bahrain's Health Minister, Nizar Baharna. In November 2011, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry released a [report](#) concluding that the Bahraini authorities had responded with "excessive force". In [reaction](#), King Hamad said the authorities would "learn their lesson".

Despite [reports](#) that demonstrations and human rights offences were ongoing, on 22 April 2012, the country held the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix—in the face of [vocal opposition](#). Once again, the preceding months of [February](#) and [March](#) saw tens of thousands of protesters take to the streets, as the Shia community called for an end to the "deep discrimination" they believe is handed down to them by the Sunni-led government. More protests followed in [May 2012](#), in opposition to a potential union between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. These proposals also caused discord with Iran.

Whilst the majority religion in the country is considered to be Shia Muslim, Bahrain has been ruled since 1783 by the Khalifah dynasty, who are Sunni Muslims. Along with King Hamad, the family has also [installed](#) Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, as "the longest-sitting unelected Prime Minister in the world". As a result, there have been long-standing tensions between the two religious groups, with the Shia population calling for constitutional reforms that could enhance their political power. Although concessions toward such demands have been made over the past 15 years, they have still not quelled the level of dissatisfaction expressed by the Shia community.

Further Reading

- Amnesty International, [Flawed Reforms: Bahrain Fails to Achieve Justice for Protesters](#), April 2012
- Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, [Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry](#), 23 November 2011
- Jane Kinninmont, [Bahrain: Beyond the Impasse](#), Chatham House, June 2012

3. Egypt

On 24 June 2012 Mohammed Mursi was announced the victor of the Egyptian presidential elections (see Appendix 2 for more information), so becoming the first civilian leader of Egypt in more than 60 years and the first Islamist politician in the modern Arab world to come to power via the ballot box. He was formally sworn in on 30 June 2012. Observers have suggested Mr Mursi faces some difficult political challenges, particularly the future role of the military and the drafting of the new constitution. Days before his election, [the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces \(Scaf\)](#) issued a constitutional declaration following the dissolution of parliament. The Scaf gave itself temporary legislative powers and control over all army affairs, including the defence budget. The power to dissolve the constitutional assembly and appoint a new one was also reserved. [One observer has suggested](#) the declaration indicated “the old regime is still very much alive and will fight new battles with the Muslim Brotherhood and other groups that want political change to continue”. As another [commentator put it](#), removing Mubarak was “the easy part compared to addressing the deeper power structures in a state where the military, the police and the intelligence services have been accustomed to sweeping powers”. On 8 July, President Mursi [ordered parliament to reconvene](#), indicating the new President is willing to confront the military’s place in the Egyptian state. In response Scaf insisted [the decision would be upheld](#) but the parliament has since briefly met.

Observers have suggested Mursi will also need to address Egypt’s economic problems. In reference to the factors that brought down the Mubarak regime, the [World Bank](#) has said the low projected growth rates (2.5 percent in 2012 and 3.5 percent in 2013) could “pose the danger of adding fuel to mounting social frustrations, as they will not be enough to deliver the needed jobs and opportunities”. Unemployment, the World Bank predicts, is set to remain around 12 percent. Commercial activity has been interrupted since January 2011 by political uncertainty, itself compounded by external factors. The global economic slowdown led to a drop in Foreign Direct Investment (which fell from an average \$3.7 billion to \$0.9 billion in 2011) and international reserves have continued to fall, reaching \$18 billion by end of December 2011—“the equivalent to three months of imports of goods and services”. It has been reported [Egypt is confident agreement can be reached with the IMF](#) on a \$3.2 billion loan once a new government has been formed.

National reconciliation, following a close and often bitter election campaign, will also be a challenge for the new President. [It has been suggested](#) that the formation of Mr Mursi’s cabinet “will be an early indication of his ability to work inclusively with other political factions, which will be essential if Egypt’s new civilian leaders are to negotiate an end to military rule”. There have also been concerns expressed about what Mr Mursi’s election will mean for [Egypt’s minorities and women](#). In his first speech, however, he sought to calm fears: “Egypt is for all Egyptians; all of us are equals in terms of rights”. On the international front, amid [reported tensions](#) with Gulf States, [Mr Mursi has already stated](#) Egypt’s international commitments will be maintained and has said Egypt would not interfere with the internal affairs of any other country. It is also thought possible that Mr Mursi may change [Egypt’s policy with regard to its relationship with the US](#). Hilary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, is due to visit Egypt in July and [President Mursi will meet President Obama](#) at the White House in September.

Further Reading

- *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, [‘Event Summary: Egypt’s New President: Political and Economic Challenges’](#), 22 June 2012
- Jeff Martini, [‘The Egyptian Military Wins Again’](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 21 June 2012
- Jane Kinninmont, [‘Egypt’s Presidential Elections: The Economy’](#), *Chatham House*, 18 May 2012

4. Iran

Talks were held in Moscow in June 2012 between Iran and members of the P5+1 group (US, UK, France, Russia, China and Germany) over the ongoing Iranian uranium enrichment programme. However, these talks [concluded without agreement](#), or with a date set for further high-level negotiations. Instead, technical experts from each country and officials from Brussels and Tehran are [currently meeting in Istanbul](#). Baroness Ashton of Upholland, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Chair of the P5+1 group, said that “[significant gaps in substance](#)” between the two sides had prevented any progress being made.

One such area of disagreement was the ongoing imposition of international sanctions on Iran. In addition to economic sanctions already enacted by the UN Security Council, [EU and US sanctions](#) targeting Iran’s oil export sector came into force on 1 July and 28 June 2012 respectively. Analysts report that the combined effect of these sanctions are already being felt within the country. [Food costs have reportedly risen markedly](#), and much of Iran’s tanker fleet is thought to have been rendered immobile or reduced to [providing floating storage for surplus oil](#).

Iran’s response to the sanctions, and wider international pressure, has been to embark on a [series of military exercises](#) and to continue to threaten the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. The Iranian Parliament—the Majlis—is [currently considering legislation](#) which would provide authorisation for such a blockade. Iranian state media has also issued claims that Iran could [attack nearby US bases](#) if provoked. The response of the United States has been to [significantly increase its military deployment](#) to the region. Senior American officials have reportedly briefed the media that the [US is prepared to respond with force](#) if Iran attempts any form of military blockade.

The US administration has also [tacitly admitted involvement](#) in cyber attacks on Iranian facilities. Such attacks have continued, with Iran’s oil ministry and main export terminal being targeted in May by “[the most sophisticated malware ever found](#)” according to cyber security specialists.

Further Reading

- Congressional Research Service, [Iran: US Concerns and Policy Responses](#), 24 May 2012
- House of Commons Library, [Iran: could there be a compromise?](#), 1 June 2012, SN/IA/6336
- Dalton, R, ‘[Chapter 7: Iran](#)’, *The Middle East*, Chatham House, 2012
- *Foreign Policy*, ‘[Battle Rial: To end Iran’s nuclear program, it’s time for America to step up its economic warfare](#)’, June 2012
- *Economist*, ‘[America is using the dollar to hurt Iran—will it work?](#)’, 23 June 2012
- Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), [Nuclear Iran](#), 2012
- *The New York Times Topics*, ‘[Iran’s Nuclear Programme](#)’, 2012

5. Iraq

Following the withdrawal of American troops in mid-December 2011, Iraq has seen a [rise in violent terrorist attacks](#). Whilst the violence still remains far below 2006/07 levels, in 2012 Al Qa'ida in Iraq and other Sunni Islamist insurgents have carried out at least one major attack a month against predominately Shiite targets, in an apparent attempt to stir up sectarian tensions.

So far those attempts have largely failed. However, the violence has added to growing tensions among Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish political groups. The Iraqi government is currently led by the Shiite Prime Minister, Nouri Al-Maliki, following [contentious elections in 2010](#). Months of political deadlock following the elections were eventually overcome via a US brokered solution (the 'Irbil Agreement') through which Sunni factions led by the former Prime Minister, Iyad al-Allawi, agreed to let Mr Al-Maliki form a [national unity government](#). However, Mr Al-Maliki has faced growing allegations that he is attempting to [monopolise power at the expense of Sunni and Kurdish groups](#). In December 2011, even as US troops were leaving the country, Mr Al-Maliki pushed for a vote of no confidence against the Sunni Deputy Prime Minister, Salah al-Mutlaq, and issued an [arrest warrant](#) against the Sunni Deputy President, Tariq al-Hashimi, accusing him of ordering acts of assassination. Mr Al-Maliki has also been accused of failing to set up a promised regulatory body that would have the final say on legislation, and to appoint defence and interior ministers, [retaining both roles himself](#).

A key point in the escalating tension came in June, when Mr Al-Maliki narrowly survived a vote of no confidence. The campaign for such a vote had been backed by Sunni and Kurdish political groups, but also by the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his supporters. It was reported that following intervention from Iran however, itself predominately Shiite, Mr al-Sadr and other Shiite factions were pressed to give Mr Al-Maliki—who has close ties with the Iranian administration—a [two month grace period](#) to address the issues within the governing coalition. The extent of Iran's influence in Iraq remains an area of significant debate. Some analysts suggest that [Iranian influence has continued to grow](#) following the US military withdrawal. However, others point to lingering tensions between the two countries dating back to the Iran-Iraq war, and to [ongoing co-operation between the US administration and Baghdad](#).

The current political deadlock has had a significant impact on the legislative process in Iraq, preventing parliament from considering key proposals including those which would [regulate the sharing of oil revenue](#).

Human Rights Watch also report that human rights conditions in Iraq remain "[extremely poor](#)". In particular, journalists, detainees and opposition activists have reportedly been subjected to severe and widespread brutality at the hands of security forces and armed gangs.

Further Reading

- Congressional Research Service, [Iraq: Politics, Governance and Human Rights](#), June 2012
- Centre for Strategic and International Studies, [The Outcome of Invasion: US and Iranian Strategic Competition in Iraq](#), March 2012
- House of Commons Library, [Iraq at the creation of its new government](#), 19 January 2011, SN05834
- House of Commons Library, [The Chilcot Inquiry: an update](#), 3 February 2012, SN06215

6. Israel/Palestine

Legislative and presidential elections were both due to take place in the Palestinian Territories in May 2012. However, following a [breakdown in reconciliation talks](#) between Hamas, which recently entered its fifth year of control of the Gaza Strip, and Fatah, which leads the Palestinian Authority based in the West Bank, these elections have now been postponed. It is unclear whether they will be held before the end of 2012.

In Israel, on 7 May 2012 the Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, [appeared to confirm plans for early elections](#) for the Israeli Parliament—the Knesset—in September 2012. However, the following day Mr Netanyahu announced a [surprise coalition deal](#) with the recently elected leader of the Kadima party, Shaul Mofaz. Kadima has joined the coalition led by Mr Netanyahu's Likud party with the intention, according to Mr Netanyahu, of creating a [“stable government” for Israel until elections in October 2013](#). Some observers have called the move a [stunning coup](#), aimed at bringing the ruling coalition closer to the centre and outflanking hard-line pro-settlement factions within Likud.

Key events have pushed the issue of Israeli settlers occupying land in the Palestinian Territories to the forefront of political debate in recent months. These included a recent Supreme Court ruling that an [illegal settlement in Ulpana](#) in the West Bank had to be demolished, generating considerable criticism amongst pro-settlement factions. Mr Netanyahu attempted to counteract such criticism by announcing that a further [850 Israeli homes would be built in the West Bank](#). However, this largely failed to placate those angry that the Ulpana settlement was to be dismantled, and attracted considerable international criticism, [notably from the United States](#) and [the United Kingdom](#).

Meanwhile, negotiations on the future of the Palestinian Territories continue to show little signs of progress. In May 2012 Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak indicated that inaction was not an option, and that in the absence of agreement Israel would have to consider [“a provisional arrangement or even unilateral action”](#). The Palestinian Authority has [opposed any effort by Israel to decree the contours of its territory](#) and to abandon a negotiated settlement on a wide range of issues, including the future of Jerusalem.

June 2012 was marked by a [resurgence in violence](#) in Gaza between the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and militants allegedly backed by Hamas. [An armed raid across Egypt's Sinai border](#), in which an Israeli man and two gunmen were killed, sparked a spate of attacks and counterattacks involving [Israeli air strikes in the Gaza Strip](#) and a surge in [Hamas rocket attacks into Israel](#). The [Israeli blockade of Gaza](#) also continues, now entering its sixth year.

Further Reading

- House of Commons Library, [Palestine Update 2012](#), 26 April 2012, SN/IA/6307
- United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OCHAoPt), [Five Years of the Blockade: The Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip](#), June 2012
- International Crisis Group, [The Emperor has No Clothes: Palestinians and the End of the Peace Process](#), May 2012
- United Nations Security Council, [675th meeting: The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question](#), April 2012

7. Libya

On 7 July 2012, Libya held elections to the new General National Congress (GNC), the first national elections since 1965. At the time of writing, the results are not available, but [unofficial exit polls](#) suggest the liberal National Forces Alliance led by Mahmoud Jibril, who headed Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) during 2011, is ahead despite earlier expectations that Islamist parties would do well. The 200-member GNC will replace the NTC as Libya's interim government.

Violence in the days leading up to the elections led to [uncertainty about whether they would go ahead](#). The self-declared Barqa Council in Cyrenaica, the oil-rich eastern province of Libya, called for a boycott unless GNC seats were shared equally between Libya's three provinces. In late June, armed militias [set up roadblocks](#) on the main highway linking the east and west of the country which they said would remain in place unless more seats were allocated to Cyrenaica. On 1 July, armed men [ransacked election offices](#) in several eastern cities, including Benghazi, setting fire to voting lists and ballot papers. On 6 July, armed groups shut down several eastern oil terminals, and shot a helicopter carrying election materials. A 22-year-old election volunteer was killed in this incident. On polling day, several polling stations in Benghazi and the eastern coastal towns of Guba and Suluq were [attacked](#).

There have been a number of attacks against international targets in Benghazi in recent months. A convoy carrying Sir Dominic Asquith, the British Ambassador to Libya, came under [attack](#) from a rocket-propelled grenade in mid-June. Five days earlier, a small bomb was set off outside the US diplomatic mission in Benghazi. In May, a rocket propelled grenade struck the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and in April, an explosive device was thrown at the convoy of the head of the United Nations mission to Libya.

Amnesty International [warned in a report](#) published at the beginning of July that hundreds of armed militias continue to act above the law, arresting people and holding them in unofficial detention centres. Clashes between armed militias have led to deaths and injuries among bystanders, and some communities displaced by militia activity during the 2011 conflict have not yet been able to return home.

In other developments, the former Prime Minister Al Baghdadi Al Mahmoudi was [extradited from Tunisia](#) at the end of June. The Libyan government denied claims by Mahmoudi's lawyer that he had been tortured on his return. The Tunisian President described the extradition as "illegal", saying it had taken place without his knowledge, but the Tunisian government insisted the extradition had only gone ahead after they had received assurances that Libya could guarantee a fair trial. The NTC persuaded the powerful military council in Zintan to [release four members of staff](#) from the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 2 July after nearly a month's detention. The ICC has charged Colonel Gaddafi's son Saif al Islam with crimes against humanity, and the ICC staff were in Libya to discuss his defence rights with him. The Libyan authorities alleged that they had compromised Libyan national security by smuggling secret letters to him. Libya continues to insist that it, and not the ICC, will try Saif.

Further Reading

- Amnesty International, [Libya: Rule of Law or Rule of Militias?](#), 5 July 2012
- *Guardian*, '[After Gaddafi, Libya splits into disparate militia zones](#)', 10 June 2012
- *Libya Herald*, '[Election Analysis: So who are they and what do they actually stand for?](#)', 30 June 2012

8. Syria

Speaking on [11 June 2012](#), the UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, warned that Syria was on the verge of civil war. It was [estimated](#) that over 15,000 Syrians had died in violence across the country as the government sought to repress opposition forces. At a recent [meeting](#) in Paris, calls intensified for further global sanctions to be imposed, and for Russia and China to cease their support of the Syrian government.

The Syrian government have also witnessed a number of [high-ranking defections](#) across the border in recent weeks, a fact that has soured Syrian-Turkey relations. However, these relations were dealt an even fiercer blow by news that Syria had targeted [several Turkish planes](#), one of which had been shot down. Reacting to the attacks, the Turkish government outlined their anger but affirmed that they had no intention of going to war. Later, in an [interview](#) with the Turkish newspaper Cumhuriyet, Syria's President, Bashar al-Assad, claimed to "100 percent" regret the incident.

Within the country, recent events have suggested that the violent conflicts between the Syrian army and armed rebel forces show no signs of abating. [On 6 June 2012](#), opposition forces claim that military forces killed 78 people in a single village within the Hama province. Previously, on [25 May 2012](#), a similar "massacre" occurred in the village of Taldou, in the Homs province. On that occasion it was confirmed that 108 people had been killed, including 49 children and 34 women. [In a recent address to the Syrian parliament](#), President Assad blamed the violence within the country on terrorism and foreign forces.

The actions of the Syrian government have attracted fierce criticism from the international community, with concerted efforts to resolve the crisis coming from the United Nations Security Council. On [2 April 2012](#), following a period of negotiation, Kofi Annan announced that the Syrian government had agreed to a peace plan. However, with the following days witnessing an intensification in violence, the United Nations were soon to issue a statement condemning the Syrian government for their failure to adhere to the plan. More recently, in [June 2012](#), it was reported that UN proposals had now been agreed for the introduction of a "national unity government" to lead political change within Syria. The sticking point is the potential participation of President Assad in such a move; with Russia opposed to his exclusion, and Syrian rebels demanding it.

The country has been run by the Baath party since 1963, with Bashar al-Assad installed as President in 2000 through succession. Protests have been aimed at the human rights policies of the regime, and call for its removal. The tensions between the government and opposition forces, which increased following a series of events in [March 2011](#), may also be a reflection of the religious differences between the two sides. It is reported that the majority of the opposition to the government are Sunni Muslims, whereas the Syrian government mostly consists of Alawites—a branch of Shia Islam—and Christians. As such, there are increasing [concerns about sectarianism within the country](#), which may continue even if Assad's regime were to fall.

Further Reading

- Human Rights Watch, [Arbitrary Arrests, Torture and Enforced Disappearances in Syria's Underground Prisons since March 2011](#), July 2012
- International Crisis Group, [Syria's Phase of Radicalisation](#), Middle East Briefing No 33, 10 April 2012
- House of Commons Library, [The Syrian Crisis](#), 9 May 2012, SN/IA/6271

9. Tunisia

On the anniversary of revolution in Tunisia, Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General, issued a [statement](#) in which he commended “the people of Tunisia for progress achieved, which he trusts will continue to inspire the region and the world”. In its profile of the country, the [World Bank](#) has also praised Tunisia for its transition to democracy, its advocacy of open information and its commitment to democratic accountability. There is also progress in the drafting of a new constitution, which is underway, and fresh elections are likely to be held in 2013.

Despite this optimism, observers say the interim government need to address a number of economic and social challenges. Following a visit to the country, Christine Lagarde, the Managing Director of the IMF, [said](#) Tunisia faced “deteriorating public finances, a widening current account deficit, and lingering problems in the banking sector”. There was “widespread anxiety about the cost of living and trade”. Recent estimates put unemployment at 18 percent, with youth employment at over 40 percent. The government and private sector “must work in harmony to boost investment, productivity, and create jobs”. The challenge, she said, was to “ensure social cohesion while maintaining macroeconomic stability”. In June 2012 the International Crisis Group highlighted “rising unemployment, stark regional inequalities, smuggling and corruption” as particular issues to be tackled. In a speech to the World Economic Forum, Hamadi Jebali, the interim Prime Minister, [acknowledged](#) the importance of economic development to the success of the transition: “You need to invest in democracy. We all need to invest in democracy. We need to support this Tunisian model”.

Outbreaks of social unrest have continued. In June [violence broke out](#) following a series of protests, including one against an art exhibition that included a portrayal of a nude woman. There have also been political tensions. It was [announced](#) that Mustapha Kamel Nabli, the Central Bank Governor, had been fired, following disagreement with the government over economic policy. Mohamed Abbou, Minister for Administrative Reform, had resigned, saying he had not been given the authority and resources to address corruption. There has also been [public disagreement](#) between parliament and President Marzouki over the legality of the extradition to Libya of Al-Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi, a former Libyan Prime Minister.

Tunisia has been in transition since President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali was forced from power, fleeing to Saudi Arabia in January 2011. Hamadi Jebali became interim Prime Minister in December 2011 as head of Ennahda, the Islamist party banned by Mr Ben Ali that became largest party in the interim assembly elections in October 2011. Moncef Marzouki became President.

Further Reading

- International Crisis Group, [Tunisia: Confronting Social and Economic Challenges](#), 6 June 2012
- Ibrahim Saif and Muhammad Abu Rumman, ‘The Economic Agenda of the Islamist Parties’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 2012, pp [5–9](#)
- Duncan Pickard, [‘The Current Status of Constitution Making in Tunisia’](#), *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 2012
- *Chatham House*, [‘Tunisia One Year On: The Challenges and the Achievements—Meeting Transcript’](#), March 2012

10. Yemen

Yemen's new President, [Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi](#), was inaugurated in February 2012 after an uncontested election, bringing to an end Ali Abdullah Saleh's 33 years in power. Following [UN Security Council Resolution 2014](#), President Saleh agreed in November 2011 to hand over power to Hadi, his deputy, in a transition deal brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council. President Hadi and the national unity government have two years to restructure the military security apparatus, address issues of transitional justice and launch an inclusive National Dialogue Conference to draft a new constitution before full presidential and parliamentary elections are held in 2014. According to the [International Crisis Group](#), "rebels in the North, southern separatists and many independent protestors view the settlement with scepticism, if not outright disdain".

In mid-June, Al Qa'ida-linked militants [withdrew from the towns of Jaar and Zinjibar](#) in the southern province of Abyan. Ansar Al Shariah, an insurgent movement linked to Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP, the Yemeni branch of Al Qa'ida) gained control of territory in Abyan during the summer of 2011, capitalising on the security vacuum left by Yemen's internal political turmoil. Their withdrawal from Jaar and Zinjibar represents a significant victory for Yemeni troops who, with US support, have been waging a campaign against the militants for the last few months. The militants have fought back with acts of terrorism: [AQAP claimed responsibility](#) for a suicide bomb on 18 June which killed a senior army commander. [Ansar Al Sharia was behind a suicide attack](#) in Sana'a during rehearsals for a military parade in which nearly 100 people died.

The US is reportedly behind a number of [drone strikes](#) targeting Al Qa'ida militants, which are said to have become more frequent since President Hadi took power. [Fahd Al Quso](#), a senior AQAP operative, was killed in a US drone attack on 6 May. It emerged soon afterwards that British, American and Saudi intelligence agencies had [disrupted another AQAP plot](#) to bomb a US-bound flight.

The [World Food Programme](#) has warned that Yemen is "on the edge of a humanitarian crisis with some ten million Yemenis, nearly half the population, either hungry or on the edge of hunger". Multiple conflicts have left almost half a million people displaced. At a meeting of the "Friends of Yemen" group chaired by the UK in May, \$4 billion in aid was pledged to address the humanitarian crisis.

Further Reading

- International Crisis Group, [Yemen: Enduring Conflicts, Threatened Transition](#), Middle East Report No 125, 3 July 2012
- Congressional Research Service, [Yemen: Background and US Relations](#), 10 April 2012
- Ginny Hill, '[Yemen's presidential gambit](#)', *Foreign Policy*, 16 May 2012
- Mohammed Albasha, '[Debating the failed states index: Yemen](#)', *Foreign Policy*, 22 June 2012
- Letta Taylor, '[Losing Yemeni hearts and minds](#)', Human Rights Watch, 31 May 2012
- Spencer Ackerman and Noah Schachtman, '[Let's admit it: The US is at war in Yemen too](#)', Brookings Institution, 14 June 2012
- Benedict Wilkinson, '[What is the link between Ansar al Sharia and Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula?](#)', RUSI Analysis, 25 May 2012
- World Food Programme, *Yemen—Comprehensive Food Security Survey 2012*, June 2012, [summary](#) and [full report](#)

Appendix 1: Middle East and North Africa—Select Statistics

Countries profiled in the Library Note are highlighted in grey.

Country	Profile information			Economic Indicators				
	Leader(s)	Population (2011 million)	Area (Sq. Km)	Major Religion(s)	GNI Per head (\$) (2010)	GDP (annual Growth 2010)	Inflation (consumer Prices 2010, annual %)	Unemployment (2009)
Algeria	President: Abdelaziz Bouteflika	36	2,381,740	Sunni Muslim (99%) Christian and Jewish (1%)	4,460	3%	3.9%	11.3% (2008)
Bahrain	King: Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah	0.8	717	Muslim	25,420	6.3% (2008)	2%	n/a
Egypt	Head of State: Field Marshall Tantawi Prime Minister: Kamal al-Ganzouri	76.5*	1,001,450	Muslim (mostly Sunni) (90%) Coptic Christian (9%) Other (1%)	2,340	5.1%	11.3%	9.4%
Iran	Supreme Leader: Ayatollah Ali Khamenei President: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	75.1	1,648,000	Muslims (89% are Shi'a, 10% are Sunni, mainly Kurds) Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian or Bahá'í (1%)	4,530	1.8% (2009)	10.1%	10.5% (2008)
Iraq	President: Jalal Talabani Prime minister: Nouri al-Maliki	24.6	437,072	Muslim (97%) Christian or other (3%)	2,320	0.8%	2.9%	n/a

Country	Profile information				Economic Indicators			
	Leader(s)	Population (2011 million)	Area (Sq. Km)	Major Religion(s)	GNI Per head (\$) (2010)	GDP (annual Growth 2010)	Inflation (consumer Prices 2010, annual %)	Unemployment (2009)
Israel	President: Shimon Peres Prime minister: Binyamin Netanyahu	7.5	21,000	Jewish, Muslim, and Christian	27,340	4.7%	2.7%	7.6%
Jordan	Head of state: King Abdullah II Prime Minister: Awn al-Khasawneh	6.5	89,213	Sunni Muslim (92%), Christian (6%) Other (2%)	4,350	3.1%	5%	12.9%
Kuwait	Emir: Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Jaber al-Sabah	3.6	17,818	Muslim (85%) (Sunni 70%, Shi'a 30%)	43,930 (2009)	4.4% (2007)	4%	n/a
Lebanon	President: Michel Suleiman Prime Minister: Najib Mikati	4.3	10,452	Muslim Christian	9,020	7%	4%	9% (2007)
Libya	Chairman of the National Transitional Council (NTC): Mustafa Abdul Jalil Interim Prime Minister: Abdurrahim al-Keib	6.4	1,760,000	Sunni Muslim (97%)	12,020	2.1% (2009)	2.5% (2009)	n/a
Mauritania	President: Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz	3.3	1,030,000	Muslim	1,030	5%	6.3%	n/a
Morocco	King: Mohammed VI Prime minister: Abdelilah Benkirane	31.9 (2010)	446,550	Muslim (98.7%), Christian (1.1%), Jewish (0.2%)	2,850	3.7%	1%	10%

Country	Profile information				Economic Indicators			
	Leader(s)	Population (2011 million)	Area (Sq. Km)	Major Religion(s)	GNI Per head (\$) (2010)	GDP (annual Growth 2010)	Inflation (consumer Prices 2010, annual %)	Unemployment (2009)
Oman	Sultan, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister: Qaboos Bin Said Al Said	2.8	309,500	Muslim	17,890	1.1% (2009)	3.2%	n/a
Palestinian Territories	Palestinian Authority President: Mahmoud Abbas Hamas leader: Ismail Haniya	4.4	5,970 (West Bank territories) 365 (Gaza)	Muslim Christian	1,250 (2005)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Qatar	Emir: Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifah Al Thani	1.5	11,437	Muslim	n/a	8.6% (2009)	-2.4%	0.5% (2007)
Saudi Arabia	Head of state, prime minister: King Abdullah Bin-Abd-al-Aziz Al Saud	26.2	2,240,000	Muslim	17,200	3.8%	5.3%	5.4%
Syria	President: Bashar al-Assad	22.5	185,180	Sunni Arab (64%) Sunni Kurd (10%) Christian (divided into 11 sects) 10%; Alawite 10%; Twelver Shia/Ismaeli 3%; Druze 3%; Yazidis, Jews, and others	2,640	3.2%	4.4%	8.4% (2007)
Tunisia	President: Moncef Marzouki Prime minister: Hamadi Jebali	10.4	164,150	Muslim (99%) Other (1%)	4,070	3.7%	4.4%	14.2% (2008)

Country	Profile information			Economic Indicators				
	Leader(s)	Population (2011 million)	Area (Sq. Km)	Major Religion(s)	GNI Per head (\$) (2010)	GDP (annual Growth 2010)	Inflation (consumer Prices 2010, annual %)	Unemployment (2009)
United Arab Emirates	President, ruler of Abu Dhabi: Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Vice president and PM, ruler of Dubai: Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum	4.7	77,700	Sunni Muslim (majority) Shi'a Muslim (minority)	41,930 (2009)	1.4%	N/A	4% (2008)
Yemen	President: Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi	24.3	536,869	Muslim	1,070 (2009)	3.8% (2009)	11.2%	15% (2008)

(Sources: Foreign and Commonwealth Office; [‘Country Profiles—Middle East and North Africa’](#); BBC, [‘Country Profiles’](#) and World Bank, [‘Data—Indicators’](#))

Appendix 2: Egyptian Presidential Elections

Egyptian Presidential Elections: Results

- On 24 June, it was [announced](#) that Mohammed Mursi, of the Muslim Brotherhood, had won the run-off to be Egypt's new President, receiving 51.73 percent of the votes (around 13.23 million).
- Elections took place on 16–17 June, but the [results were delayed](#) following a decision by the Egyptian electoral commission to investigate a number of complaints made by the candidates.
- In his [first speech as President](#), Mursi urged unity: "I invite you, the great Egyptian people... to cement bonds amongst us, to strengthen our comprehensive national unity".
- In advance of the polls, Mursi's rival, Ahmed Shafiq, had [warned](#) that a victory for the Muslim Brotherhood representative would send Egypt back "to the dark ages".
- Reacting to the result, the office of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, issued a [statement](#) calling for "continuing cooperation" between the two countries.
- The UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, [congratulated](#) the nation for its commitment to the democratic process.

Country Profile

- Population: 76.5 million (Census 2006)
- Religion(s): Muslim (mostly Sunni) (90 percent), Coptic Christian (9 percent) and other (1 percent)
- Real GDP growth: 1.8 percent (FY 2010/11)
- Inflation: 9.5 percent (December 2011)
- Unemployment: 12.4 percent (December 2011)
- Net international reserves: \$16.4 billion (January 2012)

(Foreign and Commonwealth Office website, '[Country Profile: Egypt](#)', accessed 25 June 2012)

Background to the Elections

In [February 2011](#), Hosni Mubarak stood down as President of Egypt, responding to a period of heightened anti-government protesting. The protests, which saw hundreds of thousands of Egyptians gather in Tahrir Square and its surrounding streets, began on [25 January 2011](#) following an internet campaign inspired by events in Tunisia. Since this time, the post of President had remained vacant. With constitutional reforms agreed in [March 2011](#), the country resolved to hold parliamentary elections between [November 2011 and January 2012](#), with the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party winning the majority of the votes. However, following a recent [Supreme Court ruling](#) that these polls were "unconstitutional", the Egyptian Parliament has since been dissolved.

Electoral System

- The President is elected by absolute majority vote through a two-round system to serve a 6-year term.
- The Prime Minister is appointed by the President with the approval of the Parliament.
- The Egyptian Parliament is made up of two Houses; the Advisory Council (Majlis Al-Shura), and the People's Assembly (Majlis Al-Sha'b). Membership consists of appointed members, and those elected through absolute majority or a closed-list proportional representation system.

