



Middle East Mediterranean

An ELIAMEP Report

September-October 2012

5/12

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*Monitoring
the Middle East*

Middle East Mediterranean

Editorial Team

Evangelos Venetis, *Editor in Chief,*
The Middle East Research Project, ELIAMEP

Evangelos Tembos,
Research Associate, ELIAMEP

George Tzogopoulos, *Web Editor*
Bodossakis Post-Doctoral Fellow at ELIAMEP

Thanos Dokos, *Senior Advisor,*
Director-General, ELIAMEP

Editorial Office

Hellenic Foundation for European and foreign Policy - ELIAMEP
49, Vas. Sofias str., Athens, 10676, Greece
T.: (+30) 210 7257110
Email: mideast@eliamep.gr; venetis@eliamep.gr

Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) is an unbiased bimonthly report of the *ELIAMEP Middle East Research Project*, focusing largely on geopolitical and economic developments, debates as well as policies, affecting the future of the Middle East. Having a global outlook MEM hosts analyses, commentaries, interviews and news, conducting research in the fields of politics, economics and culture in the Middle East and adjacent areas, such as the Eastern Mediterranean.

NOTICE: The views expressed in the articles of the *Middle East Mediterranean* do not reflect the point of view of the Hellenic Institute for European and Foreign Policy and the Editorial Team.

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Analyses

Assad and the Civil War in Syria

Dr. Evangelos Venetis,
The Middle East Research Project - ELIAMEP

Attempting to unfold Bashar al-Assad's view about the ongoing crisis in Syria and his policy to restore peace, law and order amid intensive fighting and western pressure, calling him to step down.

If two years ago Bashar al-Assad was asked to describe the future of his country, he would have never imagined that Syria would have reached the ongoing strife and destruction. Likewise it is difficult to imagine how the country will look like in two years from now. Yet it is interesting, based on developments on the ground, to shed some light on how the current leader of Syria views the crisis and what he does in order to bring Syria back on track.

Assad's firm belief is that the civil war in his country stems, from the geopolitical significance of Syria in economic and security terms. This significance has prompted the intervention of Washington, Israel and Riyadh primarily in the political affairs of Syria. In the view of Damascus's administration the domestic political disaffection of a portion of the Sunni majority toward Assad's rule is undoubtedly chronic, as this was manifested also in the

rule of his father Hafez. Yet in order to boost the support of his followers and to weaken the resolve of the opposition, one of the pillars of Assad's communication policy is that the Sunni disaffection could have not turned to an armed resistance without the active support of foreign countries in terms of weaponry and manpower.

With his political image largely isolated abroad, Assad has not succumbed to the demands of his domestic and foreign political opponents. Instead, in order to alter the situation, he gives an ongoing battle in two fronts: the front of information-communication and the actual front on the ground. Both fronts are interconnected.

The first front is of crucial significance, for it forms the backbone of transmitting Assad's ideological campaign both to his domestic and foreign supporters. Assad does not view himself, and is

not, like Qaddafi. He is not isolated in the region and he enjoys the support of a considerable portion of Syria's population, largely the Allawites, the Christians and a part of the secular Sunnis. Syria's public opinion for Assad is not a black and white issue, as Western media have presented it so far, i.e. the People against the Dictator. Considerable public support to Damascus is one of the main reasons for the fact that the Syrian army has remained faithful to Assad so far.


For Damascus transmitting the message properly to his followers and enemies is a necessity in order to preserve the ranks militarily and politically and promote Assad's image to his allies. Also Assad knows that once his ranks and public support are secured, then he can easier negotiate with his allies and enemies. One of the key issues in Assad's rhetoric is the rivalry, not between Shiites and Sunnis or liberals and pro-dictatorial supporters, as promoted in the West, but the one between secularism and Islamism in Syria. Assad's communication policy aims to influence primarily those of his geopolitical adversaries, for instance Israel, which seems to be concerned about the late rise of Salafism in Syria.

So far Assad has been instrumental in turning the cards in the second actual front on the ground. Along with the support of

Tehran and Moscow, up until now he has neutralized the US and NATO efforts to create a buffer zone in the north by outlining the risks for Turkey regarding the issue of Kurdistan. Without Turkey actively in the game, Assad knows that the West cannot impose a no-fly zone in Syria or a part of it.

Now Assad's main aim is to diminish the influx of Muslim fighters sponsored by opponent regional Arab states. Assad knows that as long as western support for the Syrian opposition is not neutralized politically, for instance starting with a cease-fire deal, then the influx of weaponry and manpower to Syria will continue, restricting the prospects for an end to the civil war in the short-term. His hope is that, by displaying political and operational stamina, in the mid-term his foreign opponents will be convinced to change route and withdraw their support for the opposition.

Interestingly, despite the fact that too many Syrian have been killed so far, Assad is still optimistic that he can remain in power. This is based on the fact that the casualties are heavy on both sides. For Assad there is only one option: to keep walking in the path of preserving himself in power by promoting his image of the adamant protector of

Syria's territorial integrity. Assad believes that, if he steps down, then this will be the beginning of a long destabilization process for Syria and the region, due to the lack of any balance of power in the ranks of the opposition. No doubt, Assad has lived to fight another day in a country suffering a full-scale destruction of its infrastructures and economy. Indeed, every card is still on the table...

The Syrian Opposition: Who Are They?

Dr. Aref Alobeid

Expert in Middle Eastern Affairs

An analysis of who is who in the Syrian opposition and their outlook regarding the Syrian crisis.

The fact is that before March 15, 2011 there was no formal Syrian opposition because of fear and terror of the secret intelligences of Assad's regime. Moreover, the outbreak of the Syrian uprising caused the emergence of several political factions and parties against Assad. The Syrian National Council (SNC), the Free Syrian Army (FSA), The Coordinating Committee for Democratic Change, the National Alliance, the National Front, the Current Planning the Future of higher Syrian businessmen, the Movement of the Salafist and independent personalities, have been the main dissident factions until now. These newly created political parties may surpass 150 in number after the fall of the Assad regime. Also, the continuous rise in the creation of political parties causes constant changes to the political scene among the dissidents which proves that Syria passes from a single party to a multi party system after 49 years of Ba'th government.

The SNC, whose headquarters is located in Ankara, is considered as

the main political force but unfortunately it suffers from different positions of its members and the intervention of the regional and major powers in its internal affairs. As a result, it has been described as ineffective by the majority of dissidents. Furthermore, the SNC consists of the group "Muslim Brotherhood", leftist, communist, socialist, Marxist, secular factions, 11 Kurdish parties, independent members and Islamists Salafistes. Therefore, the SNC is trying to include all the minorities - communities (Muslims, Christians, Kurds, Alawites, Ismailis, Kurdish etc). In addition, the main economic resources from countries like Qatar, Libya, Saudi Arabia, USA and other European countries, which are allocated to the opposition are controlled by the SNC that determines to which direction they will go. What is more, the mild efforts to reorganize and reshuffle of the SNC have so far failed to represent all dissident factions in international organizations. Therefore the SNC has lost much of

its credibility among Syrian dissidents and in countries that support it. Apart of this, its institutional operation is weak democratically due to the fact that it is limited to a small group of people while the vast majority of members do not participate in the decision making process.

The establishment of the FSA, was characterized as a focal point in the Syrian crisis from soldiers who broke away from Assad's army and their number exceeds 20 000, a number that continues to grow. Besides this, the FSA follows the method of guerrilla warfare against the Assad's forces due to shortage of appropriate military equipment. Moreover, the relations between the FSA and the SNC could not be characterized as strong because of lack of trust between the two sides. The role of the FSA could be upgraded from Turkey if it found support from the Syrian regime to Kurdish PKK rebels in Turkey. But the main problem of the breakaway military is the lack of financial resources and weapons which limits the fighting capabilities of the army and gives an excuse for Islamist militants to cover this gap in the field of battle. Although the Islamists are fighting under the umbrella of the FSA, they are considered independent teams and classified as gifted in confronting the forces of Assad. However, in the last three

months there has been a reversal in the field of conflict because of sudden supply, under control, to the FSA with modern weapons by the major powers and this explains the collapse of several fighters of Assad. The fear of the rise of extremist Islamic militants against the militants of FSA was the cause of change in attitude of major powers in the issue of equipment.

It can be said that the "Movement of Muslim Brothers" which is supported mainly by Turkey is the main strength of the SNC because it controls over 50% of its members and this is due to the high number of Sunni Arabs in the Syrian society. Consequently, it is has been difficult for the "Muslim Brothers" to assume power in the post-Assad era for several reasons. First, the movement's members have no social relations and social cohesion with the majority of the Syrian people as had the similar movement in Egypt. Second, the Act 49, which allows security forces to execute without trial anyone found to belong to them, documented that there is no organized member of this organization in Syria. Third, bloodshed operations carried out by the military wing of the organization during the 80s left bad memories to the Syrian people as it murdered doctors, lawyers and bombings etc. Fourth, the variety of political forces that will emerge in the new era and

the culture of the Mediterranean Syrian people do not allow full control of the country from the "Muslim Brotherhood." Finally, the percentage of Sunni Arabs in Syria, which is the mainstay of the movement and approaching 58%, demonstrates the difficulty of concentrating an absolute majority due to the presence of other communities and the existence of some Sunnis that will not vote in favor of this organization. Although the establishment of the political party of Muslim brothers will be a fact, any future attempt to control power in the post-Assad era requires its cooperation with other political factions.

In conclusion, one of the features of the Syrian uprising is the

rise of the Salafist and this is due to the hundreds of thousands of Syrian workers in Arab Gulf countries and due to support of Saudi Arabia. The Syrian opposition is divided and unable so far to gain the full trust of the Syrian people and the appreciation of the great powers. Despite these, the majority of the opposition seeks to implement no fly zones but no military intervention as Libya and themselves want to overthrow Assad. Furthermore, the foundation of the revolutionary military councils per country gives nomination to the FSA against political forces that are overseas to control the country and are expected to play a crucial role after the end of the Assad regime.

Comments

The Devil You Know: The Kurdistan Issue and Syrian-Turkish Relations

Pantelis Touloumakos,
University of Athens, ELIAMEP

In the short term Ankara will probably contain Kurdish separatist activities but it is also expected that Turkey may encounter more serious threats in Kurdistan in the future.

The civil war in Syria poses one more serious source of Turkish anxiety; it might be possible to cause serious implications in one of Turkey's main internal problems: the Kurdish issue.

Before the Arab Spring uprisings, Turkish – Syrian relations were on good level; joint cabinet meetings were proof of a close political cooperation between Damascus and Ankara. When the Syrian demonstrations against the Assad government took place, the AKP government was supportive of Assad; however, privately, Turkish political pressures were put on Assad government, in order to introduce reforms. The reluctance of Assad to follow the Turkish suggestions, as well as his rapprochement with Iran, resulted in the reorientation of Turkish foreign policy. Ankara sided with the protesters, offering them openly her support. In November

2011, Erdoğan even asked publicly Assad to step down.

Syrian civil war is posing a security threat for the broader area of the Middle East, but for Turkey – as it has already been mentioned – is something more than this. As a consequence of the civil war, Assad's forces withdrew from many areas of Northern Syria, vastly inhabited by Kurdish populations. Except for some Kurds sided with the Free Syrian Army, most Kurdish organizations are seeking for an autonomous Kurdish region – and this is a scenario closely related with the outcome of the Syrian civil war. One of the main Turkish concerns is that such a potential will inevitably strengthen Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) activities inside Turkey; besides, it will further enhance the demands of Turkish Kurds.

Adopting a rather realistic approach towards this issue, the Turkish government rejected Kurdish autonomy under Assad; however, Ankara seems willing to accept this autonomy, as long as it is a product of a new constitution, approved by the Syrian people. At the same time, Turkey is trying to control Kurdish ambitions through the Syrian National Council (SNC), representing the Syrian opposition, and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq (KRG). The SNC was established in and supported by Turkey; so far, it has rejected Kurdish demands to offer written guarantees towards a Kurdish autonomy. Also, KRG is trying to expand its own influence over Syrian Kurds; in 2008, for example, Barzani appointed Abdulhakim Bashar as the new head of the Syrian Kurdish National Council.

But there is still a long way for Turkey to go, in order to achieve what she is looking for. Contrary to Turkish ambitions, the Kurdish Party of Unity and Democracy in Syria (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat – PYD) – an organization closely affiliated to PKK – has expanded its power over Northern Syria, at the expense of pro – Turkish elements. Moreover, PYD has openly declared its intention towards a Kurdish self – determination. As long as the civil war goes on in Syria, it should be expected that the PYD power will be expanding, mainly because the large

majority of Kurdish peoples of Syria were not satisfied with the Assad regime. On the other hand, the containment of PKK activities in Syria sets as a prerequisite a solid political regime – which is very difficult to achieve for the time being.

The option of a Turkish military intervention in Syria is not a very satisfying one for Turkey – even if Ankara considers it as a serious potential. Turkish public opinion is against such an action; furthermore, NATO has already made it clear that it would support Turkey in case of a Syrian attack, but it won't back up Turkey in case of a unilateral Turkish military action against Syria. Last but not least, a Turkish military intervention in Syria will probably cause a serious enhancement of PKK activities – which is one of the worst Turkish nightmares.

The foundation of KRG in Iraq, as well as Kurdish activities in Turkey and particularly in Syria, mean that Kurds will sooner or later claim for themselves a more active role in the Middle East. The inability of Ankara to effectively control what happens in Syria, as well as its failure to solve her own Kurdish problem, prove that this is not the right path to go. In the short term, the containment of Kurdish activities might be successful, but this also means that Turkey might be faced with much more serious threats in the future.

The Eastern Mediterranean Security System in a Transition Phase

Dr. Thanos Dokos

Director-General, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy - ELIAMEP

The EU declining role in the region could change if EU leaders adopt a more comprehensive policy vis-à-vis the Arab world, aiming to weaken the role of radical Islamic groups in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. (A longer version of this article has been published by Istituto Affari Internazionali in the series of Op-Meds Papers (October 2012).

Almost two years after the beginning of the Arab revolts, the key words describing the regional security environment in the Mediterranean and the Middle East are fluidity, instability and unpredictability. There has been regime change in several countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya –in the latter case also as a result of a NATO operation), violent suppression of the protests in Bahrain, continuing instability in Yemen and civil war in Syria. The general feeling is that this process of protest and demand for regime change is extremely likely to continue, although predicting the exact form it will take in each Arab country, as well as the final result is all but impossible. It should also be taken for granted that the lengthy road to more representative government will not be a smooth one for most countries in the region and there may be important setbacks along the way.

The major western concern has been the possibility that extremist Islamic, anti-western political parties might rise to power in some countries, especially Egypt, long perceived as a pivotal country for regional stability. While the concern is a valid one, in view of the popular support for such groups (although each country constitutes a different case) and of the potential implications should some of these countries adopt a radically different foreign policy vis-à-vis the West and/or Israel, such a change hasn't taken place yet. The early days in power of Mr. Morsi, a politician coming from the Muslim Brotherhood, as president of Egypt have not caused any serious concern along the lines described above, although it is, of course too early to reach any definite conclusions.

The Syrian crisis is another current source of serious concern for all neighboring countries, as well as

the international community in general. In addition to the humanitarian dimension, including the increasing number of refugees, the stakes are high regarding the day after the (eventual) regime change. Iran and Russia (for different reasons) would like to prevent such a development, or at least have a significant say in the post-Assad period, several Arab countries are supporting various groups among the opposition, Turkey has openly sided with the opposition and has been engaged into (minor) skirmishes with the Syrian military, and the Western countries, having no appetite for a (Libya-type) military intervention, have limited their role in the application of economic sanctions against the Assad regime. The outcome of the Syrian crisis could have an important effect on regional security dynamics as the so-called “HISH Alliance” may lose two of its members (Syria and Hamas).

Mainly as a result of the Syrian crisis, but also because of its failure to achieve any substantial improvement in relations with Armenia, Greece, Cyprus and Iran, the Turkish foreign policy doctrine of “zero problems with neighbours” is under review. The resumption of PKK military action, as well as developments regarding the Kurdish question in Syria, tensions with Russia over the Syrian crisis, and

with Iran over both Syria and the deployment of a NATO early warning radar have complicated things further for Turkey.

Dealing with Iran’s nuclear programme is undoubtedly the most critical strategic question in the proliferation field and a very important issue on today’s international security agenda. The regional security problem is in reality not limited to the nuclear issue, but rather this is perceived to be the case by Western countries, and probably by some of Iran’s neighbours, as being the most pressing security concern. The dominant view in Athens is that the military action must be viewed as a component of a comprehensive strategy rather than a stand-alone option for dealing with Iran’s nuclear programme (Leaving moral arguments aside, there is concern that under the current circumstances an Israeli attack would be of limited effectiveness in destroying all the intended targets, counter-productive in the long-term in stopping the Iranian nuclear programme and very costly because of Iran’s asymmetric response). Furthermore, sanctions –which, in their latest form, appear to be “biting”- should continue to be used as a tool of pressure against Iran, but the critical component of the West’s strategy should be engagement.

In addition to the traditional sources of hydrocarbons in the wider

region, a new one has appeared. The discovery of significant natural gas deposits in the exclusive economic zones of Israel and Cyprus and the alleged deposits of the Levant Basin may provide an additional energy source outside the former Soviet space and the Middle East proper. The evolving cooperation between Israel and Cyprus, with Greece as a potential third partner, is a new element in regional politics in the Eastern Mediterranean and a possible source of friction with Turkey.

Greece is a potentially important regional player who has in essence been absent from regional developments in the Eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, If Greece remains weakened for a long time, there may be negative repercussions for regional stability in Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the EU's and NATO's ability to play a substantial role in those regions.

But the major implication of the evolving financial crisis has been the EU, which has been strategically weakened. Without underestimating Greece's own responsibilities, at the global level it was the EU's inability to successfully manage the crisis that has been perceived by competitors and friends alike as a signal of weakness and has hurt the image of the Union as an important strategic

actor. Completely ignoring the geopolitical consequences of the Greek crisis is yet another symptom of the European foreign policy malaise. There is increasing concern that Europe is sliding into strategic insignificance, losing its global role and influence as it is becoming more and more introvert as a result of its own economic and political crisis.

In view of the declining influence and appeal of the EU's soft power and the large scale changes in much of the Arab world, the EU has no other option but to develop a comprehensive policy vis-à-vis the Arab world, employing all existing instruments to re-define its relationship and strengthen its role in the Middle East. In this context, the UfM might prove quite useful, despite its early problems, but of course much more needs to be done. NATO should also re-think its possible role in the emerging security environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. By developing country specific strategies, the Western objective should be to prevent, if possible, a takeover by radical Islamic groups (or to mitigate the consequences) and the establishment of moderate regimes in the Eastern Mediterranean, who would be willing to work together with the transatlantic partners.

The Eastern Mediterranean Security System in a Transition Phase

Dr. Thanos Maroukis

Marie Curie Fellow: University of Bath, UK – Research Associate, ELIAMEP

Due to the severity of the ongoing Syrian Crisis, EU policymakers view as extremely significant the EU negotiations with Turkey on the readmission of Third Country Nationals, entering illegally the Greek borders from its territory as a means to address security and the humanitarian crisis in the EU South-East border.

Irregular migration and asylum seeking waves have been exercising a considerable pressure at the Greek-Turkish borders since 2007. Empirical research and non-governmental organisations' reports (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis 2012, GCR 2009, Human Rights Watch 2008, Pro Asyl 2007) have recorded allegations of push back incidents towards irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the period before 2010. Greece has also been heavily criticised on the management of irregular migrant inflows at the Evros land border region. International stakeholders such as UNHCR, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, NGOs such as Human Rights Watch (2011), Medecins Sans Frontieres (2010),

Pro Asyl and other domestic NGOs have all highlighted the insufficient reception processes and facilities and inhuman conditions in detention facilities at the bordering with Turkey Region of Evros in Greece (FRA 2011). The landmark ruling by the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights on the case of *M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece* (Application No. 30696/09) in January 2011 provided an acknowledgment of the conditions that irregular migrants and refugees often suffer when entering Greece.

In response to this humanitarian crisis, Greece has prepared a national action plan for the management of irregular migrant flows at the Greek Borders that culminated in law 3907/2011 and Presidential Decree 114/2010. Being penalised with longer detention if they do apply for asylum after their

first days in the country remains one of the reasons why most immigrants crossing the border do not apply for asylum in Greece, despite the Presidential Decree 114 of 22nd of November 2010 stipulating that the detention of asylum seekers is only exceptionally permissible when there are no alternatives (article 13, para. 2 & 4, PD114/2010)¹. However, there has been a small increase in asylum applications registered in the land border regions of Orestiada and Alexandroupoli in 2011 due to GCR legal missions and the placement of 2 UNHCR correspondents in the area since 2010 who monitor the first reception process and offer capacity building assistance to the Greek Police towards the forthcoming implementation of the asylum law 3907/2011.

The advent of Syrian potential asylum seekers in this border management context adds to the challenges that the Greek authorities already face. Indeed, a substantial increase of Syrians has been recorded in 2012 according to Greek Police and Coastguard apprehension data (see Table below).

The EU negotiations with Turkey on the readmission of Third Country Nationals who enter illegally the Greek borders from its territory are regarded of paramount importance by many EU

policymakers in dealing with the security and humanitarian crisis at the EU's southeastern border. During the period 2006-2010, Greece had presented 3,431 readmission requests to Turkey concerning 62,816 people. Of those 7,359 were accepted for readmissions by Turkish authorities, but only 1,281 were effectively re-admitted to Turkey (Triandafyllidou & Maroukis 2012). However, even if Turkey comes into an agreement with the EU over the issue of readmission, implementation is not a given. One has to look into the Turkish political economy in order to understand its capacity and eagerness or reluctance in implementing successfully a readmission agreement and tackling irregular migration and asylum seeking flows.

A key variable behind Turkey's economic and political (in)stability in the coming years, and therefore its record in readmissions and humanitarian rights, is the way Turkey addresses its developmental and redistributive challenges. The highly fragmented and hierarchical corporatist social security system in Turkey providing health and pension benefits only to formally employed individuals coexists with a labour market structure where self-employment, unpaid family labour and informal employment practices are very important (Buğra and

¹ FRA 2011 and Human Rights Watch 2011

Keyder 2006). Part of Turkey's informal economic activities though is migrant smuggling. Significant marginalised segments of Turkish society and marginalised regions (especially in the South-East) have been earning a living from this illegal activity (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis 2012, Danis 2006, Icduygu 2004), alleviating thus the pressure from the redistributive inequalities (often translating into political crises, e.g. the Kurdish issue) that the Turkish political economy faces.

Turkey's commitment to a viable accord with the EU on the readmission of the growing number of illegally entering migrants and refugees is interconnected to the way it will take on domestic developmental and redistributive challenges and thus counterbalance the limitations of the existing model of externally driven economic growth, based on significant inflows of foreign capital and a powerful external anchor in the form of EU membership, as they are exposed by the recent global financial crisis.

*Table: Main apprehended nationalities for irregular entry and stay in Greece (2011 & 8months 2012)

Country of origin	2011	Jan-Aug 2012
Afghanistan	28,528	13,977
Pakistan	19,975	8,784
Albania	11,733	7,123
Bangladesh	5,416	6,718
Syria	1,522	6,210
Algeria	5,398	4,003
Morocco	3,405	1,906

Source: Greek police data available at www.astynomia.gr

Monitoring the Middle East

Afghanistan

Taliban leaders may be candidates for Afghan Presidential Elections (31, Oct. 2012)

Fazil Ahmad Manawi, Head of the Afghan Independent Election Commission made the remark, stating, “We are even prepared to pave the ground for the armed opposition, i.e. the Taliban or Hezb-e Islami, to participate in the elections either as voters or candidates without discrimination.”

Bahrain

Manama Bans Demonstrations and Public Gatherings (30 Oct., 2012)

Bahraini Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid b. Abdullah stated that “All rallies and gatherings have been suspended and no public activity will be allowed until security and stability are achieved.”

Comment: From the Sunnite-Shiite struggle point of view, the Bahrain Crisis is the equivalent of the Syrian Crisis in the Persian Gulf. Both are ongoing.

Cyprus

Russia approves loan to Cyprus (4 Sept., 2012)

Russia has politically approved a 5-million Euro financial lifeline to Cyprus, which sought a bailout from its EU partners in June. The amount would be disbursed by Russia to Cyprus in consultation with the International Monetary Fund.

Comment: Could Russia have an actual political gain from this loan to Cyprus? If so, then what?

Egypt

Egypt Prosecutor General defies Mursi's order (11 Oct., 2012)

Abdel Meguid Mahmud, Egypt's prosecutor General said he will not step down, defying President Muhammad Mursi's order. Mursi's move came a day after a court acquitted 24 former loyalists to Hosni Mubarak for killing demonstrations in the Tahrir Square.

Comment: Mahmud's reaction reveals that the army is still in charge in Egypt.

Greece

Greek President Papoulias visits Egypt (18 Oct., 2012)

Greek President Carolos Papoulias concluded a three day (18-20/10) visit to Egypt accompanied by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense as well as other senior officials. Talks focused on issues of common interest, such as the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).

Pro-Gaza Greek activist censures Israel over interception of aid ship (24 Oct., 2012)

The Greek lawmaker Vangelis Diamantopoulos who was aboard the Finnish-flagged Estelle ship censured Tel Aviv's military interception of a humanitarian aid ship, attempting to break the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Iran

Iran and Egypt agree to resume commercial ties (20 Oct., 2012)

The two countries have agreed to resume their commercial relations after more than three decades. On 13 October an Egyptian business delegation visited Iran, holding a meeting at the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade.

Ahmadinejad in Azerbaijan for the ECO Summit (15 Oct., 2012)

The Iranian president arrived in Baku to participate in the 12th Economic Cooperation Organization Summit. ECO was established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey to promote relations in every field. In 1992 ECO welcomed the new memberships of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Iraq

Iraq stop Turkey's Saudi-bound lacking visa buses (18, Oct., 2012)

According to Ali al-Mussawi, advisor to the Prime Minister, Iraq refused to allow 128 Turkish buses to cross into Saudi Arabia because they did not hold visas issued by Baghdad. The buses were stopped inside Iraq, after crossing the Kurdistan Regional Government territory. The Turks held visas issued by KRG, not the central government.

Comment: Another incident added to the already tense relations between Ankara and Baghdad with regard to the issue of Kurdistan and Tariq al-Hashemi.

Kuwait

Fitch: Kuwait's AA rating under threat due to public unrest (30 Oct., 2012)

According to the ratings agency Fitch, a surge in public unrest and radicalization of popular protest in Kuwait may threaten the state's solid sovereign rating.

Public Unrest in Kuwait: 100 protesters wounded (25 Oct., 2012)

Major popular unrest broke out in Kuwait after a decision of the Amir of Kuwait to amend the electoral constituency law ahead of the December elections. 100 protesters were hurt in weekend clashes with police, defending the “universal right” to freedom of assembly. Riot police used rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades, beating hundreds of demonstrators to break up the protest.

Comment: Kuwait is a key state in the Sunnite-Shiite struggle. If the dsituation gets out of control, then it could become a new Bahrain.

Lebanon

Fierce fighting between rival groups in Tripoli (30 Oct., 2012)

The conflict between two Lebanese rival groups of pro-Assad Jabbal Mohsen and pro-Saudi Bab al-Tabbaneh raged on unabated in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli.

Comment: Lebanon could become an additional battleground if the Syrian civil war goes beyond its borders.

Libya

Bani Walid not under state control (10 Oct., 2012)

According to Libyan Defense Minister Osama al-Jueili, Libyan army has no control over the northwestern city of Bani Walid, the last bastion for pro-Gaddafi supporters. Gunmen held a checkpoint to the city, 170 km southeast of Bani Walid. 30.000 people were displaced to tarhuna and 10.000 to Tripoli.

Comment: It will take years before Libya is stabilized.

Palestine - Israel

Emir of Qatar visits Gaza Strip (24 Oct., 2012)

Qatari Emir Hamad b. Khalifa al-Thani arrived in Gaza on 23 Oct. and became the first head of state to visit the strip since Hamas took power in the territory five years ago. Calling Palestinians to unite and resist against discord, al-Thani pledged 400 millions dollars for reconstruction projects, such as housing complexes and rehabilitating roads in the area.

Israel intercepts Estelle humanitarian aid ship (21 Oct., 2012)

30 nautical miles off the Gaza coast the Israeli navy intercepted the Finish-flagged ship “Estelle” of pro-Palestinian activists, aiming to break the blockaded Gaza Strip.

Comment: Striking contradictions: apparently, it is easier for the Emir of Qatar to visit Gaza than the EU MPs...

Qatar

Qatar plays major role in global economy (27, Oct., 2012)

Muhammad b. Abdallah al-Rumaihi, the Qatari Ambassador to the US, highlighted the importance of Qatar in supporting other economies, especially those with limited energy resources as he spoke at the National Council on US-Arab Relations.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia oil revenues to exceed SR 1 trillion mark (24 Oct., 2012)

Despite the ongoing global economic gloom, the Saudi economy walks on a solid growth path, expecting to register this year on of the highest growth rates among G20 countries. This is due to four factors: the hydrocarbon sector, the expansionary fiscal policy with a positive impact on the non-oil sector, solid domestic consumption and supportive bank lending to the private sector.

Somalia

New Somali president sworn into office (16 Sept., 2012)

Somalia's new President Hassan Sheykh Muhammad has been sworn into office, just four days after two bombs hit a hotel housing the newly elected president.

Al-Shabab threatens attack on UK (23 Oct., 2012)

The Somali Islamic group has warned that it will launch its worst-ever attack on Britain due to Britain's "war against Islam" and extradition of Muslim cleric Abu hamza al-Masri to the United States.

Syria

Russia: West call for Assad departure daydreaming (31 Oct., 2012)

Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov stated that the Western powers's call for the ouster of the Syrian President Bahsar al-Assad is lie daydreaming and will only lead to more bloodshed in the Syria.

Comment: Whether sarcastic or realistic or both, Russia remains firm...

Tunisia

Tunisia extends state of emergency (31 Oct., 2012)

President Moncef Marzouki decided to extend the state of emergency by three months until January 2013.

Salafi leader declares war Tunisia's ruling party (31 Oct., 2012)

Nassreddin Aloui declared war on Ennahda Party, stating that the country's rulers and their allies want elections held on the "ruins and the bodies of the Salafist movement."

Turkey

US deploys troops to Turkey (25 Oct., 2012)

According to the commanding general of the US Army Europe (USAREUR), the Pentagon has recently sent a number of American soldiers to Turkey to assist Ankara in handling the spillover of the Syrian crisis.

Gas pipeline explosion injures 28 Turkish soldiers (19 Oct., 2012)

At least 29 Turkish soldiers were injured after suspected members of the Kurdistan Workers's Party (PKK) blew up a section of a pipeline carrying gas from Iran to Turkey near the Eleskirt town in the Agri province.


United Arab Emirates

UAE non-oil growth subdued at 3-4% (23 August, 2012)

According to the National Bank of Kuwait weekly report on GCC economies, the UAE non-oil growth is expected to continue at a below trend pace of 3-4% for the next two years. The economy will be held back by concerns over the restructuring and refinancing of Dubai Inc. debt, and ongoing fiscal consolidation. Due to its strong trade and transport links, the UAE is also more exposed than its neighbors to any global economic turmoil. Sanctions against Iranian economy have also contributed considerably to the UAE exposure.

Yemen

Yemeni protesters demand Saleh prosecution (19 Sept., 2012)

Tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets in the Yemeni capital of San'a to demand the prosecution of ousted dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh and his inner circle members. 



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