



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

Recent Developments in the Middle East and North Africa

This Library Note provides background material on recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa. Given the size of the region and the speed with which developments are unfolding in many countries, this Note is not exhaustive but provides a brief summary of events in selected countries, including Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Iran, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Yemen and Egypt.

This Note adds to and updates information provided in House of Lords Library Note, [Recent Developments in Syria, the Middle East and North Africa](#), LLN 2013/017.

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I. Syria

The conflict in Syria has now been raging for over four years. Syrian government forces continue to battle a range of insurgent groups, some of whom have also been fighting each other, and during the course of the fighting hopes of a resolution have ebbed and flowed as one faction or another has appeared to gain the upper hand. Currently, the government troops of President Bashar Al-Assad, and backed by support from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, control most of the major cities in western Syria, including the capital Damascus.¹ Government forces have suffered a number of military and territorial losses in 2015, which include the provincial capital of Idlib in the north-west, the final regime position within which fell on 9 September 2015.² However, US analysts Christopher Blanchard et al argue that despite these losses, “the Assad government has shown no sign of imminent collapse of an intention to leave power”.³

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) controls large, but sparsely populated, swathes of territory in northeast and central Syria, including a number of areas adjacent to the country's borders with Turkey and Iraq. ISIL too has suffered a number of losses in 2015, however, notably to Kurdish forces backed by coalition airstrikes (which have not involved UK warplanes), and Blanchard et al note that new offences launched by ISIL in May and June 2015 have brought it into conflict with both government and anti-government forces.⁴

Moderate armed opposition groups, including the Free Syrian Army/Southern Front, continue to fight government and ISIL forces, and have made gains in 2015 in the southern cities of Deraa and Quneitra, seizing the Syrian government's largest military base in Deraa in June 2015.⁵ It is also notable that, following fierce conflict between moderate and Islamist groups opposed to the Assad regime in a number of areas, in Idlib a coalition of rebel groups which included elements from Jabhat al Nusra/the Nusra front—a group allied with Al Qaeda and hostile to ISIL—came together in a single command known as ‘Jaysh al Fatah’ to force pro-government forces from the city.⁶ Yet opposition to the Assad regime remains fractured at best, and as noted by Sebastian Usher, Arab Affairs Correspondent for the BBC, rebel groups in many areas continue to be as opposed to each other as they are the Syrian regime.⁷

I.1 Humanitarian Impact and Refugees

The Syrian conflict has had a devastating impact on the population of the country. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reports that 12.2 million people, out of a total population of 22.85 million, are in need of humanitarian assistance.⁸ UNOCHA estimates that 7.6 million people have been internally displaced in Syria as a result of the violence, and a further 4.1 million have fled the country.⁹ The result, according the European Commission, is the largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War.¹⁰

¹ Christopher Blanchard et al, [Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and US Response](#), Congressional Research Service, 15 July 2014, p 1.

² BBC News, [‘Syria Conflict: Rebels Seize Key Idlib Airbase’](#), 9 September 2015.

³ Christopher Blanchard et al, [Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and US Response](#), Congressional Research Service, 15 July 2014, p 1.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ BBC News, [‘Syria: Mapping the Conflict’](#), 10 July 2015.

⁶ Christopher Blanchard et al, [Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and US Response](#), Congressional Research Service, 15 July 2014, p 14.

⁷ BBC News, [‘Syria: Mapping the Conflict’](#), 10 July 2015.

⁸ UNOCHA, [‘Syrian Arab Republic’](#), accessed 10 September 2015.

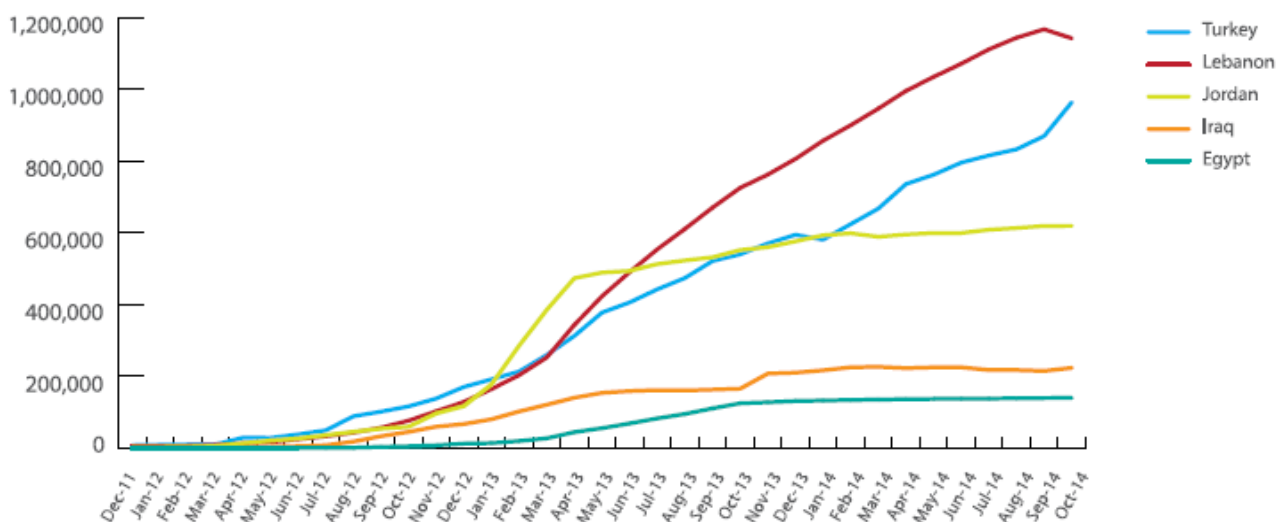
⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ European Commission, [Syria Crisis](#), August 2015.

Impact on Neighbouring Countries

The majority of those who have fled Syria have done so to neighbouring countries in the region. The largest numbers of Syrian refugees have gone to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, as illustrated by the graph below:

Number of Syrian Refugees in Neighbouring Countries



(Source: UN, '[Overview: 2015 Syria Response Plan and 2015–2016 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan](#)', 18 December 2014)

As explored in other sections of this briefing, the impact of this influx of refugees on many of these countries, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, has been profound.

UK Response

The UK government's approach to the issue of refugees from Syria has changed since the beginning of the crisis. Where previously UK efforts had focused on providing aid to Syria's neighbouring states, in January 2014 the Home Secretary, Theresa May, announced the establishment of the 'Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme', to "to relocate some of the most vulnerable refugees who have fled the conflict in Syria".¹¹ The scheme is separate from the UNHCR resettlement programme, of which the UK is not a part. By June 2015, 216 people (including dependants) had come to the UK under the scheme.¹² The government states that around 5,000 Syrians have been granted asylum in the UK since the beginning of the crisis.¹³

However, in response to the growing crisis, criticism about the scope of the resettlement scheme, and recent developments including the number of Syrian refugees (and many others) making often perilous crossings of the Mediterranean sea and land routes into Europe which have dominated news headlines in recent weeks, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, made a statement to the House of Commons on 7 September 2015. In that statement, Mr Cameron

¹¹ HC Hansard, 29 January 2014, [cols 863–4](#).

¹² House of Commons Library, [Syrian Refugees and the UK](#), 8 September 2015, 06805, p 8.

¹³ HC Hansard, 7 September 2015, [cols 23–7](#).

announced a significant expansion of the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme for Syrian nationals, whereby “Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the rest of this parliament”.¹⁴ Noting that the UK is the second largest bilateral donor of aid to the Syrian conflict (after the US), and the government had recently committed a further £100 million, taking the total contribution to over £1 billion¹⁵, Mr Cameron said it would remain the UK’s policy to offer resettlement directly to those in Syrian and in neighbouring countries rather than to those who had travelled to Europe:

[...] Britain will play its part alongside our other European partners. But because we are not part of the EU’s borderless Schengen agreement or its relocation initiative, Britain is able to decide its own approach. So we will continue with our approach of taking refugees from the camps and from elsewhere in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. This provides refugees with a more direct and safe route to the UK, rather than risking the hazardous journey to Europe which has tragically cost so many lives.

We will continue to use the established UNHCR process for identifying and resettling refugees and when they arrive here we will grant them a 5 year humanitarian protection visa. And we will significantly expand the criteria we use for our existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme.¹⁶

The Prime Minister also stated that the cost of supporting Syrian refugees in the UK will be met via the aid budget:

[I]n full accordance with internationally agreed rules, we will also ensure that the full cost of supporting thousands of Syrian refugees in the UK will be met through our aid spending for the first year, easing the burden on local communities.¹⁷

1.2 Military Response

A multinational coalition, led by the United States, has been carrying out air strikes in Syria in support of rebel forces and principally directed at ISIL targets since August 2014. The UK has not participated in these airstrikes, following a vote against such action in the House of Commons in September 2014.¹⁸ In the second half of his statement to the House of Commons on 7 September 2015, however, the Prime Minister revealed that UK forces had been involved in the deaths of two ISIL fighters of British nationality in Syria:

[...] in recent weeks it has been reported that 2 ISIL fighters of British nationality who had been plotting attacks against the UK and other countries have been killed in airstrikes. Both Junaid Hussain and Reyaad Khan, were British nationals based in Syria who were involved in actively recruiting ISIL sympathisers and seeking to orchestrate specific and barbaric attacks against the West, including directing a number of planned

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ [Speech](#) by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, 4 September 2015. The government has stated that 60 million pounds of this additional funding will go to help Syrians in Syria, while the rest will go to neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. Mr Cameron also said that over half of this new funding will be directed towards helping children, with a particular priority on those who have been orphaned or separated from their families.

¹⁶ HC *Hansard*, 7 September 2015, [cols 23–7](#).

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ HC *Hansard*, 26 September 2014, [cols 1255–366](#). It has subsequently been revealed, however, that UK military personnel embedded with American combat units have participated in such action. Source: *Guardian*, ‘[David Cameron knew UK Pilots were Bombing ISIS in Syria](#)’, 17 July 2015.

terrorist attacks right here in Britain, such as plots to attack high profile public commemorations, including those taking place this summer.

We should be under no illusion. Their intention was the murder of British citizens. So on this occasion we ourselves took action. Today I can inform the House that in an act of self-defence and after meticulous planning Reyaad Khan was killed in a precision air strike carried out on 21 August by an RAF remotely piloted aircraft while he was travelling in a vehicle in the area of Raqqah in Syria.

In addition to Reyaad Khan who was the target of the strike, 2 ISIL associates were also killed, 1 of whom—Ruhul Amin, has been identified as a UK national. They were ISIL fighters and I can confirm there were no civilian casualties.¹⁹

Mr Cameron also confirmed that Junaid Hussain had been killed by an American airstrike on 24 August in Raqqah.²⁰ He added that the action taken by UK forces “was not part of coalition military action against ISIL in Syria”, but was a targeted strike to “deal with clear, credible and specific terrorist threats to our country at home”.²¹

Since the Prime Minister’s statement, there has been considerable speculation that the government is planning an expansion of the UK’s military involvement in Syria, and potentially another vote on the issue in the House of Commons. For example, the *Guardian* reported on 9 September 2015 that the government was drawing up a new strategy for Syria that would involve limited military strikes against key ISIL figures subject to parliamentary approval,²² and the Reuters news agency reported on 14 September 2015 that a Number 10 press spokesperson said the Prime Minister will seek to reach a consensus on striking ISIL militants in Syria:

The PM thinks there is a strong case for taking action against ISIL in Syria in the way that the UK is taking action against ISIL next door in Iraq... That remains his view. It hasn't changed because there has been a new leader of the opposition elected but, as he has said before, he wants to proceed with consensus on this matter and I think that is how he will continue to approach the issue.²³

¹⁹ HC Hansard, 7 September 2015, [cols 23–7](#).

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *Guardian*, ‘[No 10 Plans Limited Syria Strikes and Push for Transition of Power](#)’, 9 September 2015.

²³ Reuters, ‘[Cameron To Seek Consensus on Striking Islamic State in Syria—Spokeswoman](#)’, 14 September 2015.

2. Iraq

The period from the end of 2013 to date has been characterised by instability in Iraq, particularly as a result of the rise of the Sunni insurgent group, ISIL. During 2014, nearly one-third of Iraqi territory was captured by ISIL.²⁴

2.1 ISIL

At the end of 2013, ISIL attacked and took over several cities in the mainly Sunni Anbar Province in the West of the country, including Ramadi, Fallujah, and some smaller Anbar cities. By early January 2014, the Iraqi government had regained most of Ramadi, but Fallujah remained controlled by ISIL. In April 2014, ISIL-led insurgents also established a presence in Abu Ghraib, approximately ten miles from Baghdad.²⁵

In early June 2014, ISIL captured the large city of Mosul, the main city in northern Iraq. According to Kenneth Katzman of the US Congressional Research Service, this occurred amid mass surrenders and desertions by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).²⁶ The BBC reported that “an estimated 30,000 soldiers fled [the city] when confronted by as few as 800 militants”.²⁷ Apparently supported by many Iraqi Sunni residents, ISIL-led fighters then also captured territory to the south and east of Mosul, including the city of Tikrit.²⁸ Katzman observes that this offensive enabled ISIL fighters to “loot banks, free prisoners, and capture US-supplied military equipment such as Humvees, tanks, and armoured personnel carriers”.²⁹

It has been reported that ISIL has become “notorious for its brutality, including mass killings, abductions and beheadings”³⁰ and has imposed an extreme version of Islamic law in the territory it controls.³¹ The UN reported that at least 1,000 civilians were killed and another 1,000 injured in Iraq during two weeks of ISIL’s offensive across the country in June 2014, and that there was evidence that summary executions had taken place.³² ISIL has publicised videos of beheadings of many captured foreign fighters and journalists.³³ In Mosul, the BBC reports that ISIL has persecuted ethnic and religious minorities and punished contraventions of ISIL’s interpretation of Islamic law with floggings, amputations and executions.³⁴

In August 2014, ISIL advanced to the north and west of Mosul into territory held by the armed forces of Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, the Peshmerga.³⁵ The Peshmerga quickly withdrew in the face of the attack, leaving villagers in the area—largely inhabited by minorities—vulnerable to ISIL.³⁶ The Yazidis, a Kurdish-speaking people who practice a mix of ancient religions, were particularly persecuted by ISIL, with hundreds of men and boys killed

²⁴ Kenneth Katzman, [Iraq: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy](#), Congressional Research Service, 22 June 2015, p 23

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ BBC News, [‘Islamic State: What Has Happened Since the Fall of Mosul?’](#), 10 June 2015.

²⁸ BBC News, [‘Iraq Crisis: Militants ‘Seize Tikrit’ After Taking Mosul’](#), 11 June 2014.

²⁹ Kenneth Katzman, [Iraq: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy](#), Congressional Research Service, 22 June 2015, p 23.

³⁰ BBC News, [‘What is Islamic State?’](#), 29 June 2015

³¹ Terrence McCoy, [‘ISIS, Beheadings and the Success of Horrifying Violence’](#), *Washington Post*, 13 June 2014.

³² United Nations News Centre, [‘Iraq Violence: UN Confirms More than 2,000 Killed, Injured Since Early June’](#), 24 June 2014.

³³ BBC News, [‘Islamic State: What Has Happened Since the Fall of Mosul?’](#), 10 June 2015.

³⁴ BBC News, [‘Inside Mosul: What’s Life Like Under Islamic State?’](#), 9 June 2015.

³⁵ BBC News, [‘Islamic State: What Has Happened Since the Fall of Mosul?’](#), 10 June 2015.

³⁶ Kenneth Katzman, [Iraq: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy](#), Congressional Research Service, 22 June 2015, p 24.

and women and girls abducted and raped.³⁷ Between 35,000 and 50,000 Yazidis fled to Mount Sinjar, where they were surrounded by ISIL forces. During this offensive ISIL also captured the Mosul Dam, which controls a large proportion of Iraq's water and power.³⁸ These events prompted the US to launch air strikes against ISIL in northern Iraq and to drop humanitarian aid to the Yazidis on Mount Sinjar.³⁹ A combination of these air strikes and an offensive led by Kurdish Peshmerga forces has, reports suggest, helped to “ease the stranglehold on Mount Sinjar”.⁴⁰

2.2 Political Context

On 30 April 2014, elections were held for the Iraqi Council of Representatives, the country's legislative body. On 17 June, official results revealed that the State of Law coalition, headed by the incumbent Prime Minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, had won 92 seats—three more than it won in 2010 and significantly more than those won by any other party.⁴¹ However, according to US analyst Kenneth Katzman personal support for al-Maliki had dissipated because of recent ISIL gains, and Haydar al-Abadi, a member of al-Maliki's party and deputy speaker of the Council of Representatives, replaced him as Prime Minister.⁴²

In evidence given to the House of Commons Defence Committee, Professor Toby Dodge of the London School of Economics maintained that the Iraqi government is unpopular across the whole of the country. He argued that “the government, because of its corruption, has squandered its oil wealth and undermined the institutional capacity of the state”.⁴³ In August 2015, “thousands”⁴⁴ of Iraqis staged demonstrations in central Baghdad to protest against government corruption poor services.⁴⁵ In response, on 9 August Prime Minister al-Abadi announced proposals to reform the political system, including eliminating sectarian and party quotas in the appointment of top officials and abolishing the three vice presidency positions, which are primarily ceremonial.⁴⁶

2.3 Recent Developments

In September 2014, Members of the House of Commons discussed a motion, tabled by Prime Minister David Cameron, on the government's proposal to participate in air strikes against ISIL in Iraq. The motion recognised the fact that the Iraqi government had requested military support and argued that this provided a legal basis for military action in the country, whilst explicitly ruling out deploying UK troops in ground combat operations in the country.⁴⁷ The motion was passed by 524 votes to 43.⁴⁸ Since October 2014, the Royal Air Force has

³⁷ BBC News, '[IS Yazidi Attacks May Be Genocide, Says UN](#)', 19 March 2015.

³⁸ Alex Milner, '[Mosul Dam: Why the Battle for Water Matters in Iraq](#)', BBC News, 18 August 2014.

³⁹ Dan Roberts and Spencer Ackerman, '[US Begins Air Strikes Against Isis Targets in Iraq, Pentagon Says](#)', *Guardian*, 8 August 2014.

⁴⁰ BBC News, '[IS Yazidi Attacks May Be Genocide, Says UN](#)', 19 March 2015.

⁴¹ Kenneth Katzman, [Iraq: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy](#), Congressional Research Service, 22 June 2015, p 24.

⁴² *ibid*, p 25.

⁴³ House of Commons Defence Committee, [The Situation in Iraq and Syria and the Response to al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq al-Sham \(DAESH\)](#), 5 February 2015, HC 690 of session 2014–15, p 30.

⁴⁴ Vivian Salama, '[Thousands of Iraqis Protest Against Government Corruption](#)', *Washington Post*, 7 August 2015.

⁴⁵ Omar al-Jawshy and Tim Arango, '[Premier Haider al-Abadi, Facing Protests, Proposes Iraqi Government Overhaul](#)', *New York Times*, 9 August 2015.

⁴⁶ *ibid*.

⁴⁷ House of Commons Library, [ISIS and the Sectarian Conflict in the Middle East](#), 19 March 2015, RP15/16, p 48.

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p 50.

conducted air strikes against ISIL in Iraq, dropping over 200 bombs and missiles by May 2015,⁴⁹ as part of a coalition of twenty countries providing air support or military equipment to fight against ISIL in both Iraq and Syria.⁵⁰

The US Department of Defence stated in March 2015 that Iraqi forces had recaptured approximately 30 percent of the territory taken by ISIL.⁵¹ Further, on 1 April 2015 the ISF and allied militias retook the city of Tikrit, with support from coalition air strikes.⁵² However, in late May 2015, ISIL recaptured the city of Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province.⁵³ Kenneth Katzman argues that this development was particularly significant because it “again called into question the commitment of the ISF to the battle”,⁵⁴ as Iraqi government forces abandoned their positions, allowing ISIL to advance.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Richard Norton-Taylor, [‘Scale of UK Attacks on Islamic State in Iraq Revealed’](#), *Guardian*, 11 May 2015.

⁵⁰ Colin Freeman, [‘Who is in the Anti-Islamic State Coalition and What They Are Contributing?’](#), *Telegraph*, 26 September 2014.

⁵¹ Kenneth Katzman, [Iraq: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy](#), Congressional Research Service, 22 June 2015, p 31.

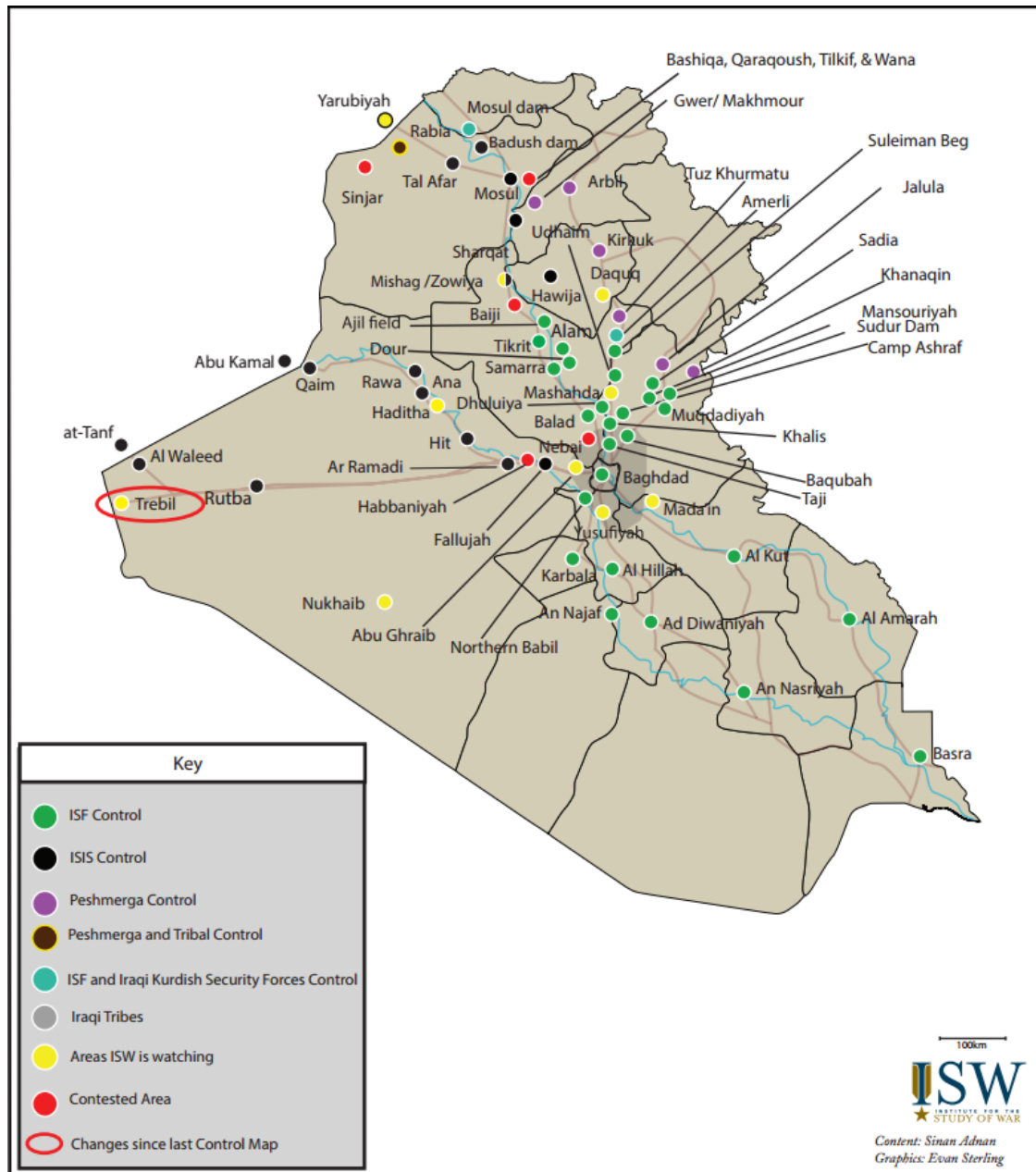
⁵² Institute for the Study of War, [‘Control of Terrain in Iraq: April 3, 2015’](#), 3 April 2015; Reuters, [‘Special Report: After Iraqi Forces Take Tikrit, a Wave of Looting and Lynching’](#), 3 April 2015.

⁵³ Institute for the Study of War, [‘ISIS Captures Ramadi’](#), 18 May 2015.

⁵⁴ Kenneth Katzman, [Iraq: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy](#), Congressional Research Service, 22 June 2015, p 31.

⁵⁵ BBC News, [‘Islamic State ‘Seizes Iraqi City of Ramadi’](#), 17 May 2015.

Control of Terrain in Iraq, 20 July 2015



Source: [Institute for the Study of War](http://www.instituteforthe studyofwar.com)

3. Tunisia

In December 2011, a Tunisian fruit vendor set himself alight in protest against police corruption and impunity, leading to demonstrations around the country. These protests then spread to many other countries in North Africa and the Middle East in a movement which became known as the Arab Spring. Following the ousting of former President, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, in January 2011, elections were held in Tunisia in October 2011. The Islamist Nahda party won a plurality of seats and formed a government.⁵⁶ However, in January 2014 the Nahda government resigned over “its inability to complete a new constitution and amid criticism of its failure to control its most extreme supporters”.⁵⁷ It was replaced by a coalition government, headed by a ‘technocratic’ prime minister, Mehdi Jomaa. This government passed a new constitution that created a mixed presidential system, in which the directly elected president is the head of state and exercises powers over defence and foreign affairs but shares executive power with a prime minister from the party with the largest number of seats in parliament. According to US analyst Kevin Sullivan, “despite its secular framing, the constitution asserts Tunisia’s Muslim identity, at times in ways that suggest tensions with its more liberal provisions”.⁵⁸

In October 2014, parliamentary elections were held in Tunisia, closely followed by presidential elections in November the same year. Parliamentary elections were won by the secular Nida Tunis party, which won 85 of the 217 parliamentary seats, but the formation of a government was deferred until after the presidential elections. The Nida Tunis party candidate, Beji Caid Essebsi, won the presidential elections in a run-off on 21 December 2014.⁵⁹ According to the *Economist*, Mr Caid Essebsi— a former minister under the deposed President Ben Ali—is the first Tunisian president to have been chosen in an “open, democratic election”.⁶⁰ Following the presidential election, a Nida Tunis-led coalition government was formed. This coalition includes the Nahda party, which won the second-largest block of legislative seats.⁶¹ In an announcement made shortly after the government was formed, Prime Minister Habib Essid said the government would focus on improving the economy and combating terrorism.⁶²

In July 2015, the United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries warned that many Tunisians had left the country to join foreign conflicts.⁶³ According to the UN, the number of Tunisian foreign fighters is “one of the highest among those travelling to join conflicts abroad”.⁶⁴ They report that there are approximately 4,000 Tunisians currently fighting in Syria; 1,000–1,500 in Libya; 200 in Iraq; 60 in Mali; and 50 in Yemen. A further 625 people who have returned from Iraq are being prosecuted. According to the UN, Tunisians who have left to join “extremist groups” abroad are primarily young, between 18 and 35 years old, and male, though some women and families are also among them.⁶⁵ The UN states that the reasons why people

⁵⁶ BBC News, ‘[Tunisia’s Islamist Ennahda Party Wins Historic Poll](#)’, 27 October 2011.

⁵⁷ Kevin Sullivan, ‘[Tunisia, After Igniting Arab Spring, Sends the Most Fighters to Islamic State in Syria](#)’, *Washington Post*, 28 October 2014.

⁵⁸ Alexis Arieff and Carla E Humud, [Political Transition in Tunisia](#), Congressional Research Service, 10 February 2015, p 8.

⁵⁹ BBC News, ‘[Tunisia Election: Essebsi Wins Presidential Run-Off](#)’, 22 December 2014.

⁶⁰ *Economist*, ‘[Don’t Be Ageist](#)’, 3 January 2015.

⁶¹ Alexis Arieff and Carla E Humud, [Political Transition in Tunisia](#), Congressional Research Service, 10 February 2015.

⁶² BBC News, ‘[Tunisia’s Secularists and Islamists Form New Government](#)’, 5 February 2015.

⁶³ United Nations News Centre, ‘[UN Experts Report Uptick in Flow of Tunisian Militants to Conflict Zones, Call for Urgent Response](#)’, 10 July 2015.

⁶⁴ United Nations Human Rights, ‘[Foreign fighters: Urgent Measures Needed to Stop Flow from Tunisia—UN Expert Group Warns](#)’, 10 July 2015.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

are choosing to join these groups are varied and include “religious and political ideologies, financial gains, economic and social conditions, sense of purpose, and sense of belonging”.⁶⁶

In 2015, several terrorist attacks aimed at foreign tourists took place in Tunisia. On 26 June, 38 tourists, of whom 30 were British, were killed by a Tunisian student with links to ISIL in the resort town of Sousse on the Tunisian coast.⁶⁷ Earlier in the year, on 18 March, 22 people—including one British woman—were killed in an attack at the Bardo Museum in the capital, Tunis.⁶⁸ According to the BBC, ISIL has claimed responsibility for both attacks.⁶⁹

In the wake of these attacks the Tunisian government has stepped up security efforts, including operations against Okba Ibn Nafaa, a group linked to Al Qaeda in North Africa. At the end of July, the Tunisian parliament passed an anti-terror law which means that a conviction of terrorism now carries the death penalty and expressions of support for terrorism could result in a prison sentence. The BBC reported that some human rights groups have criticised the law as “draconian”, arguing that the law’s definition of terrorism is too vague and that the law does not protect the rights of defendants.⁷⁰ In addition, the *New York Times* reported that critics have complained that the government’s security crackdown “has become too sweeping and threatens to restore harsh methods by the security forces” that are associated with the country’s former dictatorships.⁷¹

Tunisia’s tourism minister, Selma Elloumi Rekik, has stated that she expects the recent terrorist attacks to have a negative impact on the country’s tourism industry, which accounted for seven percent of gross domestic product in 2014.⁷² However, the *Financial Times* reported in July 2015 that some analysts predict that if the coalition government executes its planned structural reforms to the economy and the political situation remains stable, the outlook for the Tunisian economy is positive.⁷³

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ BBC News, ‘[Tunisia Attack: Profile of Gunman Seifeddine Rezgui](#)’, 29 June 2015; and Clare Spencer, ‘[Tunisia Beach Attack: What’s the Security Situation?](#)’, BBC News, 29 July 2015.

⁶⁸ BBC News, ‘[Tunisia Beach Massacre ‘Linked’ to Museum Killings](#)’, 5 August 2015.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ BBC News, ‘[Tunisia Parliament Passes New Anti-Terror Law](#)’, 25 July 2015.

⁷¹ Carlotta Gall, ‘[Change in Militant Tactics Puts Tunisians on Edge](#)’, *New York Times*, 9 August 2015.

⁷² *Economist*, ‘[The Other Victim](#)’, 2 July 2015.

⁷³ Steve Johnson, ‘[Tunisian Economy Fights Off Terror Threat](#)’, *Financial Times*, 10 July 2015.

4. Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories

4.1 Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation

In April 2014, Hamas, a militant Palestinian organisation which does not recognise Israel, and Fatah, a more moderate Palestinian organisation, signed a reconciliation agreement after opposing each other for many years.⁷⁴ This led to the formation of a unity government, with a largely 'technocratic' cabinet backed by both Hamas and Fatah.⁷⁵ Israel opposed the inclusion of Hamas in the government and put peace talks on hold after the unity deal was reached.⁷⁶

4.2 Conflict in Gaza

In June 2014, tensions between Israel and Palestine rose after three Israeli teenagers were abducted in the West Bank and were later found dead.⁷⁷ Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Prime Minister, blamed Hamas for the attack.⁷⁸ Hamas initially denied responsibility, though Hamas leaders later admitted that although they had had no prior knowledge of the plan, the perpetrators were Hamas operatives. According to the *New York Times*, Hamas leaders praised the killing of the teenagers and said it was a legitimate act of Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation.⁷⁹

Before the bodies of the teenagers were found, Israel forces conducted a search of Palestinian areas, particularly the city of Hebron. According to the *Guardian*, "the Israeli military flooded the Hebron area with several thousand additional troops, deployed extra anti-rocket units in two southern cities and called up several hundred reservists".⁸⁰ During this operation five Palestinians were killed and over 400 were arrested.⁸¹

On 7 July 2014, Israel launched Operation Protective Edge, a military campaign of air strikes followed by ground troops in Gaza. Israel stated that the campaign was targeted at Palestinian militants, and the aim was to stop rocket strikes into Israel from militants in Gaza.⁸² A ceasefire, brokered by Egypt, was agreed and came into effect on 26 August 2014.

4.3 Accusations of War Crimes

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict published its report in June 2015, which found that during the operation 2,251 Palestinians were killed, including 1,462 civilians, of whom 299 were women and 551 children; and 11,231 Palestinians, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children, were

⁷⁴ Robert Tait and Inna Lazareva, '[Fatah and the Hamas Agree Unity Government](#)', *Telegraph*, 23 April 2014.

⁷⁵ Peter Beaumont, '[Palestinian Unity Government of Fatah and Hamas Sworn In](#)', *Guardian*, 2 June 2014.

⁷⁶ BBC News, '[Israel PM Warns Against Hamas-Fatah 'Terror' Cabinet](#)', 1 June 2014.

⁷⁷ Peter Beaumont and Orlando Crowcroft, '[Bodies of Three Missing Israeli Teenagers Found in West Bank](#)', *Guardian*, 30 June 2014.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Isabel Kershner, '[New Light on Hamas Role in Killings of Teenagers That Fueled Gaza War](#)', *International New York Times*, 4 September 2014.

⁸⁰ Peter Beaumont, '[Israeli Forces Tighten Grip on West Bank in Search for Three Abducted Teenagers](#)', *Guardian*, 15 June 2014.

⁸¹ BBC News, '[Abducted Israeli Teens Found Dead Near Hebron](#)', 30 June 2014.

⁸² *International New York Times*, '[Israel Launches Military Offensive Against Gaza Militants](#)', 7 July 2014.

injured.⁸³ On the Israeli side, 67 soldiers and six civilians were killed and approximately 1,600 were injured,⁸⁴ including 270 children.⁸⁵ The UN inquiry concluded that there were actions on both sides of the conflict which may have amounted to war crimes. The report stated:

In relation to this latest round of violence, which resulted in an unprecedented number of casualties, the commission was able to gather substantial information pointing to serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law by Israel and by Palestinian armed groups. In some cases, these violations may amount to war crimes.⁸⁶

Regarding the conduct of the Palestinian armed groups, the UN inquiry argued that the “indiscriminate” use of rockets and “any targeted mortar attacks against civilians” constitute violations of international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes.⁸⁷ It also alleged that 21 Palestinians accused of “collaborating” with Israel were executed by the Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed branch of Hamas.⁸⁸ On the other side, Israel was accused of potentially violating international law in several areas, including the use of artillery and other explosive weapons in densely populated areas⁸⁹, air strikes on residential buildings⁹⁰, targeting of civilians⁹¹, and the use, in the West Bank, of firearms against those not posing a threat to life or serious injury.⁹² Both the Israeli government and Hamas rejected the inquiry’s findings.⁹³

4.4 Palestine and the United Nations

Following the success of Palestine in securing the status of a “non-member observer state” at the United Nations General Assembly in 2012,⁹⁴ in December 2014 Jordan proposed a motion to UN Security Council demanding an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories within three years. This motion was rejected by the Security Council; it received eight yes votes, including from Russia and France, two no votes, from the United States and Australia, and five countries abstained, including the UK.⁹⁵ In January 2015, the government of Palestine acceded to the Rome Statute and became a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC), asking the Court to exercise jurisdiction over any crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territories after 13 June 2014.⁹⁶ Israel and the US opposed the Palestinian accession to the ICC.⁹⁷

⁸³ United Nations Human Rights Council, [Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict](#), 24 June 2015, p 6, para 20.

⁸⁴ *ibid*, para 21.

⁸⁵ *ibid*, p 8, para 27.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p 19, para 74.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, p 9, para 33.

⁸⁸ *ibid*, p 17, para 68.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p 12, para 50.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p 10, paras 38 and 40.

⁹¹ *ibid*, p 15, para 60.

⁹² *ibid*, p 18, para 71.

⁹³ Peter Beaumont, [‘UN Accuses Israel and Hamas of Possible War Crimes During 2014 Gaza Conflict’](#), *Guardian*, 22 June 2015.

⁹⁴ BBC News, [‘Q&A: Palestinians’ Upgraded UN Status’](#), 30 November 2012.

⁹⁵ Al Jazeera, [‘UNSC rejects resolution on Palestinian state’](#), 31 December 2014.

⁹⁶ International Criminal Court, [‘The State of Palestine accedes to the Rome Statute’](#), 7 January 2015.

⁹⁷ BBC News, [‘Will ICC Membership Help or Hinder the Palestinians’ Cause?’](#), 1 April 2015.

4.5 Israeli Elections

On 17 March 2015, elections were held in Israel. Elections were not due until 2017, but in December 2014 the Israeli parliament voted to dissolve the parliament in response to divisions in the cabinet over the 2015 budget and a contentious bill to set in law Israel's status as a Jewish state, which critics argued would discriminate against Israel's minorities.⁹⁸ In spite of polls indicating a win for the main opposition Zionist Union party was likely, Netanyahu's Likud party won 30 seats in the 120-seat Knesset and Zionist Union won 24.⁹⁹ The result gave Likud the right to form a coalition. After nearly two months of talks, a "right-wing" coalition was announced consisting of Likud, United Torah Judaism, Shas, Kulanu and the Jewish Home parties.¹⁰⁰

4.6 Recent Developments

Since the new Israeli government came to power there has been continued tension over the building of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. On 30 July 2015, immediately after an Israeli court ruled that two apartment blocks in a West Bank settlement had been built illegally and should be demolished, Prime Minister Netanyahu authorized the immediate construction of 300 more housing units in the same settlement.¹⁰¹ According to the *New York Times*, the move was intended to "appease Mr Netanyahu's right-wing coalition partners, as well as Jewish settlers".¹⁰² In August 2015, a UN Special Committee released a statement lamenting the "escalating violence" in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, particularly a recent incident in the village of Duma, where an 18 month old Palestinian baby died following the fire-bombing of the house by Israeli settlers.¹⁰³ According to the UN Special Committee, "it was apparent from the testimonies that the root cause of the escalating violence is the continuing policy of settlement expansion and the climate of impunity relating to the activities of the settlers".¹⁰⁴ Mr Netanyahu condemned the attack, calling it an "act of terrorism".¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Peter Beaumont, '[Israel's Election—the Guardian Briefing](#)', *Guardian*, 16 March 2015.

⁹⁹ *Economist*, '[The Price of Bibi's Comeback](#)', 21 March 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Mairav Zonszein, '[Benjamin Netanyahu Closes Last-Minute Deal to Form New Israeli Government](#)', 6 May 2015.

¹⁰¹ Isabel Kershner, '[As Homes in West Bank Settlement are Demolished, Netanyahu Approves More](#)', *New York Times*, 29 July 2015.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ United Nations Human Rights, '[End of Mission Statement of the UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices](#)', 10 August 2015.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Maher Abukhater and Batsheva Sobelman, '[Palestinian Toddler Burned to Death in Attack by Suspected Israeli Extremists](#)', *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 2015.

5. Iran

Recent developments in Iran have centred on the country's nuclear capabilities. On 14 July 2015, Iran and the P5+1 group of countries—The US, UK, France, Germany, China and Russia—reached an agreement on a long-term deal regarding Iran's nuclear programme.¹⁰⁶

5.1 Iran's Nuclear Programme

The deal, known as the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA), will see Iran reduce its supplies of enriched uranium, and limit further enrichment activities, in exchange for sanctions relief.¹⁰⁷

As part of the JCPOA, Iran has agreed to reduce its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98 percent.¹⁰⁸ Iran has also agreed for their centrifuges to only enrich uranium to 3.67 percent, which, according to the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, is enough “for civilian nuclear power and research, but well below anything that could be used possibly for a weapon”.¹⁰⁹ The agreement stipulates that these limits would be in place for a minimum of 15 years. Iran has also agreed to reduce the number of centrifuges in their possession from 19,000 to 6,104, with only 5,060 of the remaining centrifuges allowed to enrich uranium in the country over the next decade.¹¹⁰

The agreement will also require significant repurposing of nuclear facilities in Iran, particularly the Arak and Fordow sites. Under the terms of the agreement, Iran will be unable to build facilities tasked with enriching uranium for at least 15 years, including heavy-water reactors.¹¹¹ As a result, Arak—a heavy-water reactor site—will be redesigned to prevent it from producing spent fuel (which contains plutonium, a component found in nuclear bombs),¹¹² whilst the Fordow facility will be prohibited from enriching uranium for 15 years, with the facility instead converted into a nuclear, physics and technology centre.¹¹³ Existing centrifuges at the facility will be used to produce isotopes for use in agriculture, industry, medicine and science.¹¹⁴

In addition to the JCPOA, Iran has also agreed with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it will commit to the Additional Protocol; an expanded set of requirements for information and access to assist the IAEA in confirming that states are using nuclear material for solely peaceful purposes.¹¹⁵ As part of that agreement, monitors from the IAEA will be able to request entry into any sites in Iran that they “deem suspicious” in regards to nuclear activity, including military sites.¹¹⁶ However, Iran would be able to challenge the request. In such cases an arbitration panel would be formed of representatives from Iran, the European Union and the P5+1 countries, to decide on the outcome by majority decision, should Iran and the IAEA fail to resolve any disagreement within 14 days.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁶ *Guardian*, ‘[Iran Nuclear Deal: World Powers Reach Historic Agreement to Lift Sanctions](#)’, 14 July 2015.

¹⁰⁷ European External Action Service, ‘[Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#)’, 14 July 2015.

¹⁰⁸ The White House, ‘[Statement by the President on Iran](#)’, 14 July 2015.

¹⁰⁹ US Department of State, ‘[Press Availability on Nuclear Deal with Iran](#)’, 14 July 2015.

¹¹⁰ US Department of State, ‘[Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Program](#)’, 2 April 2015.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² World Nuclear Association, ‘[Plutonium](#)’, accessed 6 August 2015.

¹¹³ The White House, ‘[Key Excerpts of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#)’, 14 July 2015.

¹¹⁴ BBC News, ‘[Iran Nuclear Deal: Key Details](#)’, 14 July 2015.

¹¹⁵ The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, ‘[Factsheet: Iran and the Additional Protocol](#)’, 14 July 2015.

¹¹⁶ *Economist*, ‘[Making the World a bit Safer](#)’, 18 July 2015.

¹¹⁷ Reuters, ‘[US, Iran Finesse Inspections of Military Sites in Nuclear Deal](#)’, 15 July 2015.

The agreement between Iran and the P5+1 countries has been commended by Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, who stated that it marked “the end to acts of tyranny against our nation and the start of cooperation with the world”.¹¹⁸ Similarly, US President, Barack Obama, hailed the agreement as an “an opportunity [for Iran and the P5+1 countries] to move in a new direction”, before vowing to veto any legislation in Congress that prevented its successful implementation.¹¹⁹ However, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, John Boehner, reacted to the agreement by stating that Congressional Republicans would “fight a bad deal”. Mr Boehner also claimed that “instead of stopping the spread of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, this deal is likely to fuel a nuclear arms race around the world”.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, expressed that the deal was a “bad mistake of historic proportions”.¹²¹

On 20 July 2015, the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to endorse the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*. The deal is expected to formally take effect in October 2015, with sanctions on Iran expected to be lifted in 2016.¹²²

The Congressional vote on the nuclear agreement with Iran took place in September 2015. With the Republican Party having majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, there was a possibility that Congress could reject the deal. However, on 10 September 2015, a ‘resolution of disapproval’ on the nuclear deal fell two votes short of the required 60-vote threshold in the Senate to advance to a final vote. Results indicated that four Democrats and 54 Republicans voted to oppose the deal.¹²³ Following the result, President Obama stated that the result was “a victory for diplomacy, for American national security, and for the safety and security of the world”.¹²⁴ However, Senate Majority Leader and Republican, Mitch McConnell vowed to set up another vote on the nuclear deal.¹²⁵

On 11 September 2015, the House of Representatives participated in a “symbolic vote” on a resolution backing the nuclear deal with Iran, which Republicans felt would force Democrats who had previously backed President Obama’s stance on the nuclear deal to “formally register” their endorsement.¹²⁶ However, the resolution was defeated 269 to 162 votes. The results revealed that not a single Republican voted in favour of the resolution, yet only 25 Democrats also voted against it.¹²⁷

5.2 Iran’s Relationship with Foreign Governments and Militant Groups

Despite the nuclear agreement, Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has stated that his country’s policy “regarding the arrogant US government will not change”, and that Iran would not “give up on their friends in the region”.¹²⁸ According to the United States’ Congressional Research Service, as an instrument of its foreign policy, “Iran provides arms,

¹¹⁸ Reuters, [‘Iran Deal Reached, Obama Hails Step towards ‘More Hopeful World’](#), 14 July 2015.

¹¹⁹ *Washington Post*, [‘Historic Deal Reached with Iran to Limit Nuclear Program’](#), 14 July 2015.

¹²⁰ Speaker of the United States House of Representatives John Boehner, [‘Speaker Boehner Statement on Iran Nuclear Agreement’](#), 14 July 2015.

¹²¹ *Independent*, [‘Iran Nuclear Deal: Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu Condemns ‘Bad Mistake of Historic Proportions’](#), 14 July 2015.

¹²² BBC News, [‘UN Security Council Endorses Iran Nuclear Deal’](#), 20 July 2015.

¹²³ *Guardian*, [‘Republican-led Attempt to Block Iran Deal Fails in the Senate’](#), 10 September 2015.

¹²⁴ *New York Times*, [‘Democrats Hand Victory to Obama on Nuclear Deal’](#), 10 September 2015.

¹²⁵ *Guardian*, [‘Republican-led Attempt to Block Iran Deal Fails in the Senate’](#), 10 September 2015.

¹²⁶ *Guardian*, [‘House Rebukes Obama’s Nuclear Accord with Iran in Symbolic Vote’](#), 12 September 2015.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Wall Street Journal*, [‘Iran’s Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Says Nuclear Deal Won’t Change US Ties’](#), 18 July 2015.

training, and military advisers in support of allied government as well as armed factions”.¹²⁹ Examples include supporting the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, in addition to arming and financing militant groups such as the Houthi rebel fighters in Yemen.¹³⁰ Tehran are also believed to provide funds to Hezbollah—whose manifesto calls for Israel to be “obliterated”¹³¹—with figures estimated to be between US\$100–200 million annually.¹³² The militant group emerged following Israel’s war with Lebanon in 1982, and in their infancy “obtained critical financial support and training from Iran’s Revolutionary Guards”.¹³³

Iran has also previously displayed support for Hamas, with Supreme Leader Khamenei previously describing Israel as a “cancerous tumor”, and vowing to endorse and help any nation or group that “confronts the Zionist regime”.¹³⁴

5.3 Economy in Iran and the Impact of Sanctions

In 2005, the IAEA found that Iran were not compliant with its international obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.¹³⁵ As a result, a number of sanctions had been placed on the country by the United Nations, United States and the European Union. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the sanctions were imposed on Iran for what it describes as a “clandestine nuclear program”, which the IAEA, United Nations, United States and the European Union believed violated the terms of the treaty.

The sanctions against Iran prior to the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* sought to target the country’s financial and banking sector, oil exports, trade and their ability to develop weapons. Sanctions included the US government prohibiting US-based institutions from having financial dealings with Iran; the EU freezing the assets of Iran’s central bank; the curtailing of Iran’s oil revenue by placing sanctions on foreign firms that provided services to Iran’s oil industry; US firms being prohibited from trading with Iran; and the United Nations embargoing materials and technology from reaching Iran, which could be used to either enrich uranium or develop ballistic missiles.¹³⁶

According to the BBC, the sanctions have “crippled” Iran’s economy and have cost the country more than US\$102 billion in oil revenue since 2012.¹³⁷ Similarly, prior to the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*, Iran’s Gross Domestic Product had shrunk by approximately 9 percent in the two years ending in March 2014, as a result of the economic pressure caused by sanctions.¹³⁸

According to Masoud Daneshmand, a member of the Iran-United Arab Emirates Chamber of Commerce, sanctions have “mostly been imposed on our banking system, transport, insurance and on oil”, and subsequently Iranians “have no way to transfer money; transport companies have been banned from coming to Iran’s ports, and insurance for goods and transportation also suffers”.¹³⁹

¹²⁹ Kenneth Katzman, [Iran’s Foreign Policy](#), Congressional Research Service, 30 June 2015, p 4.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ Council on Foreign Relations, ‘[Hezbollah](#)’, 3 January 2014.

¹³² M Levitt, ‘[Hezbollah Finances: Funding the Party of God](#)’, The Washington Institute Blog, February 2005.

¹³³ Council on Foreign Relations, ‘[Hezbollah](#)’, 3 January 2014.

¹³⁴ *Telegraph*, ‘[Iran: We Will Help ‘Cut out the Cancer of Israel’](#)’, 3 February 2012.

¹³⁵ International Atomic Energy Agency, [Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#), 24 September 2005.

¹³⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, ‘[International Sanctions on Iran](#)’, 15 July 2015.

¹³⁷ BBC News, ‘[Iran Nuclear Deal: Key Details](#)’, 14 July 2015.

¹³⁸ Kenneth Katzman, [Iran Sanctions](#), Congressional Research Service, 21 April 2015, p 48.

¹³⁹ Al Jazeera, ‘[Analysis: The Impact of the Iran Nuclear Deal](#)’, 20 January 2014.

6. Lebanon

In 2014, the security situation in Lebanon deteriorated as a direct result of violence spilling-over from the civil war in neighbouring Syria.¹⁴⁰

6.1 Security Situation in Lebanon

Between 2 and 5 August 2014, clashes between the Lebanese army and militant groups based in Syria, including ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra, took place in the Lebanese city of Aarsal. According to Human Rights Watch, approximately 489 people were wounded and 59 civilians were killed in the fighting.¹⁴¹ The organisation also reports that during the clashes, members of Lebanon's security personnel were taken as hostages by militants, three of whom have since been executed. Human Rights Watch also note that in 2014 there were 14 car bombings or suicide bomb attacks in the country, five of which reportedly directly targeted civilians.¹⁴²

6.2 Influx of Refugees

The civil war in Syria has also had an impact on the flow of refugees into Lebanon, seeking to flee the escalating violence in their country. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that, as of December 2014, 1.15 million Syrian refugees have entered Lebanon—meaning that they now represent more than a quarter of the country's population of 4.4 million.¹⁴³ There are also an estimated 450,000 registered Palestinian refugees currently residing in Lebanon.¹⁴⁴ According to the European Commission, with the influx of Syrian refugees and existing Palestinian refugees residing in the country, as of June 2015 Lebanon has the “highest per-capita concentration of refugees worldwide”.¹⁴⁵ The UNHCR contends that refugees, along with Lebanese citizens in local communities that have been affected by the influx, are “becoming increasingly vulnerable”, with humanitarian needs showing “little signs of abating”.¹⁴⁶

In its January 2015 *Humanitarian Bulletin*, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported that US\$2.14 billion was required to implement the ‘Lebanon Crisis Response Plan’—authored by both the UNOCHA and Lebanese government and partnered by over 50 organisations—which aims to provide humanitarian assistance in the country, protect Syrian refugees from attacks and invest in “Lebanese services, economies and institutions in the poorest and at-risk areas”.¹⁴⁷ However, on 1 July 2015, the World Food Programme announced that it would be halving the number of food vouchers given to Syrian refugees in Lebanon for that month, due to a shortfall in the required funds to provide assistance. It attributed the shortfall to a number of humanitarian emergencies in 2015, including crises in Syria, Iraq, South Sudan and the countries affected by the Ebola outbreak.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁰ Chatham House, ‘[Syria Spillover Risks Lebanon's Uneasy Peace](#)’, 17 June 2015.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, ‘[World Report 2015: Lebanon](#)’, 11 January 2015.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘[2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile: Lebanon](#)’, accessed 28 July 2015.

¹⁴⁴ United Nations Relief and Work Agency, ‘[Lebanon](#)’, accessed 29 July 2015.

¹⁴⁵ European Commission, ‘[Lebanon: Syria Crisis](#)’, June 2015.

¹⁴⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘[2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile: Lebanon](#)’, accessed 28 July 2015.

¹⁴⁷ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘[Humanitarian Bulletin: Lebanon](#)’, 15 January 2015, p 1.

¹⁴⁸ *Guardian*, ‘[WFP to Cut Food Vouchers for Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon](#)’, 1 July 2015.

6.3 New Requirements for Syrian Nationals

As a result of the influx of Syrian refugees and the growing strain on the country's economy and infrastructure, in January 2015 Lebanon introduced new requirements for Syrian nationals seeking to apply for or renew residency permits to stay within the country. These measures include that Syrian nationals over the age of 15 must produce a range of documentation such as a valid passport and pay an annual fee of US\$200 for the processing of their residency permits.¹⁴⁹ Amnesty International argue that these requirements expose Syrian nationals to “a range of human rights violations”, as without a permit, Syrian refugees: have limited or no access to public services, for example education and healthcare; can be detained by security forces; and may “be forcibly returned to Syria”.¹⁵⁰

6.4 Social Tensions between Lebanese Citizens and Syrian Nationals

The influx of Syrian nationals has also reportedly led to an increase in social tensions between refugees and Lebanese citizens.¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch discovered that incidents of racism and violence towards Syrian nationals in Lebanon appeared to have increased following the violent clashes of August 2014. The organisation documented that in August and September 2014, eleven violent attacks by Lebanese citizens took place against both unarmed Syrian nationals and those perceived to be Syrian nationals.¹⁵² However, a study by UNOCHA in June and July 2014 attributed the social tensions to the influx of Syrian refugees on Lebanese communities, revealing that 61 percent of the 446 communities surveyed had reported incidents of tension or violence within their communities in the previous six months.¹⁵³ The same survey found that communities believed that incidents occurred between Lebanese citizens and Syrian nationals “as a result of cultural differences, shortage of housing and higher unemployment”.¹⁵⁴ Further, the Carnegie Middle East Center, based in Beirut, attributes the social tensions to a number of factors including the per capita ratio of refugees; the concentration of refugees in marginalised areas; a lack of financial support to deal with their influx; and a number of government measures, which it suggests have “backfired”.¹⁵⁵

6.5 Economy in Lebanon

The economy in Lebanon has also suffered as a result of the Syrian crisis. According to the International Labour Organisation, the influx of refugees has “exacerbated the already difficult living conditions of hosting communities” in Lebanon, arguing that this is a direct result of an increase in job market competition, a reduction in wages, a rise in the price of goods and “an additional strain on available services”.¹⁵⁶ The crisis in neighbouring Syria has also had an impact on Lebanese trade. According to the World Bank, the conflict has reduced the Syrian demand for goods and services, including products of Lebanese origin. It also contends that the war has “increased the cost of trading through Syria”, which it argues “is the only overland connection

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Amnesty International, [Pushed to the Edge](#), 15 June 2015, p 5.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, [Lebanon: Rising Violence Targets Syrian Refugees](#), 30 September 2014.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [Informing Targeted Host Community Programming in Lebanon](#), October 2014.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Carnegie Middle East Center, [Repercussions of the Syrian Refugee Crisis for Lebanon](#), 10 December 2014.

¹⁵⁶ International Labour Organisation, [ILO Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan and Lebanon](#), March 2014, p 1.

with the rest of the world for Lebanon”.¹⁵⁷ Further, it reported that tourism in Lebanon has suffered as a result of the conflict, with the first four months of 2014 witnessing a 16 percent decline in the number of visitors to Lebanon, in relation to the first four months of 2013.¹⁵⁸

As a result, the Carnegie Middle East Center report that from 2012 to 2014, there were cuts in real GDP growth by 2.9 percent each year. It contends that this has pushed a further 170,000 Lebanese citizens into poverty. Subsequently, it estimates that it would cost approximately US\$2.5 billion to “bring the Lebanese economy back to its pre-crisis position”, with strains on roads, healthcare, electricity and waste management.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ The World Bank, [The Impact of the Syrian Conflict on Lebanese Trade](#), April 2015.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Carnegie Middle East Center, [‘Syrian Refugees and the Regional Crisis’](#), 30 December 2014.

7. Saudi Arabia

Developments in Saudi Arabia over the past year have included a change in monarch, in addition to the country facing a number of security challenges, with the threat of ISIL in the north of the country and Houthi rebel fighters in Yemen in the south.

7.1 Monarchy in Saudi Arabia

On 23 January 2015, Saudi Arabia's King, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, died weeks after being treated in hospital for a lung infection. He was succeeded by his half-brother, Salman, who had already taken on many of King Abdullah's responsibilities prior to his death. King Salman has vowed to "continue adhering to the correct policies which Saudi Arabia has followed since its establishment",¹⁶⁰ which so far has included maintaining close ties and cooperation on foreign policy with the US and Yemeni governments. The Al Saud family, which Kings Abdullah and Salman both belong to, have ruled Saudi Arabia since its founding in 1932.¹⁶¹ The Saudi royal family practise Wahhabism, which has been described as an "ultra-conservative" form of Sunni Islam.¹⁶² Approximately 85–90 percent of the Saudi population are Sunni Muslims.¹⁶³

7.2 Saudi Arabia's Military Involvement in Yemen

Saudi Arabia's support for the government in Yemen has led it to becoming a key actor in the current conflict in the country. The conflict was triggered in August 2014, when Houthi rebels demanded that the president, Abed-Rabbo Mansour Hadi, reverse a decision to remove fuel subsidies, prompting violent clashes between government forces and Houthi rebels. This resulted in what Houthi rebel leader, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, described as a "revolution",¹⁶⁴ which saw: Houthi rebels seizing the president's residence; president Hadi and his cabinet resign from office; the dissolution of Yemen's parliament; and the takeover of the city of Sana'a during the period between 21 September 2014 and 6 February 2015. The move resulted in many countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the United States suspending their embassy operations in Yemen.¹⁶⁵

On 24 February 2015, Yemeni President, Abed-Rabbo Mansour Hadi, withdrew his resignation after escaping the custody of Houthi rebels.¹⁶⁶ The US and Saudi backed president would later flee the country on the 25 March 2015, before calling for international military assistance, as Houthi rebel fighters advanced on Aden—the provisional capital city under Hadi's government. The next day, a coalition of Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, began a military operation in the country entitled Operation Decisive Storm, which involved a series of air strikes against Houthi rebel fighters. According to Adel al-Jubair, the Saudi ambassador to the US, the intention of the operation was to halt the advance of the Houthis in Yemen and to "protect the legitimate government of Yemen from falling".¹⁶⁷

Saudi-owned television channel, al-Arabiya, had claimed that the country had deployed 100 fighter jets and assembled 150,000 soldiers for the military operation, with Bahrain, Jordan,

¹⁶⁰ BBC News, '[Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Dies](#)', 23 January 2015.

¹⁶¹ The Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington DC, '[The History of Saudi Arabia](#)', accessed 20 August 2015.

¹⁶² Reuters, '[Saudi Rulers Reconsider Ties to Wahhabi Clergy](#)', 17 December 2014.

¹⁶³ US Central Intelligence Agency, '[The World Factbook: Saudi Arabia](#)', accessed 20 August 2015.

¹⁶⁴ BBC News, '[Yemen: Houthi Leader Hails 'Revolution'](#)', 24 September 2014.

¹⁶⁵ Al Jazeera, '[Timeline: The Rise of Yemen's Houthi Rebels](#)', 23 April 2015.

¹⁶⁶ *Guardian*, '[Yemen's President Retracts Resignation after Escape from House Arrest](#)', 24 February 2015.

¹⁶⁷ BBC News, '[Saudi Arabia Launches Air Strikes in Yemen](#)', 26 March 2015.

Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE collectively contributing a further 76 fighter jets. In addition, Egypt provided naval support by deploying four warships to the Gulf of Aden—a waterway bordering Yemen, Djibouti and Somalia¹⁶⁸—whilst the US provided “logistical and intelligence support” to the Saudi-led coalition.¹⁶⁹

On 21 April 2015, Saudi Arabia announced an end to Operation Decisive Storm, with coalition spokesman, Brig-Gen Ahmed al-Asiri, announcing that the coalition now seek to use “a combination of political, diplomatic and military action” to “prevent the Houthi militias from moving or undertaking any operations inside Yemen”.¹⁷⁰ The campaign was fiercely criticised by Iran’s Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—whose country had been accused by the US of arming the Houthis¹⁷¹—who stated that the coalition air strikes were a “crime and genocide that can be prosecuted in international courts”, before insisting that Saudi Arabia “will not emerge victorious in its aggression”.¹⁷²

Despite declaring an end to Operation Decisive Storm, however, the Saudi-led coalition immediately began launching further air strikes under Operation Renewal of Hope. The reported aim was to prevent “any moves by the Houthi militias and their allies to acquire or use weapons seized from the Yemeni armed forces or abroad”.¹⁷³ Since then, air strikes have continued against Houthi military targets across the country, including in the cities of Taiz and Aden.¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch report that as of 21 July 2015, the fighting between the Saudi-led coalition forces and the Houthis had resulted in at least 1,693 civilian deaths, with “the majority [of deaths] from airstrikes”.¹⁷⁵

7.3 Saudi Military Engagement with ISIL

In addition to engaging militarily with Houthi rebel fighters in Yemen, Saudi Arabia has also encountered conflict domestically, with its military engaging with ISIL forces in the north of the country. In July 2014 and January 2015, Saudi border personnel were attacked on the country’s border with Iraq by ISIL, which the Congressional Research Service contends “drew new attention to the threat of potential infiltration and attacks from violent extremists in Iraq”.¹⁷⁶ In addition, Saudi officials linked ISIL to an attack in November 2014, which killed eight people, after the terror group’s leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, called on supporters of ISIL to attack Shiites, Saudi Arabia’s security forces and foreigners in the country.¹⁷⁷

According to Aaron Y Zelin at the Washington Institute, by targeting and attacking Shiites in Saudi Arabia, ISIL are aiming to delegitimise the royal family and in the process, destabilise the kingdom.¹⁷⁸ He contends that to achieve this, ISIL are trying to place the royal family “in a position of defending or appeasing Shiites”, at the expense of a “Saudi Wahhabist state

¹⁶⁸ *Telegraph*, ‘[Saudi Leads Ten-Nation Sunni Coalition in Bombing Yemen’s Shia Rebels](#)’, 26 March 2015.

¹⁶⁹ The White House, ‘[Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on the Situation in Yemen](#)’, 25 March 2015.

¹⁷⁰ BBC News, ‘[Yemen Conflict: Saudi Arabia Ends Air Campaign](#)’, 21 April 2015.

¹⁷¹ *Guardian*, ‘[Barack Obama Warns Iran against Weapons Shipment to Yemen Rebels](#)’, 22 April 2015.

¹⁷² Reuters, ‘[Iran’s leader says Saudi Air Strikes Causing Genocide](#)’, 10 April 2015.

¹⁷³ Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington DC, ‘[Operation Decisive Storm Ends, Operation Renewal of Hope Begins](#)’, accessed 3 August 2015.

¹⁷⁴ *Guardian*, ‘[Yemen Conflict Continues Despite Saudi Arabia Claiming to Have Ended Campaign](#)’, 22 April 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch, ‘[Yemen: Coalition Strikes on Residence Apparent War Crime](#)’, 27 July 2015.

¹⁷⁶ Christopher Blanchard, *[Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations](#)*, Congressional Research Service, 29 April 2015.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Aaron Y Zelin, ‘[The Islamic State’s Saudi Chess Match](#)’, The Washington Institute Blog, 2 June 2015.

ideology”, which has previously denounced Shiites as being unbelievers and not Muslim.¹⁷⁹ Zelin argues that if ISIL keep attacking Shiites in the country, it could further drive a wedge between the Shiites and the royal family, which he believes could cause a similar uprising to that in Bahrain or lead to Saudi Arabia’s Shiite population potentially seeking outside help from Iran, Hezbollah or other Shiite militant groups in the Middle East.¹⁸⁰

Further, Saudi Arabian authorities believe that the assassination of two Saudi police officers in Riyadh in April 2015 was committed by a supporter of the terror group.¹⁸¹ Since the attack, more than 90 people in Saudi Arabia have been arrested in connection with alleged ISIL plots.¹⁸² The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence report that as of January 2015, approximately 1,500–2,500 Saudi Arabian nationals had left the country to join Sunni militant organisations in Iraq and Syria.¹⁸³ On 6 August 2015, a suicide bomb attack killed 15 people at a mosque in the southern province of Asir. Later that day, ISIL would claim responsibility for the attack.¹⁸⁴

7.4 Human Rights in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has also faced international scrutiny over its domestic policies, in particular, its human rights record. One of the more prominent examples that has attracted global attention in recent months is the case of Saudi blogger, Raif Badawi. In May 2014, Badawi was sentenced to ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes for reportedly criticising Saudi religious figures on his blog, and for subsequently “insulting Islam”.¹⁸⁵ However, after the first set of 50 lashings on 10 January 2015, future public floggings have been delayed on the grounds of medical reasons. Despite the delay, the punishment has been met with international criticism, including from UK Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, who stated that the government were “seriously concerned by Raif Badawi’s case”,¹⁸⁶ and from the US State Department spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, who labelled Badawi’s punishment as “inhumane”.¹⁸⁷

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ BBC News, ‘[Saudi Police Murder Suspect 'was acting for Islamic State'](#)’, 24 April 2015.

¹⁸² Christopher Blanchard, [Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations](#), Congressional Research Service, 29 April 2015.

¹⁸³ International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, ‘[Foreign Fighter Total in Iraq/Syria now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s](#)’, 26 January 2015.

¹⁸⁴ BBC News, ‘[Islamic State Group Claims Saudi Mosque Suicide Blast](#)’, 6 August 2015.

¹⁸⁵ *Guardian*, ‘[Saudi Blogger Receives First 50 Lashes of Sentence for 'Insulting Islam'](#)’, 10 January 2015.

¹⁸⁶ *Independent*, ‘[Raif Badawi: Flogging Case Raised with Saudi Ambassador](#)’, 22 January 2015.

¹⁸⁷ *Guardian*, ‘[Saudi Blogger Receives First 50 Lashes of Sentence for 'Insulting Islam'](#)’, 10 January 2015.

8. Libya

Fighting among rival factions in Libya has intensified since 2014. The *Guardian* observes that the country is “wracked by violence, factionalism and political polarisation—and by the growing menace of jihadi extremism”.¹⁸⁸ Libya is currently divided between two rival governments, each backed by a variety of armed groups. The ‘Dignity’ coalition consists of forces under the command of former Gaddafi-era general turned exile, Khalifa Haftar, along with their Zintan allies, and backs the internationally recognised government in Tobruk. Meanwhile, the ‘Libya Dawn’ coalition backs the government of the reconstituted General National Congress (GNC), and is backed by an alliance of Islamist, Misratan and Berber militias.¹⁸⁹ In addition, there are a number of jihadist groups operating in the country, including Ansar al Sharia, al-Qaeda and ISIL.¹⁹⁰

8.1 Background

In the years following the fall of former President Muammar Gaddafi’s regime, Libya’s interim authorities have struggled to control and disarm the large numbers of armed groups that fought against government forces in the 2011 revolution.¹⁹¹ The BBC reports that there are up to 1,700 armed groups operating in Libya, divided along ideological, regional, ethnic and local lines.¹⁹² The situation has been further complicated by the interim authorities’ failure to create a stable government or address the significant problems facing Libya. Indeed, a recent Congressional Research Service (CRS) report argues that the current conflict in Libya reflects a series of “unresolved debates” in Libyan society. These include:

[D]ebates over Libya’s security relationships with foreign governments; the proper role for Islam in political and social life; mechanisms for the provision of local and national security; the political future of Gaddafi-era officials; the relative centralisation or decentralisation of national administrative authority; competing fiscal priorities; and the ongoing exploitation of Libyan territory by terrorists, arms traffickers, and criminals. Clashing personal ambitions and competition over illicit financial proceeds also reportedly have contributed to unrest.¹⁹³

Despite holding successful elections in July 2012, the CRS argues that “the unravelling of Libya’s post-Gaddafi transition intensified in late 2013”.¹⁹⁴ The then Prime Minister Ali Zeidan—who held office from November 2012 to March 2014—faced numerous crises and challenges to his authority from both armed groups and members of Libya’s newly elected parliament, the General National Congress (GNC).¹⁹⁵ For example, Zeidan was kidnapped in October 2013 by an armed group known as the Libya Revolutionaries’ Operations Room, though was soon

¹⁸⁸ *Guardian*, ‘[Libya’s Descent into Violence—The Guardian Briefing](#)’, 16 February 2015.

¹⁸⁹ *Economist*, ‘[Libya’s Civil War: That it Should Come to This](#)’, 10 January 2015; and *Financial Times*, ‘[Libya: A Divided Land](#)’, 19 March 2015.

¹⁹⁰ BBC News, ‘[Islamic State Gains Libya Foothold](#)’, 24 February 2015.

¹⁹¹ Council on Foreign Relations, ‘[Libya’s Escalating Civil War: Contingency Planning Memorandum Update](#)’, June 2015.

¹⁹² BBC News, ‘[Why is Libya Lawless?](#)’, 27 January 2015.

¹⁹³ Christopher Blanchard, ‘[Libya: Transition and US Policy](#)’, Congressional Research Service, 3 August 2015, p 1.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, p 4.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, p 4.

released.¹⁹⁶ Zeidan eventually lost a no confidence vote in March 2014, over the government's failure to stop eastern rebels from loading oil onto a North Korean tanker.¹⁹⁷

According to the CRS, public and intra-GNC tensions stemmed from continuing disagreements over the role of Libya's armed militias and the political exclusion of Gaddafi-era officials. Moreover, it notes that "disagreements between Islamist politicians and relatively secular figures also contributed to the gradual collapse of consensus over the transition's direction".¹⁹⁸ In June 2014, elections were held for a new parliament, the House of Representatives (HoR), in an effort to address Libya's political deadlock.¹⁹⁹ Turnout for these elections was very low at 18 percent and saw the defeat of Islamist candidates.²⁰⁰ Al Jazeera reported that the new parliament was "dominated by self-styled secular and nationalist candidates", with the results triggering significant violence in Tripoli.²⁰¹

8.2 Operation Dignity

On 14 February 2014, General Haftar announced a military takeover, although, according to press reports, nothing subsequently happened, and the then Prime Minister Zeidan branded the attempt "ridiculous".²⁰² However, in May 2014, Haftar launched an unauthorised campaign against Islamist militias in eastern Libya called 'Operation Dignity'. Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army forces attacked the Ansar al Sharia, February 17 Revolutionary Martyrs' Brigade, Libya Shield One and the Rafallah al-Sahati armed groups in Benghazi, while Zintan militias, allied with Haftar, also attacked the parliament building in Tripoli.²⁰³ The assault on Benghazi prompted the Islamist militias to form a coalition known as the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council in June 2014 to combat the threat, and fighting between the two sides dragged on throughout 2014.²⁰⁴

A number of commentators suggested that General Haftar was able to capitalise on a variety of grievances in order to build his movement, such as the GNC's relationship with Islamist armed groups and the belief that Islamist militias in Benghazi were linked to foreign jihadists, and had been responsible for a number of assassinations of security personnel in the city.²⁰⁵ Moreover, the CRS notes that Haftar "broadened his rhetoric and objectives to include pledges to cleanse Libya of Islamists, including supporters of the Muslim brotherhood".²⁰⁶ However, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace suggests that Operation Dignity "ended up swelling the ranks of the militants as moderate Islamists felt increasingly targeted by Haftar's elastic definition of terrorism".²⁰⁷ The *Guardian* writes that the government in Tobruk "gradually allied

¹⁹⁶ BBC News, '[Libya PM Zeidan's Brief Kidnap was 'Attempted Coup'](#)', 11 October 2013.

¹⁹⁷ *Financial Times*, '[Pro-Government Fighters Poised to Retake Libyan Oil Installations](#)', 12 March 2014.

¹⁹⁸ Christopher Blanchard, *Libya: Transition and US Policy*, Congressional Research Service, 3 August 2015, p 4.

¹⁹⁹ BBC News, '[Libyan Elections: Low Turnout Marks Bid to End Political Crisis](#)', 26 June 2014.

²⁰⁰ *Economist*, '[That It Should Come To This](#)', 10 January 2015.

²⁰¹ Al Jazeera, '[Libya: Where are the Dividing Lines?](#)', 8 September 2014.

²⁰² *New York Times*, '[In Libya a Coup. Or Perhaps Not](#)', 14 February 2014.

²⁰³ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Ending Libya's Civil War: Reconciling Politics, Rebuilding Security*, 24 September 2014, p 20; and *Guardian*, '[Gunmen Storm Libyan Parliament Amid Anti-Government Uprising](#)', 18 May 2015.

²⁰⁴ International Centre for Counter Terrorism, *Dignity and Dawn: Libya's Escalating Civil War*, February 2015, pp 4 and 7.

²⁰⁵ Christopher Blanchard, *Libya: Transition and US Policy*, Congressional Research Service, 3 August 2015, p 5 and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Ending Libya's Civil War: Reconciling Politics, Rebuilding Security*, 24 September 2014, p 21.

²⁰⁶ Christopher Blanchard, *Libya: Transition and US Policy*, Congressional Research Service, 3 August 2015, p 5.

²⁰⁷ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Ending Libya's Civil War: Reconciling Politics, Rebuilding Security*, 24 September 2014, p 22.

themselves” with Haftar in wake the Islamist takeover in Tripoli, and in March 2015 appointed him head of the Libyan army.²⁰⁸

8.3 Libya Dawn

As mentioned previously, the results of the June 2014 elections for the new House of Representatives (HoR) to replace the General National Congress (GNC) triggered further violence in the West of the country. With the electoral defeat of the Islamist-Misratan bloc and Haftar’s campaign in the East, a coalition of Islamist, Misratan and Berber militias launched ‘Operation Dawn’ and sought to take control of the capital Tripoli.²⁰⁹ Dawn forces fought for control of Tripoli’s international airport—which was held by Zintan militias—with the Libyan Revolutionaries’ Operations Room launching operations on 13 July 2014. After a five week siege the Zintan forces were driven out.²¹⁰ Meanwhile, the newly elected HoR fled to the eastern city of Tobruk because of the violence in Tripoli, while the Dawn coalition reconstituted the GNC in Tripoli.²¹¹ Though the HoR has international recognition, Frederic Wehrey and Wolfram Lacher, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, contend that the HoR is effectively a “rump parliament that represents one side in an ongoing conflict”.²¹² In November 2014, Libya’s Supreme Court—based in Tripoli—also ruled that the June elections were unconstitutional, although, the *Guardian* writes that the Supreme Court’s decision “raises the question whether [that ruling was made] under pressure from the militias”.²¹³

8.4 Intervention of Regional Powers

The conflict in Libya has also seen the intervention of regional powers. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are reported to support Haftar’s Dignity coalition, while Qatar, Sudan and Turkey are purported to back the Dawn coalition.²¹⁴ On 18 August 2014, UAE aircraft, using bases in Egypt attack Dawn positions around Tripoli’s International Airport in an effort to stop them from capturing the airport from the Zintan militias.²¹⁵

8.5 ISIL

Libya’s civil war also saw the emergence of ISIL affiliates in the country. Libyan jihadists returning home after fighting in Syria formed the Islamic Youth Shura Council, which pledged allegiance to ISIL in September 2014. Notably, ISIL opposes both the Dignity and Dawn coalitions, and Frederic Wehrey and Ala’ Alrababa’h suggest the group is “seeking to establish itself as a third force that can peel away disenchanted elements of both sides, while betting on the weakness and disunity of its rivals”.²¹⁶ On 15 February 2015, ISIL abducted and murdered 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya, which prompted Egypt to launch airstrikes against the

²⁰⁸ *Guardian*, ‘[Anti-Islamist General Named Libya Army Chief](#)’, 2 March 2015.

²⁰⁹ International Centre for Counter Terrorism, *Dignity and Dawn: Libya’s Escalating Civil War*, February 2015, p. 7; and *Economist*, ‘[Libya’s Civil War: That it Should Come to This](#)’, 10 January 2015.

²¹⁰ *Guardian*, ‘[Libyan Capital Under Islamist Control After Tripoli Airport Seized](#)’, 24 August 2014.

²¹¹ *Guardian*, ‘[Libyan Parliament Takes Refuge in Greek Car Ferry](#)’, 9 September 2014; and Frederic Wehrey and Wolfram Lacher, ‘[Libya’s Legitimacy Crisis](#)’, *Foreign Affairs*, 6 October 2014.

²¹² Frederic Wehrey and Wolfram Lacher, ‘[Libya’s Legitimacy Crisis](#)’, *Foreign Affairs*, 6 October 2014.

²¹³ *Guardian*, ‘[Libya Supreme Court Rules Anti-Islamist Parliament Unlawful](#)’, 6 November 2014.

²¹⁴ Frederic Wehrey and Wolfram Lacher, ‘[Libya’s Legitimacy Crisis](#)’, *Foreign Affairs*, 6 October 2014; and Middle East Eye, ‘[Gulf Hands in Libya](#)’, 14 September 2014.

²¹⁵ BBC News, ‘[Libya Crisis: US ‘Caught Off-Guard’ by Air Strikes](#)’, 26 August 2015.

²¹⁶ Frederic Wehrey and Ala’ Alrababa’h, ‘[Taking on Operation Dawn: The Creeping Advance of the Islamic State in Western Libya](#)’, Carnegie Endowment Fund Blog, 24 June 2015; and ‘[Rising Out of Chaos: The Islamic State in Libya](#)’, Carnegie Endowment Fund Blog, 5 March 2015.

militants.²¹⁷ The group has continued to expand in central Libya, reportedly gaining control of the entirety of Sirte in summer 2015. Meanwhile it has battled Misratan militias belonging to the Dawn coalition, launching attacks against Misrata itself.²¹⁸

8.6 UN Peace Process

In August 2014, Bernardino León was appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).²¹⁹ Peace talks between Libya's rival factions began in January 2015, after León faced difficulties getting the warring factions together.²²⁰ After nine months of negotiations and five drafts, on 11 July, a number of Libya's factions signed an agreement in Skhirat, Morocco, which called for the creation of a government of national accord. This would be headed by a Presidency Council, while legislative power would remain with the HoR. A consultative State Council would also be formed from the GNC. Notably, the GNC did not sign the agreement, citing concerns over the future role of General Haftar, for example.²²¹ However, in two-day peace talks held in Geneva on 11 August 2015, the BBC reported that all of Libya's rival factions attended, including the leaders of the GNC.²²²

8.7 Libya and the Mediterranean Migrant Crisis

In recent years, the number of migrants and refugees attempting to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea has increased significantly.²²³ According to Frontex, the Central Mediterranean route which "refers to the migratory flow coming from Northern Africa towards Italy and Malta through the Mediterranean Sea" in which "Libya often acts as nexus point".²²⁴ According to figures from Italy's Ministry of the Interior, Eritrean's now make up the biggest number of migrants travelling from Libya to Italy at 25,567 from 1 January to 31 July 2015.²²⁵ The number of Syrian's using this route has dropped by about a third since last year as they now increasingly reach Europe from Turkey to Greece.²²⁶ Migrants are typically trafficked by people smugglers and travel in unseaworthy and overcrowded vessels. The *Guardian* writes that Libya's "lawlessness" and a "generally unpatrolled Mediterranean coastline has made life easy for the people smugglers".²²⁷ Moreover, the BBC reports that Libya's "local militias are often active partners with the smugglers".²²⁸ On 28 August 2015, the United Nations Refugee Agency reported that of the 300,000 plus migrants and refugees that had crossed the Mediterranean this year, around 110,000 had landed in Italy.²²⁹

²¹⁷ *Financial Times*, '[Slaughter of Egyptians Signals ISIS Intent in Libya](#)', 19 February 2015.

²¹⁸ Frederic Wehrey and Ala' Alrababa'h, '[Taking on Operation Dawn: The Creeping Advance of the Islamic State in Western Libya](#)', Carnegie Endowment Fund Blog, 24 June 2015.

²¹⁹ UNSMIL, '[Mission Leadership](#)', accessed 24 August 2015.

²²⁰ *Financial Times*, '[UN Begins Libya Peace Talks with Two Warring Sides](#)', 15 January 2015.

²²¹ Christopher Blanchard, *Libya: Transition and US Policy*, Congressional Research Service, 3 August 2015, p 1; and European Council on Foreign Relations, '[Action Points for Europe After the Libya Deal](#)', 11 August 2015.

²²² BBC News, '[Libya UN Envoy Leon Urges Unity Government Within Weeks](#)', 11 August 2015.

²²³ BBC News, '[The Mediterranean's Deadly Migrant Routes](#)', 22 April 2015.

²²⁴ Frontex, '[Central Mediterranean Route](#)', accessed 24 August 2015.

²²⁵ International Organisation for Migration, '[Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals Approach 250,000](#)', 14 August 2015.

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ *Guardian*, '[Europe's Worsening Migrant Crisis](#)', 20 April 2015.

²²⁸ BBC News, '[Migrant Crisis: Who are Africa's People Smugglers](#)', 23 April 2015; and '[Migrants Drown as Libya Boat to Italy Sinks](#)', 12 May 2015, accessed 24 August 2015.

²²⁹ United Nations Refugee Agency, '[Mediterranean Sea Crossings Exceed 300,000, Including 200,000 to Greece](#)', 28 August 2015.

9. Yemen

Yemen has experienced violent conflict and political instability in recent years. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) characterises Yemen as being “riven by regional, sectarian, and tribal fissures”, with “peripheral political and armed movements [...] constantly challenging the centre”.²³⁰ Since January 2015, Yemen has descended into open conflict, with the country effectively split between two rival alliances. In January 2015, the Zaydi Shi Houthi movement seized Yemen’s capital Sanaa, forcing President Mansour Abdrabbuh Hadi to flee, and advanced southward towards Aden. The Houthis are backed by Iran and are allied with northern tribesmen and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Meanwhile Hadi, with few forces at his disposal, has formed an alliance with southern Sunni tribesmen and separatists. He is currently in exile in Saudi Arabia but remains Yemen’s internationally recognised President. Saudi-Arabia backs Hadi and on 26 March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition launched airstrikes against the Houthis.²³¹

The conflict in Yemen is further complicated by the presence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which has taken advantage of the turmoil in Yemen to seize territory in the south.²³² Meanwhile, the past year has seen the emergence of ISIL in Yemen and Reuters reports that the group is challenging AQAP’s leadership of Islamist militancy in Yemen.²³³ In addition to this, the fighting in Yemen has caused a humanitarian crisis, with the United Nations Humanitarian Co-ordinator, Johannes Van Der Klaauw, declaring that “we are witness to a humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen”.²³⁴

9.1 Houthis and Former President Saleh

The Houthi’s—also known as Ansah Allah (Partisans of God)—are drawn from Yemen’s Zaydi Shia community from Saada province in northern Yemen, and are led by the Houthi family. They believe that the Zaydi community has been marginalised in Yemen and have sought greater autonomy. Since 2004, the group fought six wars against former President Ali Abdullah Saleh’s government, and in 2009 against a Saudi Arabian intervention.²³⁵ In recent years, the Houthi’s expanded their territory in the north of the country, battling a variety of opponents, including tribes affiliated to the Sunni Islamist Party, Islah.²³⁶ The group opposes al-Qaeda in Yemen and it has been reported that the Houthi’s have ties to Iran. However, according to the *Financial Times*, “they have denied claims that they are proxies for Iranian foreign policy objectives”.²³⁷ Indeed, the *Guardian* writes that while the scope of Iran’s support for the rebels is unclear, it has “fed into wider Saudi anxieties about Tehran’s influence in the Gulf, at a time when it is making advances in Iraq Syria and Lebanon”.²³⁸

Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh has allied himself with the Houthi rebels, despite repeated wars with the movement while he was in power. It has been reported that Saleh—who commands elements of Yemen’s army that are loyal to him—sought to undermine President

²³⁰ Jeremy Sharp, *Yemen: Background and US Relations*, Congressional Research Service, 11 February 2015, p 18.

²³¹ *Economist*, ‘[What is Going on in Yemen](#)’, 29 March 2015.

²³² BBC News, ‘[Yemen Crisis: Al-Qaeda Seizes Southern Airport](#)’, 16 April 2015.

²³³ Reuters, ‘[In Yemen Chaos, Islamic State Grows to Rival Al-Qaeda](#)’, 30 June 2015.

²³⁴ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘[Yemen Humanitarian Response, March to July 2015](#)’, 18 August 2015.

²³⁵ *Financial Times*, ‘[Q&A: Who are Yemen’s Houthis?](#)’, 21 January 2015.

²³⁶ International Crisis Group, ‘[The Huthis: From Saada to Sanaa](#)’, 10 June 2014.

²³⁷ *Financial Times*, ‘[Q&A: Who are Yemen’s Houthis?](#)’, 21 January 2015.

²³⁸ *Guardian*, ‘[Crisis in Yemen—the Guardian Briefing](#)’, 1 April 2015.

Hadi's regime during Yemem's transition period. It has also been suggested that the Saleh's alliance with the Houthi's has contributed to their rapid successes.²³⁹ However, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Charles Schmitz argues that Saleh's alliance with the Houthi's is one of convenience, which he used to defeat his former allies in the Islah party, which had called for Saleh to step down during the Arab Spring.²⁴⁰

9.2 Southern Secessionists

Although North and South Yemen were unified in 1990, South Yemen tried to secede in 1994 sparking a short civil war. According to the CRS report, "southern Yeminiis have been disaffected because of their perceived second-class status", and continuing unrest over the years led to the creation of the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM) which seeks greater autonomy for the South or secession.²⁴¹

9.3 Background: The Arab Spring and Yemen's Transition

In January 2011, inspired by the Arab Spring, protests erupted in Yemen against the rule of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Violent clashes erupted between the opposition and security forces and Saleh-backers in mid-2011, when Saleh refused to sign a deal for him to step down which was agreed by his party, the General People's Congress, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Security forces launched a crackdown which the BBC suggests killed between 200 and 2000 people.²⁴² Eventually, Saleh agreed to step down in November 2011 as part of a United States-backed GCC plan in return for immunity from prosecution. Hadi—who had served as Saleh's Vice President—was elected unopposed as President in February 2012.²⁴³ A part of the GCC's transition plan required the establishment of a National Dialogue Conference (NDC), backed by the United Nations, to provide the basis for new constitution and system of government.²⁴⁴ However, while the NDC concluded in January 2014, the BBC observes that it failed to address the question of Southern secessionist demands. While Yemen's factions agreed to the creation of a federal structure, they could not reach agreement on how the country should actually be divided.²⁴⁵ Moreover, Hadi's plan for the creation of six federal regions caused controversy and was opposed by the Houthi's and the Southern Yemini group the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM).²⁴⁶

9.4 Recent Developments in Yemen

In July 2014, Hadi's government ended fuel subsidies. Academic Adam Baron notes that this triggered "massive opposition, stocking pre-existing resentment of the government, which was widely considered to be corrupt and ineffective".²⁴⁷ The Houthi's organised protests and clashes

²³⁹ *Financial Times*, '[Yemen's Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh Behind Houthis' Rise](#)', 26 March 2015.

²⁴⁰ Charles Schmitz, '[In Cahoots With the Houthis](#)', *Foreign Affairs*, 19 April 2015.

²⁴¹ Jeremy Sharp, *Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service, 11 February 2015, p 19.

²⁴² BBC News, '[Arab Uprisings: Country by Country—Yemen](#)', 16 December 2013.

²⁴³ *Economist*, '[Yemen's National Dialogue: Quite a Novelty](#)', 29 May 2015.

²⁴⁴ Council on Foreign Relations, '[Backgrounders: Yemen in Crisis](#)', 8 July 2015.

²⁴⁵ BBC News, '[Analysis: Yemen Faces Fresh Challenges as National Dialogue Ends](#)', 28 January 2014.

²⁴⁶ Jeremy Sharp, *Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service, 11 February 2015, pp 18–19.

²⁴⁷ Adam Baron, '[Civil War in Yemen: Imminent and Avoidable](#)', European Council on Foreign Relations, 23 March 2015.

broke out with Hadi's supporters and the Sunni Islamist Islah party.²⁴⁸ In mid-September the Houthi's took control of the capital and a UN-backed peace deal was signed which largely reversed the fuel subsidy cuts and called for the creation of a national unity government.²⁴⁹

The completion of a new draft constitution in January 2015 sparked further instability and fighting in the capital. In protest at the new constitution, the Houthi's kidnapped Hadi's chief of staff, Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, on 17 January 2015. Hadi was also placed under house arrest by the Houthi's, and on 22 January Hadi and his entire cabinet resigned.²⁵⁰ On 5 February 2015, the Houthi rebels announced the takeover of the government and the creation of an interim five-member presidential council and 'revolutionary committee', as well as dissolving Yemen's parliament.²⁵¹ According to the International Crisis Group, the Houthi's actions in January "were widely perceived, domestically and internationally, as a power grab".²⁵² On 21 February, Hadi escaped house arrest, fled to Aden and rescinded his resignation.²⁵³

After Houthi advances towards Aden in late-March, Hadi called on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab League to intervene. On 26 March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition launched 'Operation Decisive Storm' targeting the Houthi rebels with airstrikes. The Council on Foreign Relations observed that Saudi Arabia wants to prevent Houthi control of Yemen and considers the country "a front in its contest with Iran for regional dominance".²⁵⁴ The campaign lasted a month during and Saudi Arabia also blockaded shipping and aircraft into Yemen to stop Iran from supplying the rebels.²⁵⁵

The BBC reports that the operation has been a mixed success, while the threat to Saudi Arabia from the Houthi rebels has been removed, it has not brought about a political solution and the Houthi's have not retreated from the south.²⁵⁶ On 22 April 2015, Saudi Arabia announced the end of Operation Decisive Storm and its replacement with 'Operation Restoring Hope', aims to reduce the use of force and bring about a political settlement.²⁵⁷ In July, it was reported that pro-government forces had made successful advances against Houthi rebels in Aden.²⁵⁸ UAE troops have also been heavily involved in the coalition's efforts to push back the Houthi rebels, with press reports indicating that the UAE has several thousand troops in the country. They have helped southern tribesmen force the Houthi rebels from Aden and have been advancing northwards since.²⁵⁹

9.5 Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIL

AQAP has benefitted from the chaos in Yemen, seizing territory in the south of the country.²⁶⁰ According to the US government, it is arguably the most dangerous al-Qaeda affiliate and has fought an insurgency against the Yemini government since 2011. The Council on Foreign

²⁴⁸ BBC News, '[Yemen President Dismisses Government to End Stand-Off](#)', 2 September 2014; and Council on Foreign Relations, '[Backgrounders: Yemen in Crisis](#)', 8 July 2015.

²⁴⁹ Reuters, '[Houthi Rebels Sign Deal with Yemen Parties to Form New Government](#)', 21 September 2014.

²⁵⁰ *Economist*, '[Yemen's President Resigns](#)', 23 January 2014.

²⁵¹ *Guardian*, '[Yemen's Houthi Rebels Announce Government Takeover](#)', 6 February 2015.

²⁵² International Crisis Group, *Yemen at War*, 27 March 2015, p 4.

²⁵³ Reuters, '[Yemen's Hadi Flees to Aden and Says he is Still President](#)', 21 February 2015.

²⁵⁴ Council on Foreign Relations, '[Backgrounders: Yemen in Crisis](#)', 8 July 2015.

²⁵⁵ BBC News, '[Mixed Success for Saudi Military Operation in Yemen](#)', 12 May 2015.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

²⁵⁸ BBC News, '[Yemen Conflict: Houthi Rebels Driven Back in Aden](#)', 15 July 2015.

²⁵⁹ BBC News, '[Yemen Crisis: UAE Soldiers Killed by Blast at Camp](#)', 4 September 2015.

²⁶⁰ BBC News, '[Yemen: Crisis: Al-Qaeda Seizes Southern Airport](#)', 16 April 2015.

Relations reports that some Sunni tribesmen have fought with AQAP against a shared Houthi enemy.²⁶¹ ISIL affiliates emerged in November 2014 after jihadists pledged allegiance to the group. In January 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on Houthi leaders in Sanaa. According to Reuters, the presence of ISIL in Yemen is a challenge to al-Qaeda's leadership of Islamist militancy in Yemen and as of June 2015, since its emergence, the group had grown from about 80 militants to around 300.²⁶² Writing for the Council on Foreign Relations, Micah Zenko observes that "while the Islamic State's presence in Yemen is still small in comparison to AQAP" its "overlapping ideology with the Islamic State threatens to draw away critical support" for AQAP.²⁶³

9.6 Yemen's Humanitarian Crisis

The fighting in Yemen has caused a humanitarian crisis in an already poverty-stricken country. Out of a population of 26.7 million, 21 million people (80 percent of the population) now require humanitarian aid—up 33 percent since 2014—12.9 million are considered food insecure and 1.4 million people have been displaced.²⁶⁴ Aid organisations have struggled to help due to a lack of funding and access.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Jeremy Sharp, *Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service, 11 February 2015, pp 8–9; and Council on Foreign Relations, '[Backgrounders: Yemen in Crisis](#)', 8 July 2015.

²⁶² Reuters, '[In Yemen chaos, Islamic State Grows to Rival al Qaeda](#)', 30 June 2015.

²⁶³ Council on Foreign Relations, '[Guest Post: The Rise of the Islamic State in Yemen](#)', 7 July 2015

²⁶⁴ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, '[Yemen Humanitarian Response, March to July 2015](#)', 18 August 2015, pp 2–3; and BBC News, '[Yemen Crisis: How Bad is the Humanitarian Situation?](#)', 24 August 2015.

²⁶⁵ BBC News, '[Yemen Crisis: How Bad is the Humanitarian Situation?](#)', 24 August 2015.

10. Egypt

On 3 July 2013, Egypt's first democratically elected President, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, was deposed by Egypt's military following days of anti-government demonstrations. He was succeeded by the former head of Egypt's armed forces, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, who was elected President in June 2014. Since then, Sisi's government has banned the Muslim Brotherhood and been criticised for cracking down on dissent, although reports indicate that he remains popular with Egyptians.²⁶⁶ Egypt's military is also fighting an ISIL-aligned insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula.²⁶⁷ Following a number of delays, it also was announced on 30 August 2015 that Egypt would finally hold parliamentary elections in October and November.²⁶⁸ Egypt has lacked a parliament since June 2012 after the Supreme Constitutional Court dissolved the lower chamber because of alleged "constitutional violations", while the upper house was abolished by the 2014 constitution.²⁶⁹

10.1 Background

On 12 February 2011, the then Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak—who had ruled Egypt for 30 years—stepped down in response to weeks of anti-government protests as part of the Arab Spring. In June 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi became Egypt's first democratically elected President, narrowly beating his rival, a former Mubarak-era Prime Minister, Ahmed Shafiq, with 51.7 percent of the vote.²⁷⁰ Opposition to Morsi's rule mounted during 2012 and 2013, and he only lasted in office for a year. The *Guardian* argues that Morsi alienated the sections of Egyptian society that initially supported him—such as liberals and moderates—and was "seen as increasingly divisive, open only to Islamist ideas, and loyal only to the Brotherhood".²⁷¹ Morsi's popularity was further undermined by his failure to fulfil his promises of economic growth during his twelve months in power. His decision to award himself sweeping executive powers in November 2012—in an effort to prevent further judicial challenges over the composition of the country's constituent assembly—triggered increasing opposition to his rule. Critics had accused the assembly of being dominated by Islamists, and despite a boycott of the assembly by liberals, secularists and Coptic Christians, Morsi announced a rushed draft of the new constitution would be put to a national referendum.²⁷²

Opposition to Morsi's rule increased during 2013, with the creation of the grassroots Tamarod (Revolt) protest movement in late April of that year. On the anniversary of Morsi's election, the movement organised mass protests in late-June 2013, which saw millions of Egyptians call for Morsi's resignation.²⁷³ In wake of the mass anti-Morsi rallies, the then defence minister General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi issued a 48-hour ultimatum for Morsi to meet the protestors' demands and step down. On 3 July 2013, Morsi was deposed by the military. Morsi's constitution was suspended, an electoral law for new parliamentary and Presidential elections was announced, and Supreme Court judge Ally Mansour was made interim President.²⁷⁴ In

²⁶⁶ Jeremy Sharp, [Egypt: Background and US Relations](#), Congressional Research Service, 24 July 2015, p 1; and *Economist*, ['Repression in Egypt: Worse than Mubarak'](#) 2 May 2015.

²⁶⁷ BBC News, ['Enduring Repression and Insurgency in Egypt's Sinai'](#), 13 August 2015.

²⁶⁸ Al-Jazeera, ['Egypt Announces Elections for October and November'](#), 30 August 2015.

²⁶⁹ Al-Jazeera, ['Egypt Court Orders Dissolving of Parliament'](#), 14 June 2012; and Congressional Research Service, [Egypt: Background and US Relations](#), 24 July 2015, p 6.

²⁷⁰ *Guardian*, ['Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi Declared President of Egypt'](#), 24 June 2012.

²⁷¹ *Guardian*, ['How Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's First Elected President, Ended Up On Death Row'](#), 1 June 2015.

²⁷² BBC News, ['Q&A: Egypt Constitutional Crisis'](#), 24 December 2012.

²⁷³ BBC News, ['Egypt Crisis: Mass Protests over Morsi Grip Cities'](#), 1 July 2013.

²⁷⁴ *Economist*, ['Egypt's Coup: The Second Time Around'](#), 6 July 2015.

January 2014, Egypt's interim authorities put a new constitution to a national referendum which was approved by 98.1 percent of those who voted on a turnout of 38.6 percent.²⁷⁵

10.2 Muslim Brotherhood

Following the coup, Egypt's interim authorities launched a crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi's supporters. On 14 August 2013, Egyptian security forces forcibly cleared two pro-Morsi protest camps in Cairo, when over 1,150 pro-Morsi demonstrators were reportedly killed at the Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda Squares.²⁷⁶ The regime's crackdown continued and it has been reported that by late-2014, over 42,000 people were in custody, including most of the Muslim Brotherhood's top leadership.²⁷⁷ In December 2013, the interim Egyptian government declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation after it was blamed for an attack on a police headquarters, and in August 2014, the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), was banned by an Egyptian court.²⁷⁸ In 2015, Morsi was sentenced to death by an Egyptian court (along with more than a hundred others), for allegedly organising a prison break during the 2011 uprising, although his sentence would have to be approved by Egypt's Grand Mufti, Egypt's highest religious authority.²⁷⁹

10.3 Sisi's Presidency

In June 2014, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi was elected President with 96.9 percent of the vote, on a turnout of 47.45 percent.²⁸⁰ A Congressional Research Service (CRS) report notes that President Sisi's government has been accused of committing human rights abuses against its opponents.²⁸¹ The *Economist* argues that Sisi's "authoritarian habits leave Egypt looking a lot as it did before the Arab spring, when Mr Mubarak [...] ruled with an iron fist" and notes that some think the repression is even worse.²⁸² In August 2015, Sisi approved a new counter-terrorism law which has been criticised by human rights groups.²⁸³ The law will fine journalists who contradict official reports of terrorist attacks as well as imposing severe penalties on a number of crimes, such as speech which incites violence.²⁸⁴ On 29 August 2015, an Egyptian court sentenced three al-Jazeera journalists, Mohamed Fahmy, Baher Mohamed and Peter Greste (who was tried in absentia), to three years in prison for allegedly "spreading false news" and aiding the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁸⁵ The sentence attracted significant criticism from human rights groups and journalists.²⁸⁶

Sisi has sought to make Egypt attractive to foreign investment following the years of political instability. In March 2015, the government organised the Egypt Economic Development

²⁷⁵ *Financial Times*, '[Egypt's New Constitution gets 98% 'Yes' Vote](#)', 18 January 2015.

²⁷⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, '[Unprecedented Pressures, Uncharted Course for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood](#)', July 2015, p 5.

²⁷⁷ *ibid*, p 5.

²⁷⁸ BBC News, '[Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Declared 'Terrorist Group'](#)', 25 December 2013 and '[Egypt Court Bans Muslim Brotherhood's Political Wing](#)', 9 August 2014.

²⁷⁹ BBC News, '[What's Become of Egypt's Morsi?](#)', 16 June 2015.

²⁸⁰ BBC News, '[Abdul Fattah al-Sisi Declared Egypt's New President](#)', 3 June 2014.

²⁸¹ Jeremy Sharp, '[Egypt: Background and US Relations](#)', Congressional Research Service, 24 July 2015, p 7.

²⁸² *Economist*, '[Repression in Egypt: Worse than Mubarak](#)' 2 May 2015.

²⁸³ Amnesty International, '[Egypt: Draconian Counterterrorism Law Latest Tool to Muzzle Peaceful Activists](#)', 15 July 2015.

²⁸⁴ *Financial Times*, '[Egypt's Sisi Approves Strict Anti-Terror Law](#)', 17 August 2015.

²⁸⁵ BBC News, '[Al-Jazeera Trial: Egypt Gives Journalists Three-Year Sentence](#)', 29 August 2015.

²⁸⁶ *Guardian*, '[Al-Jazeera Journalists Sentenced to Three Years in Prison by Egyptian Court](#)', 29 August 2015.

Conference which the CRS describes as an “international showcase designed to signal a return to stability and stimulate foreign direct investment”.²⁸⁷ The conference saw a number of Gulf states pledge \$12 billion worth of investments and deposits to Egypt.²⁸⁸ This comes on top of significant budgetary assistance from countries such as Saudi Arabia since the removal of Morsi. According to the CRS, since then, Gulf states have provided an estimated \$30 billion in government-to-government aid, although the country is still running large annual deficits.²⁸⁹

On 12 September 2015, Egypt’s government resigned.²⁹⁰ This followed the resignation and arrest of Egypt’s agriculture minister, Salah Eddin Helal, on 7 September 2015, in relation to a corruption inquiry. President Sisi has asked the outgoing oil minister, Sharif Ismail, to form a new cabinet within a week.²⁹¹ According to the BBC, no official reason was given for the government’s resignation, but it reports that there are suggestions it reflects a desire to reshuffle the Cabinet following the corruption scandal.²⁹²

10.4 Sinai Insurgency

In recent years, violence in the Sinai Peninsula has intensified since Morsi’s removal from power. The north Sinai-based group Ansar Bayt al Maqdis swore allegiance to ISIL in November 2014 and now fights under name Sinai Province of the Islamic State (SP).²⁹³ In October 2014, Sisi’s government declared a state of emergency in the North Sinai Province. The CRS notes that SP attacks “have grown in scope and scale” in July 2015, including a rocket attack in mid-July against an Egyptian patrol craft off the coast of the northern Sinai.²⁹⁴ Attacks have become increasingly sophisticated and the start of July saw SP launch coordinated attacks on 15 military and security posts. In addition, it has also been reported that the group successfully shot down an Egyptian army helicopter with an anti-aircraft surface-to-air guided missile.²⁹⁵

²⁸⁷ Jeremy Sharp, [Egypt: Background and US Relations](#), Congressional Research Service, 24 July 2015, p 9.

²⁸⁸ *Financial Times*, [‘Gulf States Put Their Money on Sisi’s Egypt with Pledges Worth \\$12bn’](#), 13 March 2015.

²⁸⁹ Jeremy Sharp, [Egypt: Background and US Relations](#), Congressional Research Service, 24 July 2015, p 8.

²⁹⁰ BBC News, [‘Egypt Government Resigns Amid Corruption Inquiry’](#), 12 September 2015.

²⁹¹ *ibid.*

²⁹² *ibid.*

²⁹³ BBC News, [‘Sinai Province: Egypt’s Most Dangerous Group’](#), 10 August 2015.

²⁹⁴ Jeremy Sharp, [Egypt: Background and US Relations](#), Congressional Research Service, 24 July 2015, p 11.

²⁹⁵ BBC News, [‘Enduring repression and insurgency in Egypt’s Sinai’](#), 13 August 2015.