



## Arab uprisings: an update

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A brief survey of developments in the Arab world since the uprisings that began in 2011 (background and earlier developments can be found in a collection of briefings – see the last section: further reading). Two of the three countries that have had elections since the uprisings – Tunisia and Egypt – have seen mainstream and more radical Islamists dominating. In Libya, the third of the three, a pragmatic and relatively secular politician who had been former Prime Minister during the rebellion did well. It is still early to know what these new governments will do but, as with many of the countries in the region, pressing economic problems may be the most important thing. Meanwhile, after a dramatic few weeks, many are now convinced that the Assad regime in Syria cannot survive.

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Source: University of Texas

# 1 Egypt

## 1.1 Elections

From November 2011 to January 2012, Egypt held its first democratic parliamentary election. The coalition led by the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party took 47% of the vote and 235 seats in the new parliament. The fundamentalist Nour Party's group received 24% and 121 seats, leaving the secular parties very weakly represented in the 508-member assembly.

### Egyptian People's Assembly

Party/Alliance	Seats
Democratic Alliance for Egypt (led by Freedom and Justice Party, affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood)	235
Islamist bloc (led by Nour Party, Salafist Islamist)	121
New Wafd Party (Liberal nationalist)	38
Egyptian Bloc (social liberal)	34
Al-Wasat Party (mainstream Islamist)	10
Reform and Development Party (liberal)	9
Revolution Continues (radical left)	7
Other parties	18
Independents	26
Appointed by president/military council	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>508</b>

Source: [BBC News Online](#)

The first round of the presidential election was held in May and the second round in June 2012. Mohammed Mursi, candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party, won a narrow victory

(51.7%) in the second round against Ahmed Shafiq, Egypt's last Prime Minister under the fallen dictator Hosni Mubarak. Turnout was lower than at the parliamentary election and 800,000 ballot papers were spoiled, perhaps indicating a level of disillusionment with democracy as embodied in the parliament and with the choice of candidates at the presidential election.

The fact that Islamists won both the parliamentary and presidential elections does not mean that the future direction of Egypt is decided, however. Two days before the presidential election, the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) had issued a decree dissolving the parliament. Egypt's highest court had judged that the election of some of the seats in parliament was unconstitutional, and it also found at the same time that military's preferred candidate Ahmed Shafiq could after all stand as a presidential candidate, striking down the law which prevented representatives of the old regime from taking part in elections.

A few days later, the SCAF issued another decree, giving itself near-total autonomy in all military matters and taking away the president's role as commander in chief, wide-ranging legislative powers and a virtual veto over drafts of the new constitution.

The moves were interpreted by liberals and Islamists alike as an attempted coup by the old guard. Mursi quickly moved to challenge this by ordering the parliament to reassemble. Exactly who has the power in Egypt is not clear, as the constituent assembly that was to draft a constitution was dissolved in April then reformed in June; another order for its dissolution is pending.

## **1.2 Formation of a government**

President Mursi promised to appoint a government of national unity, but he is reported to have had difficulties finding a credible non-Islamist to work with him in the post of Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup> Despite the lack of a clear legal framework, Mursi named his choice for interim Prime Minister on 25 July, a week after a self-imposed deadline, appointing a practising Muslim who does not belong to the Muslim Brotherhood, technocrat Hesham Kandil, who was minister in charge of water in the outgoing interim government appointed by the SCAF. The new Prime Minister said that the President would be consulting with the SCAF on the appointment of the defence minister.

## **1.3 Outlook**

Egypt is managing only halting progress towards a new constitution that will define the powers of the presidency, the parliament and the military. The military is unlikely to want to renounce all its power, and will want to avoid anything which might endanger its huge subsidy from the US,<sup>2</sup> while democratic forces want to protect the revolution from any reversion to the dictatorship they endured for decades. The victory of forces aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood in the parliamentary and presidential elections crystallised the divisions in the country.

Difficulties in forming a government and installing a new constitution are not the only ones that face the country. Much of the force behind the uprising in 2011 came from economic grievances and organised labour. The first effect of the uprising, however, was to reduce economic activity. In the first three months of the uprising, GDP already shrank by some

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<sup>1</sup> "Egyptian President Names Minister in Interim Cabinet as Premier", *New York Times*, 25 July 2012

<sup>2</sup> The Administration requested from Congress \$3.1 billion in foreign military assistance for Egypt in 2011. [Foreign Military Financing Account Summary](#), 23 June 2010

7%.<sup>3</sup> Real gross domestic product is projected to grow by 1.5% in 2011/12 (July to June), which is not enough to bring unemployment down. The rate of joblessness has increased to 12.4% from about 9% in the previous year, and it is much higher among the young.<sup>4</sup> Tourism, Egypt's biggest foreign currency earner, was dramatically reduced. With a growing budget deficit, shrinking foreign investment and rising unemployment, Egypt is increasingly dependent on outside assistance, as its foreign reserves fall dangerously low. There are reports of renewed outbreaks of labour unrest, as workers find that their situation has if anything worsened since the fall of Mubarak.<sup>5</sup> In July, a strike by tens of thousands of textile workers in the Nile Delta town of Mahalla was reported to be gaining momentum.<sup>6</sup> The International Monetary Fund says that Egypt's medium-term prospects are positive, but that it needs to have a clear economic policy framework.<sup>7</sup>

Jane Kinninmont for Chatham House has written recently that the power struggle in Egypt will go on for several years.<sup>8</sup> Much will depend on the ability of Muslim Brotherhood politicians to make common cause with other civilian politicians to ensure a genuine transition to democracy and an end to military rule. The alternative would be to succumb to the divisions that some in the old guard have tried to accentuate, in order to justify security-first policies.

There are of course many power struggles going on in Egypt. Equally important for the future of the region is the battle for the future of political Islam between mainstream Islamists and more radical or Salafist groups. There have been reports of increased incidents of radical Islamic activism, a phenomenon that is also evident in Tunisia. A man is reported to have been killed because of what Islamic fundamentalists found to be an excessive public display of affection.<sup>9</sup> True to form in this region beset by conspiracy theories, a spokesperson for President Mursi suggested that the killing may have been the work of the old guard, trying to discredit his presidency.

So far, the Mursi presidency has done very little, either in domestic or foreign policy. This is partly because the president's powers have been severely limited by the SCAF. But it also results from the precarious position of the Muslim Brotherhood in relation to the military and the fear that radical action will provoke a crackdown. That fear has already been justified by the SCAF's actions. What will the Brotherhood do about contentious matters such as alcohol consumption, women's rights, the position of the Coptic Christians and the peace treaty with Israel if and when it becomes confident enough of its strength to do what it wants? That remains to be seen.

## 2 Tunisia

Tunisia, the first of the Arab countries to experience a broad uprising, appears to have made good progress towards a peaceful transition to democracy. At present the country is led by

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<sup>3</sup> "Egypt Economy Contracted 7% in Fiscal Third Quarter, Finance Minister Says", *Bloomberg*, 20 April 2011

<sup>4</sup> *Middle East and North Africa: Economic Outlook and Key Challenges*, International Monetary Fund, April 2012, p7

<sup>5</sup> "Egypt's labor movement feels stir of revolution; Union unrest poses the latest challenge to the new president as he seeks to stabilize the economy", *Los Angeles Times*, 23 June 2012

<sup>6</sup> "Mahalla strike gains strength", *Daily News Egypt*, 18 July 2012

<sup>7</sup> *Middle East and North Africa: Economic Outlook and Key Challenges*, International Monetary Fund, April 2012, p7

<sup>8</sup> Jane Kinninmont, "Egypt's Power Struggle is Still in its Early Days", *Politics.co.uk*, 26 June 2012

<sup>9</sup> "Rising religious fervor unnerves Egypt", *Los Angeles Times*, 29 July 2012

interim President Moncef Marzouki, a centre left secularist who was sworn in on 13 December 2011. The interim Prime Minister is Hamadi Jebali of the Nahda party.

**2.1 Election to the constituent assembly**

The election held on 23 October 2011 for a constituent assembly resulted in victory for the Al-Nahda (sometimes written En-Nahda) party, which gained some 41% of the vote and 89 seats in the 217-seat Constituent Assembly. Al-Nahda ('The Rebirth') is a moderate Islamist party that points to the Turkish and Indonesian models of Islamism in government and rejects, for example, the Saudi model. On 17 July, the party re-elected **Rachid Ghannouchi** as its leader with 76% in favour, comprehensively rejecting more radical Islamist candidates.<sup>10</sup>

Second came the Congress for the Republic, led by the veteran human rights activist and government opponent Moncef Marzouki, with 29 seats. The CPR is a secular party that campaigns against corruption and the influence of money in politics. The Popular Petition party came third, with a surprisingly high total of 26 seats. The party is run by a businessman who is allegedly close to elements of the old regime, and promised free healthcare and other benefits. Its success may have been due to its appeal in the traditionally marginalised interior and southern regions.

**The Tunisian Constituent Assembly**

Party	Seats
Al-Nahdha (Rebirth, mainstream Islamist)	89
Congress for the Republic (CPR, centre left secular party)	29
Popular Petition for Freedom, Justice and Development (Al Aridha, populist party)	26
Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (Ettakatol, social democratic party)	20
Progressive Democratic Party (PDP, secular liberal party)	16
Independents	16
Initiative (Al-Moubedra)	5
Democratic Modernist Pole (PDM)	5
Afek Tounes	4
Workers' Communist Party of Tunisia (Al Badil Athawri)	3
Socialist Democrat Movement (MDS)	2
People's Movement (Haraket Achaab)	2

Source: [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#)

**Women**

Tunisia had a reputation under the dictator Ben Ali for promoting the rights of women and much of the new political establishment seems to have decided to maintain that approach. Half the candidates at the election had to be women and that resulted in 57 of the 217 seats going to women.

<sup>10</sup> "Rachid Ghannouchi, Tunisia Islamist Leader, Re-Elected", *Huffington Post*, 17 July 2012

## 2.2 Interim government

In a widely-welcomed deal between the leading parties, Moncef Marzouki of the CPR was elected interim president by the Constituent Assembly and he appointed Hemadi Jebali of Al-Nahda as his Prime Minister. Mustapha Ben Jaafar of Ettakatol, a centre-left party, was elected Speaker of the Constituent Assembly.

### *Islamists and secularists*

If political parties have been able to collaborate relatively successfully in Tunisia, the divisions in society have come into sharper relief since the fall of Ben Ali. A recent argument over freedom of speech showed two cultures clashing publicly.

Nabil Karoui owns a satellite television channel called Nessma . Under the Ben Ali regime, it had no licence to broadcast and operated as a pirate station. With the fall of Ben Ali, Nessma increased its news and current affairs output, but the week before Tunisians voted in their first general election, the channel aired the French animated film *Persepolis*, based on an Iranian account of growing up during the Iranian revolution of 1979.

The film includes a scene where God is portrayed, and is considered sacrilegious by conservative Muslims in Tunisia. The screening of the film set liberals and defenders of free speech against these conservatives. In May 2012 Karoui was fined 2,400 dinar (£964) for “disturbing public order” and “offending public morals”. The court threw out the charge of “offence against a sacred item”.<sup>11</sup>

Increasing unemployment is thought by some to be making Salafist fundamentalist Islam attractive to disaffected Tunisian youths. Riots broke out in June after Salafists denounced an art exhibition. Salafists have been achieving a lot of publicity since the overthrow of Ben Ali, but electoral support for them seems to be minimal.

## 2.3 Outlook

The Tunisian state of emergency has repeatedly been extended and remains in force at the time of writing, and definitive legislative and presidential elections have been postponed, and now look likely to take place in mid-2013. The reform process, then, is not without its difficulties. Nevertheless, the political situation is relatively positive, particularly in view of the willingness of the main parties to work together.

As in other countries in the region, the performance of Tunisia’s economy will be very important in determining the country’s future. After shrinking by 1.8% in 2011, the economy returned to growth in the first quarter of 2012 but the economic environment remains very difficult, with two of Tunisia’s crucial markets – Libya and the EU – in turmoil.<sup>12</sup> One bright spot for the Tunisian economy is the rapid rebound in oil production in next door Libya.

The government has increased public spending to boost growth and has created jobs in the public sector.

## 3 Libya

With the death of Colonel Qaddafi in October 2011, the fear was that the control of Libya would pass to the heavily-armed local militias that had been so important in the revolution,

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<sup>11</sup> “Tunisian court fines TV station boss for airing animated film *Persepolis*”, *Guardian*, 3 May 2012

<sup>12</sup> Lahcen Achy, “[Tunisia’s Fragile Economy Puts Focus on Government Promises](#)”, Carnegie Middle East Centre, 17 April 2012

and that the Transitional National Council (TNC), originally based in the west of the country, would be unable to impose itself as a national government. While there have been many incidents of violence, the TNC's management of Benghazi during the rebellion, which was widely assessed to be quite effective, has now been extended to most areas of the country and the handling of the elections to the General Assembly surprised many with its effectiveness.

### **3.1 Electoral system**

In March 2012, the composition of the General Assembly was set out: 60 members would be appointed by the General Assembly, equally representative of each of Libya's three main regions, Cyrenaica in eastern Libya, Tripolitania in the north west and Fezzan in the south west. Decisions of the Constituent Assembly would be taken by a majority of two thirds plus one.<sup>13</sup>

The election for the General Assembly was very complicated, combining features of three different systems. Forty seats were chosen in single-member constituencies, 80 in multi-member constituencies using a single non-transferable vote (both on simple plurality) and a further 80 were chosen through a closed-list proportional representation system. Different constituencies will have different mixes of PR and majoritarian seats. According to one analysis, the multi-member majoritarian constituencies make party formation and coordination between parties difficult but are beneficial to local tribal elites.<sup>14</sup>

#### ***Women***

The electoral law sets out a gender quota for the 80 seats elected by closed-list PR. Article 15 sets out that parties should alternate men and women on their lists and that half of all a party's constituency lists must have a woman as first candidate. The first condition does not secure high female representation in countries where there is a proliferation of tiny parties, since many may only get their top candidate elected and their top candidate can be a man. The second condition seeks to remedy that, and will work as long as parties contest a number of constituencies.

#### ***Conduct of the election***

There had been concern that there might be a campaign of disruption of the election in the east; the election had already been delayed from 19 June because of security and organisational worries. A few days before the election, eastern militias forced the closure of three oil refineries because they thought their region had not been allotted enough seats in the General Assembly. Polling stations were destroyed in some parts of the country and a number of other violent disputes broke out. However, the authorities handled the disruption well. There was a turnout of about 65% of registered voters.

International observers of the election process reported that it was conducted relatively peacefully and there were no major allegations of electoral fraud. In a joint statement, EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and the European Commissioner responsible for the Neighbourhood Policy, Stefan Füle, said:

Today's truly historic elections for the Libyan National Congress should mark the beginning of a new era of democracy in Libya. In a climate of freedom, in spite of

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<sup>13</sup> Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, Constitutional reform in Arab countries, [Libya](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Libya's Electoral System](#), Democracy and Society blog, 5 July 2012



reports of isolated incidents of violence, Libyan citizens cast their votes today and have decided their future in a dignified and orderly manner.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.2 Preliminary results

The **National Forces Alliance**, the coalition of parties supporting former Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril, received some 60% of the votes in Benghazi and about 80% in some parts of Tripoli,<sup>16</sup> winning half of the seats reserved for party lists. Mr Jibril's alliance is reported to be 'moderate', although he claims that it is not secular. One successful independent candidate in Benghazi said that Jibril should not be seen as a liberal: "There are no liberals in Libya. Jibril is a Libyan who fasts and prays and whoever says he is a liberal doesn't know what they are talking about."<sup>17</sup>

Qaddafi had appointed **Mahmoud Jibril**, a former lecturer in political science at Pittsburgh University, to head the National Economic Development Board of Libya, a post which he held from 2007 to his resignation in 2011. As a former member of the National Transitional Council, he will not take a seat in the General Assembly, but some Libyans think that someone who was so close to Muammar Qaddafi should not have a prominent role in the new Libya.

**Justice and Construction**, a party close to the Muslim Brotherhood (although it denies any formal link), looked to have come second in the contest, with early reports suggesting that it was soundly defeated: in Central Tripoli district, the National Forces Alliance is reported to have won 46,000 votes while Justice and Construction got 4,000.<sup>18</sup>

**Al-Watan** (the Homeland) is the Islamist party led by Abdelhakim Belhadj, the Qaddafi-era Islamist militant who claimed to have been the subject of an unlawful transfer sanctioned by the UK authorities ('extraordinary rendition') to the custody of the Qaddafi regime where he was tortured. Al-Watan did not do well at the election, and Belhadj was heading for a loss in his Tripoli constituency.

### 3.3 Seats

Final interim results were declared on 17 July 2012 (the results will be declared final when the two-week period for appeal is over). The distribution of the party seats is as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> "Joint statement by the spokespersons of High Representative Catherine Ashton and Stefan Fule, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, on the Libyan elections.", EU press release, 9 July 2012

<sup>16</sup> "Libyan elections: moderate Mahmoud Jibril poised for victory", *Guardian*, 9 July 2012

<sup>17</sup> "[Libya's Jibril in election landslide over Islamists](#)", *Reuters*, 12 July 2012

<sup>18</sup> "[Libya's Jibril in election landslide over Islamists](#)", *Reuters*, 12 July 2012

### Election to the Libyan General Assembly - party list seats

Party	Tubruq	Baida	Benghazi	Ajdabia	Sirte	Sebha	Obari	Misrata	Khoms	Tripoli	Azzizyah	Zawya	TOTAL
National Forces Alliance	4	3	7	1	1	2	1	3	2	9	2	4	39
Justice and Construction	1	1	2	0	1	2	1	2	1	4	0	2	17
National Front Party	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Wadi Al Hayah	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Federation for Nation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
National Central Party	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Other parties (1 seat each)													15
Seats Total	5	5	11	3	4	9	7	7	3	16	3	7	80

Source: *Libya Herald*

One local analyst explained the result as a reaction against Qaddafi's rule: "The people saw in Jibril an openness to the rest of the world and they craved this openness after being closed off by Qaddafi."<sup>19</sup>

The final outcome of the election is unclear, however. The 120 seats in the General Assembly reserved for independents could determine its political direction; how the successful candidates will vote is not certain, although the Justice and Construction Party claims that it has done better in the seats reserved for independents and that, when these are taken into account, its sympathisers will equal those of the National Forces Alliance.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.4 Constituent Assembly

The General Assembly has still to appoint the 60-member Constituent Assembly, which must draft the country's constitution. Whether Libya adopts a presidential or parliamentary system of government remains to be seen, but Mr Jibril is well placed for a leading role.

### 3.5 Formation of a government

Before the confirmation of results, Mahmoud Jibril called for a grand coalition government of national unity. Justice and Construction Party members rejected the suggestion, however, perhaps still shocked not to be in a dominant position. Other parties were reported to be working on a coalition that would exclude Jibril's National Forces Alliance.

It is not clear how long it will take to form a new government once the General Assembly is finally constituted, although one report says that the National Transitional Council will hand

<sup>19</sup> "Libya's Jibril in election landslide over Islamists", *Reuters*, 12 July 2012

<sup>20</sup> "Analysis: Elections in Libya —the surprises", *Libya Herald*, 16 July 2012

over on 6 or 8 August.<sup>21</sup> International observers have called on the parties to cooperate with each other in forming a government.

### 3.6 Outlook

#### *Divisions and unity*

The conduct of Libya's election may have been impressive and the outcome encouraging for those that want to see a new Libya open to the outside world, but vast problems remain to be resolved, not least the fracturing of the country along ethnic, tribal and regional lines.

Perhaps 10% of Libyans are of predominantly Berber descent and identify themselves as Berbers (although it is difficult to tell, since a majority of the population may be 'Arabised' Berbers, speaking Arabic and with Arabic names). Tuaregs, living in the south east of the country, are part of the Berber culture. Another significant proportion of the Libyan population is black African.

Security remains tenuous at best in much of the country. In Berber (or Amazigh) areas, there are scores to settle. Under Qaddafi, Berber culture was suppressed and anyone caught speaking Berber in public could be arrested. Activists were imprisoned.<sup>22</sup> Berber language and culture have already started to re-appear, but armed clashes between Berbers and Arabs have also taken place. 17 were killed in March when clashes erupted between Berbers of Zuwara, in the far west of the country, and Arabs of the neighbouring town of Riqdaleen.<sup>23</sup> The dispute was partly about the control of resources: in this case, land and smuggling routes.

In the south, there is a significant conflict developing between African Toubou or Tebou clans and Arabs, which has led to more than a hundred deaths. In one case, the African and Arab inhabitants of the southern town of Kufra are reported to have used mortars to shell each other's part of the town. Disputes were brewing over control of the area's oil fields. In Sabha, capital of the south western Fezzan region, Arabs are reported to have used tanks to shell the African part of town.<sup>24</sup>

Tuaregs are reported to have looted large amounts of weaponry during the civil war, and to have taken them across the border into northern Mali, where the arms helped the Tuaregs to take the control of a large amount of territory from the government. Militant Islamist *jihadis* have since seized much of the territory from the Tuaregs. Looted weapons, including man-portable surface-to-air missiles, are also reported to have turned up in Gaza and in the hands of Islamists in northern Nigeria.

Almost all Libyans are Sunni Muslims, which is an important source of unity for Libya, at least in comparison with Iraq, for example. Unlike Egyptians, however, Libyans still have a very strong clan or tribal identity. Mahmoud Jibril's membership of the Warfalla tribe, the most populous in the country, may have helped his party to perform well in the election. The other significant division in the country is between the three old provinces under which Libya was administered until 1963. The west, (Tripolitania) centred on Tripoli and the east (Cyrenaica) centred on Benghazi, and the southern region of Fezzan. The revolution was born in Benghazi and the civil war progressed from east to west. Disputes may lie ahead when the

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<sup>21</sup> "Libya's NTC to hand over power in four weeks: deputy chairman", *Xinhua news agency*, 11 July 2012

<sup>22</sup> See for example *World Report 2011: Libya*, Human Rights Watch, 2011

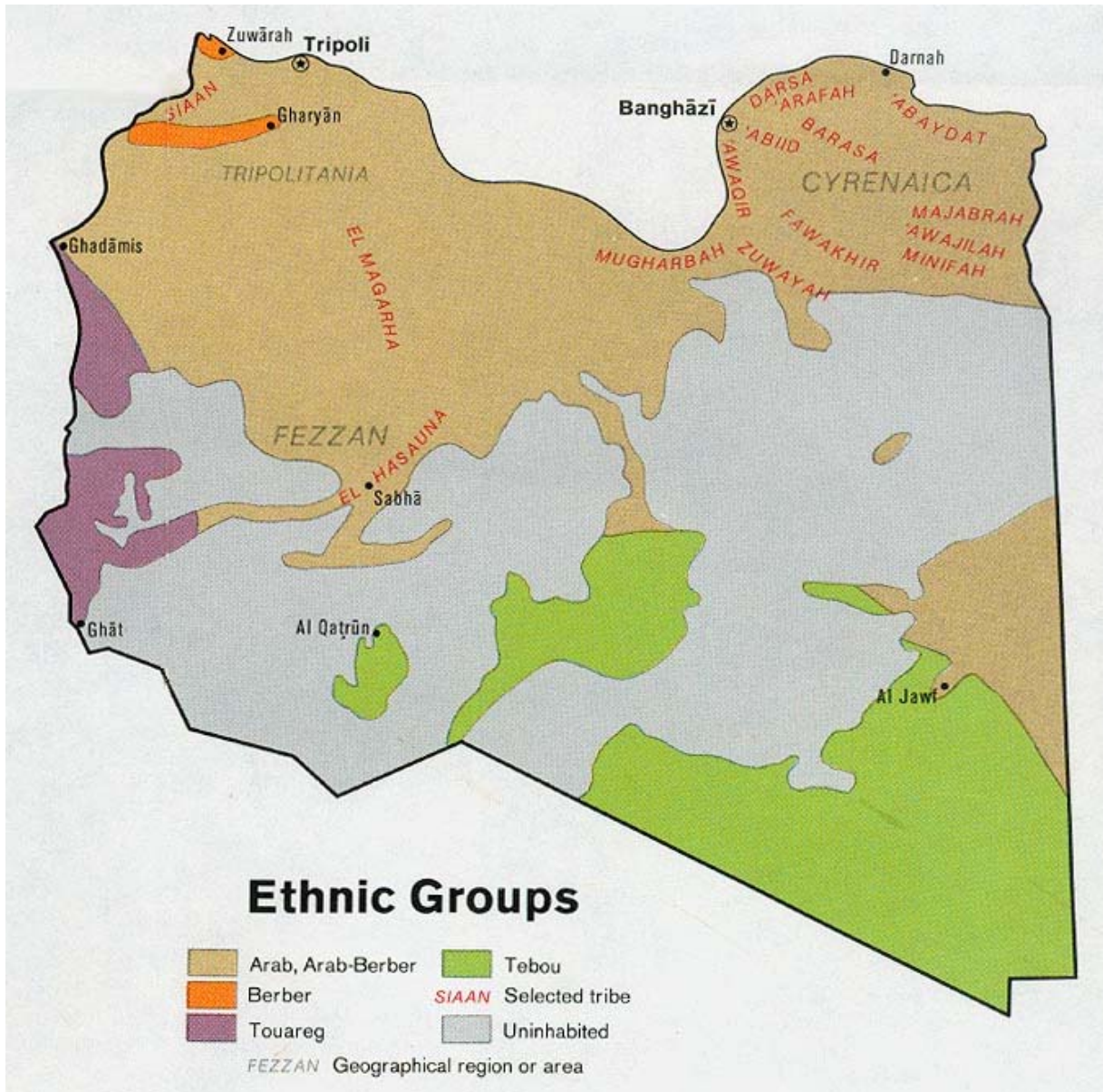
<sup>23</sup> "Libya beset by ethnic tension as elections loom", *Guardian*, 4 July 2012

<sup>24</sup> "Is Libya Cracking Up?", *New York Review of Books*, 21 June 2012

Constituent Assembly turns its attention to the degree of devolution of power under the new regime.

These tribal, ethnic and regional rifts may turn out to be an important factor in the country's political future. Regional instability could also easily undermine any progress in Libya.

**Map of Libya's ethnic groups and tribes**



Map courtesy of the University of Texas

**Economic outlook**

Libya's economic prospects are good, and very different from those of neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt.

Before the war, Libya had one of the highest incomes per head in Africa, being in the upper middle income group of countries with a higher Gross National Income per capita in 2008

than Poland.<sup>25</sup> The International Monetary Fund forecasts real Gross Domestic Product growth at a startling 116.6% for 2012 and 16.5% for 2013, after a fall of 60% in 2011.<sup>26</sup>

According to the World Bank, hydrocarbon output is expected to recover completely in 2012, after the disruption of the civil war,<sup>27</sup> although non-hydrocarbon GDP is not predicted to recover until 2014. *Business Monitor International* described the recovery in Libyan production as “incredible”.<sup>28</sup>

The potential for development in the non-hydrocarbon economy is considerable, with commentators pointing to strong tourism potential in the medium term. Big projects to improve water and transport infrastructure have been suspended for some time due to the war but should be re-started soon, adding to Libya’s economic potential.

The creation of jobs is perhaps the biggest task for any incoming government. Distribution of the country’s wealth is uneven and unemployment, particularly among young people, is high: maybe 30% according to the International Labour Organisation.<sup>29</sup>

## 4 The rest of North Africa

The other countries in North Africa, Algeria and Morocco, have been relatively stable, despite economic problems and political challenges.

### 4.1 Algeria

In Algeria, the veteran president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, in office since 1999, reacted to events in Tunisia and Egypt and unrest on Algeria’s streets that had led to five deaths and hundreds of arrests: he announced in February 2011 that the state of emergency that had been in place since 1992 would be lifted. Demonstrations continued and in April 2011, Bouteflika announced constitutional and electoral reforms before the legislative election, scheduled for May 2012. A consultative commission (boycotted by opposition parties, who thought the changes were little better than cosmetic) was established with a view to drafting amendments to the constitution and submitting them to a referendum. Laws restricting the freedom of the press, radio and television were eased. At the same time, the government announced extra spending in an attempt to placate public opinion.

As the authorities prepared their response to the upheaval in the region, regular bomb attacks were carried out across the country, largely attributed to members of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In one particularly serious attack in August 2011, 16 soldiers and two civilians were killed.

Turnout at the 2012 election was low – the official figure of 43% was probably an exaggeration – suggesting that the public was less than convinced by Bouteflika’s reforms. With reports of deserted polling stations and an average of 62 candidates per seat, it must sometimes have seemed as if there were almost as many candidates as voters. Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s party won 208 of the 462 seats, with the Prime Minister’s National Rally for

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<sup>25</sup> [GNI per capita \(Atlas method, current US\\$\), Middle Income countries](#), World Bank

<sup>26</sup> [Libya - Staff Visit Concluding Statement](#), International Monetary Fund, 4 May 2012

<sup>27</sup> [Libya Country Brief](#), World Bank, April 2012

<sup>28</sup> “Instability Demands Post-Recovery Strategy”, *Business Monitor International*, 1 August 2012

<sup>29</sup> ILO, [Libya](#)

Democracy, the other governing party, coming second with 62 seats and a moderate Islamist alliance third with 49.<sup>30</sup> The Islamists questioned the reliability of the results.

### **Outlook**

Despite widespread cynicism both about the election results and powers of the parliament that had been elected, there were no serious protests against the government. Memories of the civil war in the 1990s, when between 100,000 and 200,000 people were killed, are perhaps still too fresh.

Algeria's hydrocarbon wealth makes Algerian living standards higher than neighbouring Morocco's and helps the government to buy a certain amount of acceptance. Unemployment, particularly among the urban young, remains high and with hydrocarbons accounting for some 60% of budget revenues,<sup>31</sup> Algeria is vulnerable to any fall in hydrocarbon prices. The weak outlook for gas prices due to the 'fracking' revolution is a particular cause for concern.

## **4.2 Morocco**

Like the Algerian President, the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, responded to the uprisings by announcing constitutional reforms. Unlike in Algeria, many commentators were impressed by the authorities' apparent seriousness in addressing the country's democratic deficit. Morocco already had a relatively open political scene: the mainstream Islamist party, Justice and Development, had been allowed to operate freely since 1992.

A constitutional reform committee published its proposed changes on 9 June 2011. The King announced his intention to carry out the recommendations and they were put to a referendum on 1 July. After a 98% vote in favour, on a turnout of 73% (figures which caused some scepticism) the constitution was amended. It set out that the Prime Minister should be the head of the biggest party in the parliament, that the Prime Minister should be able to appoint a cabinet and that the Prime Minister was the head of the government, rather than the King, as had been the case.

The constitution was due to come into effect after the legislative elections, which were brought forward by a year to November 2011. One radical Islamist party and some minor left wing parties boycotted the election, and the turnout was relatively low at 45%. The results gave the Justice and Development Party (PJD, a mainstream Islamic party) the highest number of seats and its leader, Abdelilah Benicrane, was duly nominated Prime Minister, the first time that an Islamist had been head of a Moroccan government. Mr Benicrane formed a coalition composed of the PJD, Istiqlal, the Popular Movement (MP), the Constitutional Union (UC), and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS). The president of the secular Istiqlal party became president of the (lower) chamber of representatives, and ministers of other parties were appointed to the cabinet.

Morocco appears to have taken an important step towards democracy and pluralism with its new constitution and Islamist-led government. But controversies about freedom of speech and the protection of Islam continue to arise. In May 2012, imprisoned Islamists went on hunger strike, and a rapper was given a year's prison sentence for 'attacking the image of the security services' in a song about police corruption.<sup>32</sup> In July 2012, three Muslim clerics

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<sup>30</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, Algeria, [Al-Majlis Al-Chaabi Al-Watani \(National People's Assembly\)](#)

<sup>31</sup> US State Department, [Background Note: Algeria](#), 23 January 2012

<sup>32</sup> "Morocco; Rapper given 1-year sentence", *Los Angeles Times*, 12 May 2012

called for a journalist to be put to death for supporting the decriminalisation of sex outside marriage.<sup>33</sup>

### Moroccan Chamber of Representatives -- Election 25 November 2011

Political Group	Seats
Justice and Development Party (PJD, mainstream Islamist)	107
Istiqlal Party (PI, conservative monarchist party)	60
National Rally of Independents (RNI, centrist party close to the monarchy)	52
Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM, centrist party close to the monarchy)	47
Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP)	39
Popular Movement (MP, liberal conservative)	32
Constitutional Union (UC, conservative party close to the monarchy)	23
Progress and Socialism Party (PPS)	18
Labour Party (PT)	4
Democratic and social Movement (MDS)	2
Renewal and Equality Party (PRE)	2
Party of Environment and Sustainable Development (PEDD)	2
Democratic Al Ahd Party	2
Moroccan Green Left Party (PGV)	1
Freedom and Social Justice Party (PLJS)	1
Democratic Forces Front (FFD)	1
Action Party (PA)	1
Unity and Democracy Party	1

Source: [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#)

### Outlook

The Moroccan monarchy enjoys a legitimacy that would be the envy of many governments in the region and the country is relatively united, with less pronounced sectarian or regional divides than others. The political reforms implemented by Mohammed VI, while not convincing everybody, have probably shored up his rule; to have a government led by an Islamist party is a real change. Whether that will lead to a confrontation between Islamists and secularists or helps to promote consensus remains to be seen, but the political system in Morocco is relatively stable.

Economic concerns are probably more pressing. Corruption among those with close connections to the palace has not been eradicated and the distribution of wealth remains uneven. Economic growth has been respectable over the last few years at 3.7% in 2010, and an estimated 4.5% in 2011. The government projects growth of 5.5% in 2012.<sup>34</sup> It has not, however, been enough to give many young jobseekers work – the unemployment rate among urban youths is about a quarter and among highly-educated young people even

<sup>33</sup> "Execution of journalist urged", *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 2012

<sup>34</sup> US Department of State, [Background Note: Morocco](#), 12 March 2012

higher at 39%, and it is increasing.<sup>35</sup> In one high-profile incident in January 2012, five unemployed graduates set themselves alight in the capital Rabat.

## 5 Syria

By June 2012 it was becoming clear that hopes of a negotiated settlement were increasingly unrealistic and that Syria was sliding towards civil war. At a meeting of the Friends of Syria group in Paris, further calls were made for an end to Russian and Chinese vetoes of Security Council resolutions and for the imposition of sanctions.

As violence inside Syria increased, tensions across the border rose sharply after the Syrian air defences shot down a Turkish fighter jet. Syria claimed that the jet had crossed into Syrian air space. It was hit by a missile, killing both the crew members. Turkey claimed that a search and rescue plane looking for the downed fighter had also been fired on by Syrian forces. President al-Assad claimed that he regretted the incident but Turkey reacted angrily, changing the terms of engagement of Turkish armed forces. Turkey said that any forces approaching the Turkish border would now be considered hostile. It also consulted its NATO allies, which supported the Turkish position, although there was no question of imminent NATO military action.

In July, the situation deteriorated further. The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated on 9 July that the total death toll was 17,000.<sup>36</sup> General Manaf Tlass defected. He was a former childhood friend of Bashar al-Assad, and a former Brigadier General of the elite and Alawite-dominated Syrian Republican Guard. Significantly, Tlass was perhaps the most prominent Sunni associated with the regime; evidently, the increasingly sectarian nature of the conflict had made Tlass's position as a Sunni close to the government ever more difficult to sustain.

On 12 July, a massacre was reported at Tremseh in the Hama region. Activists said that army and pro-Assad militiamen killed around 220 people in the Sunni Muslim village of Tremseh in the Hama region. UN observers say the attack appeared to target army defectors and activists, although a massacre of civilians was not confirmed. But the UN did confirm that heavy weapons had been used by the government.

On the same day, the ambassador to Iraq, Nawaf al-Fares, announced that he was resigning his post and from the Baath party. He was a Sunni Muslim, and the second diplomat to resign after the ambassador to Sweden resigned in December 2011.

On 18 July, Russia and China vetoed their third UN Security Council resolution on Syria. This one would have imposed sanctions on Syria under the UN Charter's Chapter 7 mandatory powers if the government did not withdraw its troops and comply with the ceasefire as set out in the terms of the Annan plan. The proposed sanctions did not include any military action, but Russia said that the West was trying to pave the way for armed intervention. The Security Council debated a UK-drafted resolution to renew the mandate for UNSMIS, the Annan observer mission to Syria, on 20 July and unanimously approved it, contradicting earlier rumours that Western countries would refuse to extend the mandate if Russia vetoed the earlier sanctions resolution.

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<sup>35</sup> Lahcen Achy, "Youth Unemployment in Morocco Roots, Risks, Responses", Carnegie Middle East Centre, February 2011

<sup>36</sup> "Syria's death toll crosses 17,000, victims mostly civilians: opposition group", *al-Arabiya*, 9 July 2012



In the biggest blow to the Assad government so far, Defence Minister General Rajha and his deputy, Assef Shawkat, the brother-in-law of Bashar al-Assad, and Assistant to the vice-president and head of crisis management office, General Hassan Turkomani, were killed in a suicide bomb attack on 18 July. Head of the national security office, Hisham Ikhtyar, died later of his injuries. Both an Islamic violent *jihadi* group and the Free Syrian Army claimed responsibility for the attack. Diplomats continued to abandon their jobs, with the envoys to Cyprus, the UAE and Turkmenistan defecting.

At the same time, fighting intensified sharply in Syria, with the rebels taking control of some border posts on the Iraqi border and attacking government positions in Damascus. After several days of heavy fighting, during which the government was accused of using helicopter gunships and heavy artillery,<sup>37</sup> the rebel advance on Damascus was halted. The focus moved to the country's commercial capital and largest city, Aleppo, where the government used its superior firepower to attack rebels district by district. In an indication of the scale of the violence, the UN said that 200,000 people had fled Aleppo.

A further symptom of the worsening situation came on 2 August, when Kofi Annan announced that he would not seek to renew his mandate as the UN's special envoy to Syria when it ends at the end of August. The peace plan he devised had not been adhered fully to by either side, and with escalating fighting, the plan was increasingly sidelined. The UN will not disengage from Syria, however. Ban Ki Moon announced that he would consult with the Arab League to find a suitable successor.

## 5.1 Chemical and biological weapons

As the situation in Syria has worsened, there has been growing concern about the country's chemical weapons. In a statement on 23 July, a Syrian government spokesman said that the weapons would never be used against internal opponents:

No chemical or biological weapons will ever be used, and I repeat, will never be used, during the crisis in Syria no matter what the developments inside Syria. All of these types of weapons are in storage and under security and the direct supervision of the Syrian armed forces and will never be used unless Syria is exposed to external aggression.<sup>38</sup>

The statement was the first open admission that Syria possesses weapons of mass destruction, and the last comment about external aggression was taken by many as a threat that they would be used if necessary.

The programme is widely thought to have been developed with Soviet assistance during the 1980s,<sup>39</sup> and Western intelligence sources think that Syria now has the most powerful chemical arsenal in the region and an effective array of delivery methods including artillery shells and missiles.<sup>40</sup>

There have been widespread reports that Syria maintains a biological weapons capability, too. It is thought likely that Syria has stores of anthrax bacillus, botulinum toxin and ricin, but that its domestic production capabilities are limited and its weaponisation of biological

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<sup>37</sup> "Syria army 'uses helicopters' to attack Damascus rebels", *Euronews*, 17 July 2012

<sup>38</sup> "Syria threatens to use chemical weapons in case of a foreign attack", *Washington Post*, 23 July 2012

<sup>39</sup> James Blitz, "Concern grows over the fate of regime's chemical arms", *Financial Times*, 16 July 2012

<sup>40</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, Country profiles, [Syria](#)

weapons (the development of delivery systems) is not advanced.<sup>41</sup> Syria signed the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) on 14 April 1972, but has not yet ratified it.

Reports emerged in July of Syria moving its chemical weapons to locations near the country's borders.<sup>42</sup> It was not clear whether the purpose of the move was to prepare for their use or to prevent them from falling onto the wrong hands. Israel said that it was prepared to take military action to stop Hizbollah from getting the weapons. There are also reasonable fears that the weapons may fall into the hands of extreme elements in the Syrian opposition movement, including global violent *ihadis* who could possibly use them against Western targets. Some analysts have argued, however, that the risk of terrorist use of chemical weapons should not be exaggerated.<sup>43</sup> There are many practical difficulties in their use. Various groups are known to have investigated using them in the past but there have been few instances where chemicals have been used effectively.

## 5.2 Outlook

The defection of high-level insiders, the fighting in the crucial cities of Damascus and Aleppo and the explosion which killed four top security officials have given the impression that Syria has reached a turning point. These developments were enormous psychological blows and allowed the rebels to feel that the momentum was with them. They also made it difficult to imagine the survival of the regime, at least in its present form.

On the other hand the suppression of the rebellion in Damascus, which the government at least claims has been completed, shows how the government's heavy armaments continue to give it the edge in pitched battles. That advantage will persist for a long time unless there is a big change in the supply of arms to the rebels. It is therefore conceivable that the present situation could continue, with the rebels holding much of the countryside and the government able to break resistance in the big centres with tanks, artillery and possibly attack helicopters.

The loyalty of the armed forces will be essential for al-Assad's survival. The defection of Manaf Tlass is highly significant because it may encourage other Sunni soldiers to defect. The regime strategy of heightening the sectarian aspect of the conflict in order to ensure that traditional supporters in the Christian and Alawite minorities back al-Assad has a corollary: it will have a tendency to drive members of the Sunni majority away from supporting the regime. Despite the strength of the Alawite-dominated Republican Guard and the Fourth Armoured Division, if defections continue from the Sunni-dominated mainstream of the armed forces, the regime will lose its grip on most of the country.

There are some indications that the Alawite elite is preparing for the break-up of Syria. Much of the worst violence, where the 'Shabbiha' Alawite gangs as well as regular government forces are accused of committing atrocities against Sunni villages, has taken place in the border lands between the majority-Sunni hinterland and the Alawite strongholds in the coastal mountains. Some see this as ethnic 'cleansing' in preparation for the creation of some sort of Alawite state in the west of the country. Franck Salameh argued recently in *The National Interest* that this is what is happening:

...today's strings of wanton murders, sexual assaults, torture, arbitrary detentions, targeted bombings and destruction of neighbourhoods—and what they entail in terms of displacements, deportations and population movements—are nothing if not the

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<sup>41</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, Country profile, [Syria](#) [23 July 2012]

<sup>42</sup> "[Syria moves chemical weapons before wider offensive: defector](#)", *Reuters*, 21 July 2012

<sup>43</sup> "The Specter of Syrian Chemical Weapons", *Stratfor*, 2 August 2012

groundwork of a future Alawite entity; the grafting of new facts on the ground and the drafting of new frontiers.<sup>44</sup>

The 'Alawite state' strategy would be very much the last resort for the present elite. Joshua Landis recently argued that the obstacles in the way of creating a separate state are such that it could not happen. It would be a reversal of decades of Syrian policy to integrate Alawites and create a secular state. It would be difficult to defend and Alawite forces would find it hard to incorporate the coastal cities of Latakia and Tartus, where there are large Sunni populations. International recognition would be very difficult to obtain, and there is little infrastructure to allow the region to function independently.<sup>45</sup>

Experience in Iraq suggests that it will be difficult to put Syria back together if central control collapses. Some analysts have written that an increasingly likely outcome is a coup d'état that removes al-Assad from power but preserves some of the existing structure of the state. Stratfor argues that Russia and Iran, al-Assad's main external backers, could move to try to engineer a coup if the present leadership looks as if it will lose its grip.<sup>46</sup>

The risk of conflict spreading is high. An important difference between Libya and Syria is that Syrian society is intimately linked with those of neighbouring countries. Tribes in the region are not limited by international borders and straddle into Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The links between Syria and Hizbollah in Lebanon are well known. Neighbouring Turkey is very worried about the implications of a balkanisation of Syria, since that might provide a refuge for Kurdish PKK fighters. Sectarian conflict in Syria is also almost certain to have a destabilising effect on Lebanon, and Israelis are worried that whatever regime replaces the Assads may be worse for Israel's security.

In July, the Royal United Services Institute issued a report saying that Syria will probably now descend into a full-scale civil war:

The stage is set for a vicious civil war that may be defined by religious and ethnic boundaries, even if it is not about them. This is not inevitable, but it is now more likely than not.<sup>47</sup>

RUSI argues that some sort of intervention is becoming increasingly likely, particularly after the bomb that killed four top security officials. While Western governments may be reluctant to get involved, intervention, in the form of covert intelligence and special force operations, is already taking place. The scale of unrest and the potential for regional destabilisation, the report suggests, mean that Western countries will find it increasingly difficult to remain to one side.

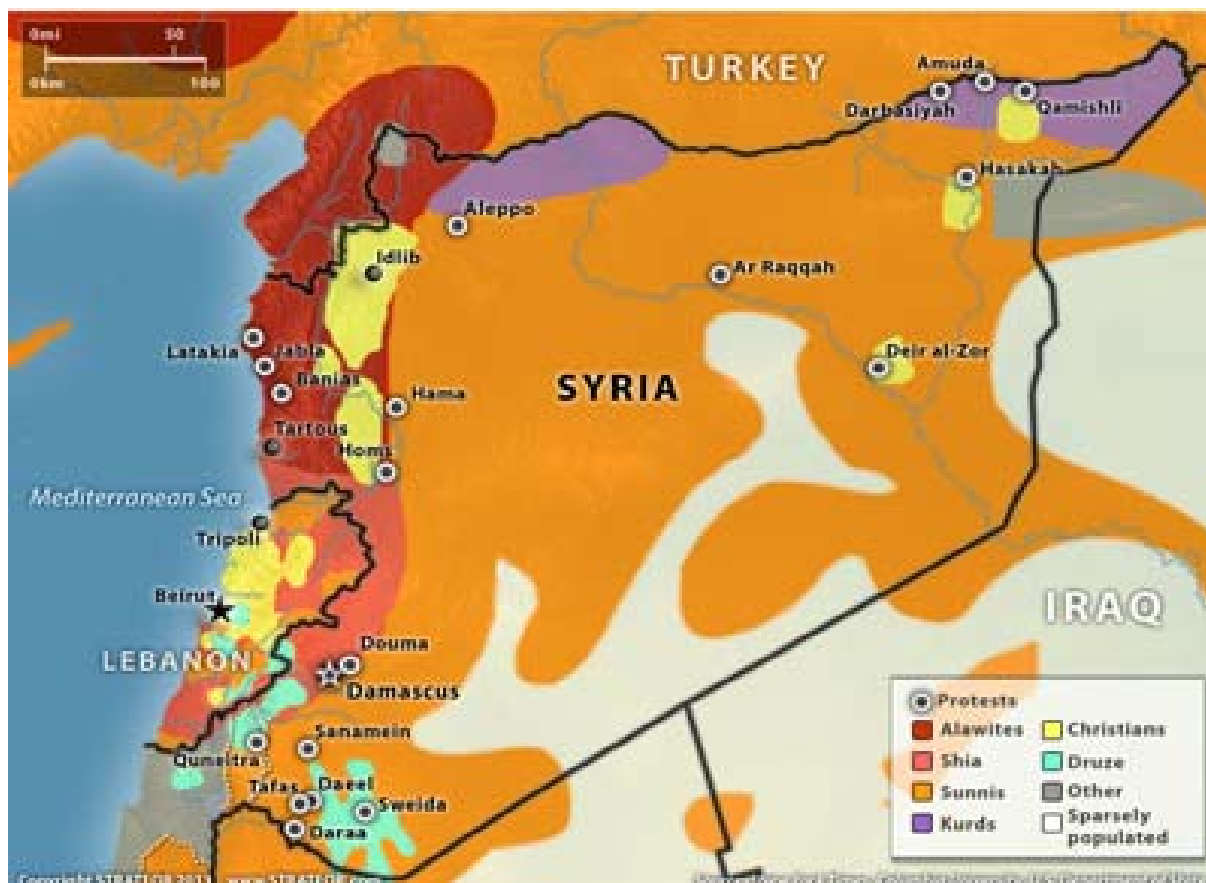
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<sup>44</sup> Franck Salameh, "An Alawite State in Syria?", *The National Interest*, 10 July 2012

<sup>45</sup> Joshua Landis, "Syria: Five Reasons Why There Won't Be An Alawite State", *Eurasia Review*, 22 July 2012

<sup>46</sup> "Considering a Palace Coup in Syria", *Stratfor*, 8 July 2012

<sup>47</sup> *Syria Crisis Briefing - A Collision Course for Intervention*, Royal United Services Institute, 25 July 2012, p1



Source: Stratfor

## 6 Arabian Peninsula

### 6.1 Bahrain

In November 2011, the Bahrain International Committee of Inquiry published its hard-hitting report on the events in the spring of that year. The report recommended sweeping reforms to end impunity for torture and extrajudicial killings and to work towards the reconciliation of Bahraini society. Despite some changes, most reports suggest that the implementation of the reforms has been half-hearted at best. Unrest and reports of abuse continue and some fear an impending crisis. Some in the Bahraini government see a partial union with Saudi Arabia as a resolution to the crisis.<sup>48</sup>

It seems that any tentative efforts at reconciliation are fading. In June, Ali Salman, leader of the Shiite Islamist Wefaq party, was hit by birdshot and injured. This may have been in retaliation for a speech he had made a few days before, in which he said that Bahrain's Shiites had yet to show their true strength and that he could bring thousands onto the streets, ready for confrontation.

A leading Wefaq member claimed that the authorities were clamping down on dissent:

<sup>48</sup> For recent background on the situation in Bahrain, see the Standard Note [Bahrain: an update](#), 30 May 2012

Security forces have been careful in dealing professionally with political leaders but this time was different. It seems a gradual crackdown is going on. They are closing the small margin for freedom of expression.<sup>49</sup>

Fears that Bahrain could again erupt into serious disorder are mounting. There has been no movement on the plans for a closer union between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, but they have not been dropped.

## **6.2 Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia has avoided the worst of the unrest in many parts of the Arab world, largely by spending extra money to placate those demanding change.

In July, a prominent critic of the Sunni ruling family, the Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr, was injured and arrested by the security forces. In demonstrations after the cleric's arrest, two Shia men were killed. It remains the Shia minority, who mainly live in the oil-rich Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, who are the focus of unrest in the kingdom. 10 people have died in Saudi Arabia since the beginning of the Arab uprisings, all of them Shia.

The Saud's grip on Saudi Arabia is not thought to be under threat, except in the event of any serious confrontation with Iran, when all bets would be off. Nevertheless, the Saudi strategy of paying off dissent may not be sustainable. A substantial fall in the price of oil would put pressure on the Saudi budget; a period of austerity in the kingdom would do nothing for political stability.

Saudi Arabia is in competition with Iran for influence over the region, and many members of the Saudi elite see events through this lens. Shia protesters east of the country are often seen as inspired by Iran and disloyal to the Saudi state, and the intervention of Gulf Cooperation Council (largely Saudi) troops in Bahrain was an indication that the Saudi authorities have no intention of letting Shia protests get out of control in either Saudi Arabia or in neighbouring Bahrain.

## **6.3 Yemen**

In 2012, Yemen has seen many developments, but whether the country has really changed is open to question. In January, the former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, left the country in completion of the deal he finally signed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in November 2011. The deal, brokered by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the US promised him full immunity from prosecution.

On 21 February, a presidential election was held. There was only one candidate, the former Vice President, Abd Rabbuh Mansour al-Hadi. Opposition groups had called for a boycott, and there were many incidents of violence on the day of the election. At least nine people including a child were killed and many polling stations were forced to close early.

Saleh formally handed over power to his deputy on 27 February. Control of the security forces, however, has not changed much. The Presidential Guard is in the hands of the former president's son, Ahmed Ali Saleh, and central security forces are led by General Yahya Saleh, nephew of the departed leader. These are some of the best-trained and equipped forces in Yemen, including US-trained anti-terrorism fighters who have turned out to fight democracy demonstrators and hostile tribal forces.<sup>50</sup> One important question is

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<sup>49</sup> "Bahraini opposition leader injured in crackdown", *Al-Akhbar*, 23 June 2012

<sup>50</sup> "Rebel general fights Yemen regime", *Wall Street Journal*, 2 June 2011

whether these forces will accept the command of the new President or whether he is their captive. The Presidential Guard, controlled by Saleh's son Ahmed, is very important. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, who has about 40,000 troops under his control along with heavy armoury, remains influential and was said to be Saudi Arabia's favourite for the transition from Saleh's rule. His future role remains unclear.

President al-Hadi has moved to remove some Saleh loyalists from the security apparatus, however, including in April 2012 General Muhammad Saleh al-Ahmar, Saleh's half brother and commander of the air force. In an illustration of the complex and chaotic nature of the country, air force personnel forced the closure of Sana'a airport in protest at the removal. The sacked general, meanwhile, refused to leave until he finally stood down at the end of the month.

The Yemeni Human Rights Ministry reported in March that 2,000 people had been killed in the year of demonstrations against the Saleh government, more than had been previously estimated.<sup>51</sup> Ex-President Saleh's immunity from prosecution for human rights abuses remains highly controversial both in Yemen and internationally. He retains the presidency of the General People's Congress Party, and some Yemenis fear that he is still pulling the strings. Change Square in Sana'a is still full of protesters' tents.

Yemen's other crises also remain unresolved. The rebellion of the Shiite al-Houthis in the north continues, though at a lower level than previously, while allegations that they are getting help from Iran and Hizbollah circulate. The Houthis control large areas in the north of the country but increasingly, they are being opposed by salafists, Sunni fundamentalists who view Shiism as heresy. An organisation associated with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Ansar al-Sharia, also mounts regular attacks against the Houthi Shiites. Some fear that the conflict in Yemen, like Syria's, is becoming increasingly sectarian.

In the south, meanwhile, there are two wars going on: one between the government and southern secessionists and the other between the government and AQAP. AQAP has taken control of a string of towns and military bases in the south, often for short periods before the government regains control. The suicide bombing at a military parade rehearsal in Sana'a on 21 May, killing nearly 100 soldiers, showed that AQAP aims to spread the battle from the south to the capital. After a major offensive in June, the government has largely retaken the towns of Zingibar and Louder in the province of Abyan from AQAP. Al-Qaeda responded in August with a suicide bombing at a funeral of the leader of a tribe that supported the Yemeni army, killing at least 45.

Iran is also reported to be helping southern separatists.<sup>52</sup> Representatives have travelled to Tehran and money and training have been offered to encourage southern Yemeni resistance. The US has an extensive programme of drone attacks in Yemen, aimed at AQAP fighters. The killing of AQAP leader Anwar al-Awlaki in September 2011 was the highest profile drone strike, but the campaign continues and in May it was reported that the US administration and the Yemeni government had agreed that the US should intensify its campaign in Yemen.<sup>53</sup>

Critics argue that Yemen is becoming the battlefield for a proxy war between more powerful states: the US, the Gulf monarchies (particularly Saudi Arabia) and Iran. The conflict has

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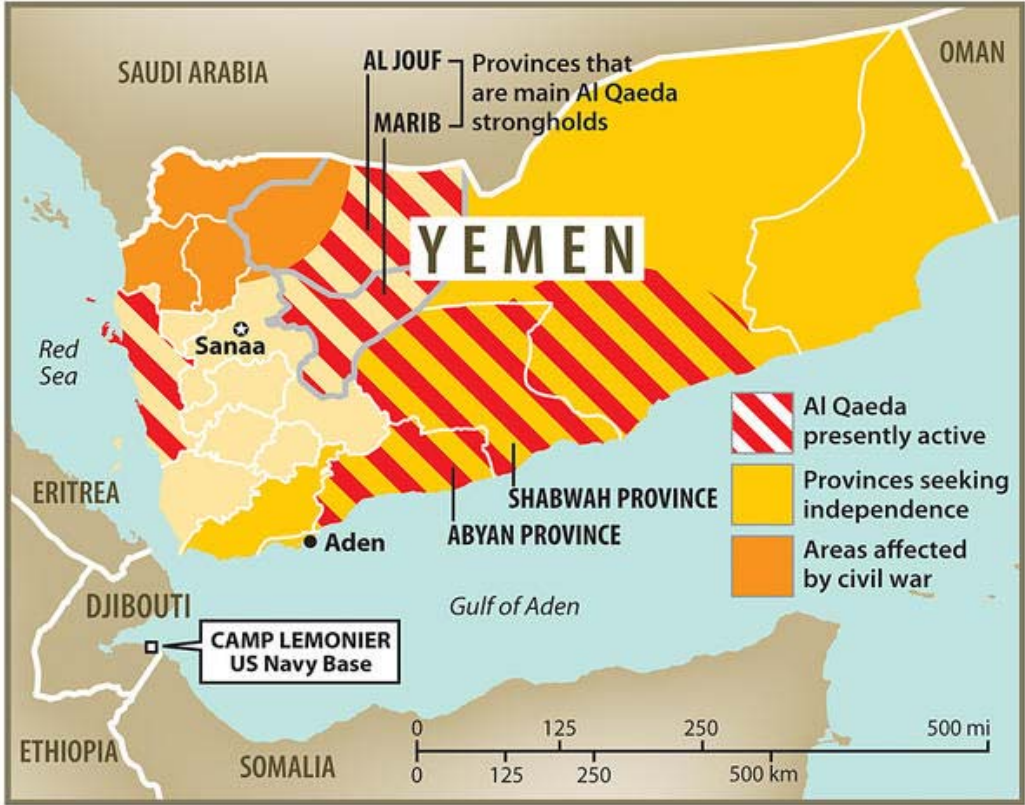
<sup>51</sup> Europa World online, Yemen, Contemporary political history

<sup>52</sup> "Iranian interference pushes young Yemenis towards violent resistance", *Guardian*, 11 May 2012

<sup>53</sup> "U.S. escalates clandestine war in Yemen", *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 2012,

certainly left much of Yemen in ruins and there is a looming food crisis. According to the World Food Programme, five million Yemenis are unable to buy or grow food for themselves. Another five million are at risk, as food prices increase, while half of Yemeni children are chronically malnourished and 10% of babies do not live to the age of five years.<sup>54</sup> The size of the crisis has almost doubled since 2009 and urgent action is required to prevent the humanitarian crisis getting out of control.

Observers have been making predictions of total collapse in Yemen for some time. At least the factions of the arked foces have not turned on each other in all-out war. Politically, Yemenis are used to conflict and upheaval; ousted president Saleh himself described governing Yemen as being like dancing on the heads of snakes. Despite the political settlement installing Hadi as president, the jockeying for power among the tribal, regional and sectarian factions will no doubt continue, partly fuelled by other countries. The effect on the civilian population is getting worse, however, as the World Food Programme figures illustrate. Yemen is in danger of a famine.



Source: *Christian Science Monitor*

## 7 Countries in the region less affected by the uprisings

### 7.1 Iraq

Having had more than its fair share of violence and unrest over the past decades, Iraq stood aside from the Arab uprisings. This is partly because Iraqis have an elected government rather than a decades-old dictatorship, but the good news does not go much further than that. Nouri al-Maliki is in his second term at the head of his Shiite coalition of parties. That

<sup>54</sup> World Food Programme, [Yemen: 10 million people facing hunger](#)

apparent stability has done little to strengthen Iraq's fractured politics and fragile democracy, however.

Inter-communal relations, far from being resolved by the election of a democratic government, appear to be getting worse. Al-Maliki is accused of centralising power in the presidency and violating power-sharing agreements with regional leaders. Opponents have been trying to bring al-Maliki down, without success, while al-Maliki has acted against rivals, in December 2011 issuing a warrant for the arrest of the Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi on terrorism charges. Sunni politicians accused al-Maliki of leading Iraq towards civil war. The next general election is due in 2014.

## **7.2 Jordan**

The Jordanian monarchy has survived the persistent anti-government demonstrations that have been held in the capital Amman over the last year. Promised reforms have been slow in coming and King Abdullah seems to have relied on the traditional tactic of changing his ministerial team, rather than genuinely attempting to open up the political system.

The constitution was amended in September 2011 introducing a constitutional court and an independent election commission. In June 2012, Jordan's Parliament passed a new electoral law paving the way for elections by the end of this year. However, the country is likely to retain its executive monarchy rather than becoming a constitutional monarchy. The slow pace of reforms is partly due to Jordan's permanently divided society: Jordanians of Palestinian origin slightly outnumber Jordanians from the East Bank and the Easterners are traditionally supporters of the monarchy, rejecting too much power for parliament, which they fear would lead ultimately to a Palestinian-dominated state.

The biggest crisis now in Jordan is the influx of Syrian refugees. The Jordanian authorities, always in a weak position with no oil and surrounded by militarily stronger states, have been at pains to make sure that the 140,000 Syrian refugees do not do anything to support the Free Syrian Army, especially supplying it with weapons. The refugees exacerbate Jordan's economic difficulties and mean that it is ever more reliant on transfers from outside. As Jordan gets closer to an alliance with the Gulf Cooperation Council alliance of monarchies, money from that source is increasingly important, but it may have a chilling effect on the reform process.

## **7.3 Israel and the Occupied Territories**

Israel's negotiations with the Palestinians have ground to a halt and some analysts say that the peace process started by the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the Oslo Accords of 1993 is effectively dead. With no prospect of a resolution, many worry that the present relative calm cannot last. The security cooperation between the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas and the Israeli state was intended to reduce Israeli security concerns and ease the way towards a Palestinian state. It has not turned out that way. Relative calm in Israel appears to have allowed Israelis to forget about the pressing problems faced by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories; domestic political pressure for a political settlement has not been high enough to bring Israeli politicians to take any bold steps towards a Palestinian state. It may also be the case that the improved economic performance of the West Bank has made a political settlement more rather than less difficult to achieve, because they make the occupation more bearable.



Recent hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners look like a symptom of rising tension and many argue that a third *intifada* (uprising) is now inevitable.<sup>55</sup> Others say that Palestinians have little appetite for that.

#### 7.4 Lebanon

In a sense, Lebanon had already experienced its uprising in 2005. After the assassination of former Sunni Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 22 others, massive demonstrations forced the Syrian government, which had largely controlled Lebanon, to withdraw its troops. The withdrawal, which at first appeared to free up Lebanon's democratic system, may have had the result of reducing the restraint on the Shia group Hizbollah, paving the way for the 2006 war between Hizbollah and Israel. Illustrating the complexity of politics in the region, it may also have boosted Iran's influence over Hizbollah at Syria's expense.

Since the Syrian withdrawal, Lebanon's fragile and complex political system has continued to function after a fashion and there has been no return to all-out war. The Lebanese people and its politicians are said to be reluctant to risk armed conflict after the suffering caused by the civil war of 1975-1990, and have pulled back from confrontation just enough to preserve some stability.

That may no longer be possible if the Syrian conflict spins out of control. Syria's confessional splits are mirrored in Lebanon, although the various sects are in different proportions in Syria's small neighbour. The more the Syrian conflict takes on a sectarian character, the more Lebanon too is likely to become the scene of fighting between the sects. As is often the case in the region, loyalty to states whose borders were drawn up after World War 1 are for some people less important than religious and tribal attachments.

### 8 Further reading

For background and earlier developments in the countries mentioned in this briefing, see the following papers:

- [The Arab Uprisings](#), November 2011
- [Bahrain: an update](#), May 2012
- [Egypt's presidential election 2012](#), 23 May 2012
- [The Syrian Crisis: Update May 2012](#), May 2012
- [Palestine update 2012](#), April 2012
- [Libya's General Assembly election 2012](#), July 2012
- [Morocco and the 2011 election](#), November 2011
- [Drone attacks and the killing of Anwar al-Awlaqi: legal issues](#), December 2011
- [Yemen on the brink of civil war?](#), June 2011

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<sup>55</sup> See Nathan Thrall, "[The Third Intifada Is Inevitable](#)", *New York Times*, 22 Jul 2012

More can be found at the following pages: <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/international-affairs/middle-east/> and <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/international-affairs/africa/>