



Turmoil in the Middle East

Standard Note: SN/IA/5902

Last updated: 28 March 2011

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Section International Affairs and Defence Section

This note looks at the instability in the Middle East and North Africa since the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings.



Source: worldmap.org

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1 Tunisia and Egypt

On 14 January Tunisia's long-serving president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, boarded a plane for Saudi Arabia. He believed that his departure was temporary, but Tunisia will not return to life under Ben Ali, nor will any of the autocratically-ruled countries of North Africa and the Middle East be the same after the uprisings of 2011.

Following the death of a fruit seller, Mohammed Bouazizi, who had set himself on fire in protest at police harassment, a series of demonstrations and strikes led the military to end its support for Ben Ali and he and his family were forced to leave.

The self-immolation of the Tunisian Mohammed Bouazizi struck a chord with people across the region. On 12 January, a man set himself alight in Algeria. Two other instances of attempted self-immolation were reported in Algeria subsequently, although none of the individuals died. On 17 January, another case was reported in Cairo, Egypt. Another man covered himself with petrol, also on 17 January, in Nouakchott, capital of Mauritania. By the 23 January, at least five Egyptians are reported to have burned themselves to death.¹

On 25 January, Egypt followed Tunisia into a series of demonstrations, with mounting industrial unrest. After 18 days of the occupation of Cairo's central Tahrir Square, despite attacks on the anti-government demonstration by the police and by regime supporters, the military decided to end its support for Hosni Mubarak and the former Air Chief Marshal, who had ruled Egypt for 29 years.

Egypt has the Arab world's biggest population and is a traditional leader of Arab culture. The years of political stagnation under the Mubarak regime eroded this leadership, as all opposition to his rule, Islamists, liberal or socialist, was repressed and dialogue silenced. Only Mubarak's success in staying in power for so long was an example to the Arab world,

¹ "Flames of fury spread", *Sunday Times*, 23 January 2011

where dictators and monarchs have for a long time introduced cosmetic democratic reforms and played on the west's fears of Islamism and illegal immigration to stay in control.

There was a widespread impression that Middle Eastern and North African populations were permanently cowed into passivity by the effective repression of their rulers: this was why the Arab world had missed out on the wave of democratisation that had swept Europe, Asia, Latin America and even Africa south of the Sahara since the end of the Cold War. It was Egypt that swept away this notion for good.²

2 Algeria

2.1 Background

Algeria has a history of conflict like no other country in North Africa. Its independence was won after a bitter war with France, the former colonial power. A one party state was created after independence, and it was not until 1991 that multi-party elections were announced. The country was plunged into turmoil; a state of emergency was imposed. The Islamist party threatened to start a *jihad*, or holy war, if the state of emergency was not lifted and hundreds of its representatives were arrested. The state of emergency was lifted and the first round of the election was held at the end of 1991, with the Front Islamique de Salut (Islamic Salvation Front, FIS) winning the biggest share of the seats. The second round of the election, to be held in January 1992, was cancelled, the People's Assembly was dissolved and the state of emergency was re-imposed.

A vicious civil war ensued between Islamists and government forces in which perhaps 200,000 were killed. The Islamic opposition split into various groups. Many atrocities were committed, some of which were suspected to be the clandestine work of government forces trying to turn the public against the Islamists. The civil war ended with the arrival of the present leader, Bouteflika, who negotiated a "Civil Concord" after his election in 1999, and some of the Islamist groups disbanded.

Further discord broke out over the Algerian government's policy of "Arabisation" which, for the residents on the Kabuyilia region, meant exclusion of the Berber culture from the character of Algeria. As many as 80 people may have died in clashes with the security forces in 2001. In 2002, the government offered significant concessions including the recognition of the Berber language and the conflict was largely resolved.

In the 2007, a new threat to stability emerged, as a group that had participated in the Islamic uprising of the 1990s rebranded itself as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). With the Algerian public disillusioned with Islamic militancy after the civil war, the group gained new publicity and possibly new recruits by allying itself to Osama bin Laden's global jihadists. Security analysts were becoming increasingly alarmed about the ease with which the violent groups could operate in the Sahara and, to its south, the Sahel, where no government has a firm control and where kidnapping, traditional smuggling and drug-running offer money-making opportunities for terrorists. Violence peaked in 2008, as 19 people were reportedly killed and many more were injured in a series of bomb attacks to the east of Algiers between

² For more information on Tunisia and Egypt, see the Library Standard Notes [Uprising in Tunisia](#), 3 March 2011 and [Uprising in Egypt](#), 14 February 2011

4 and 8 June. 43 died in a bomb attack on a police academy in August of that year. The attacks were thought to be the work of AQIM.³

Abdelaziz Bouteflika is considered by analysts to be a figurehead for what is probably close to a military junta wielding real power in the country. The government's powerful apparatus of repression, together with the fear of returning to recent violence, and "bribes" handed out to the population (civil service salaries are reported to have risen by 34% recently),⁴ seem so far to have prevented significant unrest.

Mr Bouteflika has increased subsidies on commodities such as milk and wheat and said that the government should promote job creation and that state-controlled television and radio should give airtime to his political opponents.⁵

The opposition is divided on tactics, with activists from the political world keen to move quickly to capitalise on the regional unrest, and activists from civil society groups wanting more time to develop a full platform of demands.⁶

2.2 Unrest in 2011

"They can't kill us because we are already dead" was the comment of one man who had tried to join protests in Algiers, the capital of Algeria on 12 February.⁷ The march called for the end of President Bouteflika's 12-year rule, which has been characterised by controversial elections, police brutality and accusations of corruption, and the lifting of constitutional presidential term limit to allow the 72-year old Bouteflika to remain in office for a third term.

Unrest had been mounting in Algeria before the events in Tunisia and Egypt. In early January, five days of riots over rising food prices resulted in the deaths of five people.

Several people then attempted to copy the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, whose death had sparked the Tunisian crisis. On 7 February seven unemployed men stabbed themselves in a group suicide attempt. Skirmishes were reported in February between the police and protesters in many Algerian cities. On 12 February a small demonstration was dispersed by the police. On 20 February, the police stopped a group of about 500 demonstrators marching to the centre of the capital.

On 24 February the government announced the lifting of the state of emergency. The lifting of the emergency law meant that demonstrations were now permitted except in the capital Algiers.⁸

On 27 February, a man burned himself to death after a bureaucratic problem with his identity card,⁹ but further widespread unrest did not develop in early March.

2.3 Algeria basic information

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria lies in North Africa. In 1963, having gained independence from French administration, Algeria was constituted as a

³ Material in this section based on Algeria, in *Europa World online*. London, Routledge. House of Commons. [Retrieved 15 February 2011]

⁴ "Amid a Sea Of Upheaval, Algeria Is Still", *New York Times*, 19 February 2011

⁵ "Arab world: Spirit of protest spreads to Yemen, Algeria and Syria", *Guardian*, 4 February 2011

⁶ "La révolution peut-elle s'exporter en Algérie et au Maroc ?", *Le Monde*, 1 March 2011

⁷ "Algerian Riot Police Break Up Protest", *New York Times*, 13 February 2011

⁸ "La révolution peut-elle s'exporter en Algérie et au Maroc ?", *Le Monde*, 1 March 2011

⁹ "Algérie : nouvelle mort après immolation", *Le Monde*, 28 February 2011

presidential regime with the Front de Libération Nationale as sole party. From 1989 the formation of competing political associations was permitted. The cancellation, in 1992, of the second round of voting in Algeria's first multi-party legislative elections precipitated a protracted civil conflict between the forces of the state and the Islamist opposition. In ongoing talks with the Government Berber activists in the north-eastern region of Kabylia are seeking official recognition of their language and increased investment from the state. Algeria's capital is Algiers. Arabic is the official language.

Area and Population

Area: 2,381,741 sq km

Population (mid-2008): 34,373,426

Population density (mid-2008): 14.4 per sq km

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2008): 72.4 (males 71.0; females 73.9)

Finance

GDP in current prices (2008): US \$166,545m. (\$4,845 per head)

Real GDP growth (2008): 3.0%

Inflation (annual average, 2008): 4.4%

Currency: dinar

Government and Politics

Head of State: President Abdelaziz Bouteflika

Head of Government: Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia

Last election: Presidential, 9 April 2009

Next election: Legislative, due 2012¹⁰

3 Bahrain

Though Bahrain is a traditional Gulf monarchy, its population is majority Shia, by a narrow margin, while its ruling family, the al-Khalifas, is Sunni Muslim. Many of the Shia majority are of Persian (Iranian) descent, and this has been a factor in the chronic distrust and disunity that affects the country. Plots to overthrow the government have been uncovered, allegedly involving Iran. There have been many political disturbances over the years calling for more democracy and the re-opening of the National Assembly, which had only operated for three years, from 1972 to 1975. Much of the unrest has been in Shia areas of the country, which are generally impoverished compared with Sunni areas.

The new Sheikh Hamad ascended the throne in 1999, on the death of his father. He initiated a limited programme of reforms, including the announcement of municipal elections for 2001. Also in 2001, the National Action Charter Elections for the new Council of Representatives were held in 2002 and 2006. The elections were notably genuine by regional standards: women were allowed to vote and stand for election.

¹⁰ Algeria, in *Europa World online*. London, Routledge. House of Commons [Retrieved 15 February 2011]

In 2006, after a high turnout of 73%, the Gulf States' first women parliamentarian was elected: Latifa al-Qouood. At the same election, the Sunni minority gained a majority of the seats in the Council of Representatives. Later in the year, the King appointed a new Consultative Council (which has much the same powers as the Council of Representatives) which contained 10 women and only religious figures. The small nation is also known for being very liberal in comparison with its neighbour Saudi Arabia, and as a playground for Saudis, who can drive over a causeway to drink alcohol in Bahrain's nightclubs and bars.

Despite the political opening, allegations of political detentions, particularly of Shiites, continued. The position of immigrant workers has also been heavily criticised by human rights organisations,¹¹ as has the treatment of human rights campaigners. The Council of Representatives however has proved itself to be independent-minded and this has led to friction with the monarchy.¹² Nevertheless, the monarchy retains the real power in the country, with the head of the armed forces and nearly all of the Cabinet being members of the royal family. The Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, has been in power since the inception of the state in 1971.

Bahrain is a particularly valued partner of the west. It houses the Persian Gulf base for the United States Navy's Fifth Fleet and is at one with the US and its allies in wanting to limit the influence of Iran in the region. The British navy also bases a few minesweepers at Bahrain, along with support facilities for the ships.¹³ A *Wikileaks* cable revealed that King Hamad had pressed the US to bomb Iranian nuclear facilities.

As well as its close military relationship with the west, Bahrain matters because of its Shia majority. The Sunni elite worries about losing control of the country to the Shia majority, which it suspects of being more loyal to Iran than to Bahrain (although this suggestion is to an extent part of an exercise in keeping western support for the Sunni regime). Saudi Arabia has majority-Shia areas along its east coast, the main oil-producing region, and there has been unrest in these areas. If the Sunni establishment in Bahrain were to fall, Shia uprisings in the east of Saudi Arabia might be encouraged.

3.1 Increasing repression

In 2008 and 2009, many arrests were made, particularly in Shiite areas, with those detained of various plots against the government. Clashes between Shia demonstrators and the police proliferated. Bahraini authorities responded by clamping down on opposition activity over the past year. Hundreds of people were arrested during 2010 after a series of riots, 23 of them opposition activists. They were held incommunicado and then charged with organising a terrorist group and trying to overthrow the state. It has been alleged that some were tortured.¹⁴

The government also tightened restrictions on publications of opposition groups and on freedom of association.

The legislative election of 23 and 30 October was controversial. Some opposition groups boycotted the election, but al-Wifaq, the main Shia party, increased its representation to 18

¹¹ See for example, *Slow Reform: Protection of Migrant Domestic Workers in Asia and the Middle East*, Human Rights Watch, April 27, 2010

¹² This section largely based on "Bahrain", in *Europa World online*. London, Routledge. House of Commons. [Retrieved 15 February 2011]

¹³ Royal Navy web page [Forward Support Unit Bahrain](#) [accessed 17 February 2011]

¹⁴ [Crackdown in Bahrain](#), Amnesty International, February 2011

seats out of the total of 40 in the Council of Representatives. There were complaints of misconduct during the election, and many commentators worried that the liberalisation programme introduced by King Hamad in 2001 was effectively finished, as sectarian divisions increased.¹⁵

3.2 Unrest in 2011

In Bahrain in early February, In Bahrain, clashes were reported between security forces and protesters in a Shia village outside the capital, Manama. Then, from Monday 14 February, thousands of protesters started to occupy a central square in the capital city. Further confrontations between the police and the demonstrators ensued, in which a protester was killed by the police. On 15 February, the 18 members of the Islamic National Accord announced that they were suspending their participation in the Council of Representatives. Protesters issued increasingly ambitious demands for reform. Another protester was killed when police opened fire on the funeral procession of the first dead protester.

The Bahraini government blocked the internet in an attempt to suppress the demonstration, but protesters in Pearl Square said that they would continue their sit-in until their demands for reform were met. The protesters are demanding:

- political prisoners to be released
- more jobs and housing
- the creation of a more representative and empowered parliament
- a new constitution written by the people
- a new cabinet that does not include Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, who has been in office for 40 years¹⁶

One reporter said that there were no signs of significant discontent directed at the Western military presence in Bahrain.¹⁷

On 15 February, King Hamad al-Khalifa made a televised address, saying that he would investigate the deaths of the protesters, while the interior ministry said that police involved had already been arrested. Following the address, the police pulled back from confrontation with the demonstration.

The US called for restraint from all sides, but on the night of 16/17 February, police moved to clear the square. Hundreds of officers used tear gas and batons to disperse the protesters, as tanks were deployed and helicopters hovered overhead. It was also reported that the security forces had used live fire and that bodies of the dead protesters showed signs of lead shot. At least three protesters were reported to have died in the operation.

Later in the day on 17 February, an announcement on Bahraini state television said that key parts of the capital had been taken over by the army.¹⁸

Though violence subsided after the initial bouts in February, police and demonstrators continued their confrontations in early March and, on Sunday 14th, a violent clash broke out

¹⁵ "Bahrain's Shia opposition makes poll gain", *Guardian*, 25 October 2010

¹⁶ "Bahrain protests: Anti-government campaign gathers pace", *BBC News Online*, 16 February 2011

¹⁷ "Protests across the Middle East and North Africa", *BBC News Online*, 17 February 2011

¹⁸ "Bahrain protests banned as military tightens grip", *BBC Nes*

as police attempted to clear the mainly Shiite protesters who had blocked the streets to the capital's financial district. There were also clashes near the university. Police then moved to clear Pearl Square, which had been occupied by protesters for much of the time since the beginning of the unrest. Teargas and rubber bullets were used to drive protesters back, but thousands more protesters arrived and eventually the police were forced to retreat.

The protesters increasingly abandoned calls for dialogue and a constitutional monarchy and instead called for the end of the monarchy. The protests are increasingly being led by the radical Shiite Wafa and al-Haq parliamentary blocs; talks between the government and the more moderate al-Wefaq bloc risk being eclipsed.

3.3 Saudi forces move in

The defeat of the police at Pearl Square and the diminishing prospects of a negotiated solution appeared to have forced the monarchy to more radical action, as about 1,000 Saudi troops were reported to be moving into Bahrain on Monday. The Saudi forces, accompanied by 500 police from the United Arab Emirates, came in response to a request to the Gulf Cooperation Council from the Bahraini government.

According to a newspaper close to the Bahraini government:

Their mission will be limited to protecting vital facilities, such as oil, electricity and water installations, and financial and banking facilities.¹⁹

The Bahraini opposition said that the arrival of the troops from the Gulf states amounted to a foreign occupation.

In February, the leader of the al-Haq movement, Hassan Mushaima, said that a Saudi intervention in Bahrain would give Iran the same right to intervene, but there are no signs that the Iranian military is preparing to take such a risky step.

3.4 Bahrain- Basic information

The Kingdom of Bahrain consists of some 36 islands, situated midway along the Persian (Arabian) Gulf. Formerly a British Protected State, Bahrain seceded from the Federation of Arab Emirates to become a separate independent state in 1971. After the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1975, the ruling Al Khalifa family exercised near-absolute power. In 2001 voters approved reforms contained in a National Action Charter, and in 2002 the Amir of Bahrain announced the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, proclaiming himself King. Bahrain's first legislative elections for 27 years took place in October of that year. Further legislative elections were subsequently held in 2006 and 2010. The capital is Manama. Arabic is the official language.

Area and Population

Area: 741 sq km

Population (mid-2008): 775,585

Population density (mid-2008): 1,023.2 per sq km

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2008): 75.9 (males 74.4; females 77.6)

Finance

¹⁹ "Bahrain calls for Gulf help after violent protests", *The Star* (Lebanon), 14 March 2011

GDP in current prices (2008): US \$21,903m. (US \$28,240 per head)

Real GDP growth (2008): 6.3%

Inflation (annual average, 2008): 3.5%

Currency: dinar (BD)

Government and Politics

Head of State: HM Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa

Head of Government: Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa

Last election: Legislative, 23 and 30 October 2010

Next election: Legislative, due 2014²⁰

4 Iran

Iran's Green Movement put up candidates at the controversial 2009 presidential election. When the results were known, thousands of supporters took to the streets of Tehran and other cities, protesting at what they saw as rampant fraud. Since those demonstrations were violently suppressed, the opposition in Iran has been subdued. The government has shown signs of being scared that the uprisings in Arab countries would encourage the Iranian opposition to renew its protests.²¹

4.1 Unrest in 2011

Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, leaders of Iran's opposition, encouraged demonstrations to demand reforms, echoing those in Arab countries. The government, fearing that the demonstrations would be used by the opposition to reinvigorate their movement after it had been crushed following the disputed election of 2009, decided to ban any protest. Both Mousavi and Karroubi were placed under house arrest. Monday 14 February saw thousands of protesters take to the streets of Tehran. Two people were killed and several wounded during the clashes with riot police and the feared Basij militia in Tehran.

On 16 February further small outbreaks of violence were reported at the funeral of one of the protesters killed two days before. Most of the people attending the rally were pro-government, and both sides claimed that the victim supported them.

The government in Tehran called for a rally against the opposition movement on 18 February.

On 28 February, Mir Hossein Mossavi and Mehdi Karroubi and their wives were reported to have been moved to a prison run by the military, although the government denied the story. On 1 March, the opposition claimed that over 200 people had been arrested while trying to protest in Tehran and another 40 had been detained in Isfahan.²²

²⁰ "Bahrain", in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons. [Retrieved 15 February 2011]

²¹ For more information on the opposition in Iran, see the Library Research Paper [The Islamic Republic of Iran: An introduction](#), 11 December 2009

²² "Iran opposition: Over 200 'arrested' in Tuesday protest", *BBC News Online*, 2 March 2011

4.2 Iran- basic information

The Islamic Republic of Iran lies in western Asia. In 1979 opposition to his regime forced the Shah (Emperor) of Iran, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, to leave the country. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a fundamentalist Shi'ite Muslim leader, assumed power and Iran became an Islamic republic. Following Khomeini's death in 1989, President Sayed Ali Khamenei was elected as Iran's spiritual leader. In 1997 Hashemi Rafsanjani was succeeded as President by Sayed Muhammad Khatami, who was re-elected in 2001. In 2005 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the mayor of Tehran, was elected President. Ahmadinejad was re-elected in June 2009, although allegations of voting irregularities provoked large-scale demonstrations by supporters of his principal opponents. Tehran is the capital. The principal language is Farsi.

Area and Population

Area: 1,648,195 sq km

Population (mid-2008): 71,956,322

Population density (mid-2008): 43.7 per sq km

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2008): 71.4 (males 70.1; females 72.8)

Finance

GDP in current prices (UN estimates, 2008): US \$346,611m. (\$4,729 per head)

Real GDP growth (UN estimate, 2008): 3.5%

Inflation (annual average, 2008): 25.5%

Currency: rial

Government and Politics

Wali Faqih (Religious Leader): Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei

Head of State: President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Last election: Presidential, 12 June 2009

Next election: Legislative, due 2012

5 Jordan

Jordan is a small monarchy with strong ties to the United Kingdom. In November 2009, the House of Representatives was dissolved two years early and elections were scheduled for the following year. Before the elections were held, the previous government resigned and King Abdullah installed a new government led by Samir Rifai. Elections, which should have been held within four months of the dissolution of the previous parliament, were postponed by royal decree. When they were held, in November 2010 the election was controversial, with many parties disqualified before the polls, and a boycott from the most important opposition group, the Islamic Action Front, political wing of the local Muslim Brotherhood.

5.1 Unrest in 2011

In January, the capital of Jordan, Amman, began to experience demonstrations. Responding early to the unrest, King Abdullah sacked his recently-appointed government and installed a new one. Marouf al-Bakhit, a retired general, was named as Samir Rifai's successor. Mr al-

Bakhit had previously been prime minister and was seen as resistant to reform; nevertheless, the King ordered al-Bakhit to speed up a programme of political and economic changes. The King has widened the circle of political consultation by holding meetings with the opposition, including the Muslim Brotherhood.

Particularly worrying for the monarchy is the dissent from the tribal sectors of society. Jordan is divided between about 60% Palestinians and the remaining rural and traditional groups who normally support the monarchy. A statement from tribal leaders criticising the monarchy and Queen Rania's alleged enrichment of her family was released on 10 February, drawing a sharp response from the monarchy criticising and threatening those media outlets that had published it.²³

Despite the simmering discontent in Jordan most analysts say that the overthrow of the monarchy is not likely soon.

5.2 Jordan- basic information

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan lies in western Asia. In 1920 Palestine and Transjordan were placed under British administration by a League of Nations mandate. In 1921 Abdullah ibn Hussein, a member of the Hashimi dynasty of Arabia, was proclaimed Amir of Transjordan. The British mandate was terminated in 1946, when Transjordan attained full independence and Abdullah was proclaimed King. In 1952 the crown passed to Hussein ibn Talal. During the Six-Day War of 1967 Israeli military gains included possession of the whole of Jerusalem and the West Bank. King Hussein was succeeded by his son, Abdullah ibn al-Hussein, in 1999. Amid protests against the Government in cities across the country, on 1 February 2011 King Abdullah dismissed the administration of Prime Minister Samir Rifai and instructed Marouf Bakhit to form a new Cabinet. A new administration was sworn in on 9 February. The capital is Amman. The official language is Arabic.

Area and Population

Area: 88,778 sq km

Population (mid-2008): 5,906,043

Population density (mid-2008): 66.5 per sq km

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2008): 72.7 (males 70.9; females 74.6)

Finance

GDP in current prices (2008): US \$21,238m. (\$3,596 per head)

Real GDP growth (2008): 7.9%

Inflation (annual average, 2008): 14.9%

Currency: dinar

Government and Politics

Head of State: King Abdullah ibn al-Hussein

Head of Government: Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit

²³ "Jordan Angered by Articles On the Discontent of Tribes", *New York Times*, 12 February 2011

Last election: Legislative, 9 November 2010

Next election: Legislative, due 2014²⁴

6 Libya

Muammar Qaddafi has controlled Libya since 1969, when a revolution led by the army. He was 27 years old when he became effective head of state, and is now the Arab world's longest-serving leader.

For many years Libya was considered a pariah state by the west, accused of sponsoring violent groups. The USA imposed a complete trade embargo on Libya in 1986 and, later in the same year, Libya fired missiles at US fighter planes in the Gulf of Sirte, which Libya was claiming as territorial waters. In 1986, the US bombed military installations and alleged terrorist training facilities, causing many deaths. Libya was accused of being behind the Lockerbie bombing in December 1988 and the country was required by UN Security Council resolutions to hand over two suspects, Abdel Baset al-Megrahi and Al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah. After much argument, the two suspects arrived for trial in 1999 and al-Megrahi was convicted, while Fhimah was acquitted. Al-Megrahi was sent to Scotland to serve his sentence. On 20 August 2009, Al-Megrahi was released on compassionate grounds, due to a diagnosis of terminal cancer, and returned to Libya. In 2011, he was still alive.

Despite its international isolation, the country maintained good standards of living in comparison to its neighbours, largely because of its important reserves of oil and gas. However, worsening relations with the west in the 1980s had underlined the country's vulnerability. The deteriorating state of oil production infrastructure meant that western investment and expertise were needed to take full advantage of the country's reserves.

Relations improved with western powers, as Libya renounced its chemical and nuclear weapons programmes, agreed to hand over the suspects of the Lockerbie bombing and to pay compensation for Lockerbie and the bombing of a French UTA airliner in 1989.

The Qaddafi regime has suppressed dissent with particular forcefulness. It was reported in October 1993 that elements loyal to Qaddafi had suppressed an attempted military *coup d'état*. Members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood have been arrested and detained for long periods, along with many other dissidents. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) is the most prominent violent *jihadi* group in the country and much of the regime's oppressive apparatus is directed against it. Hundreds, possibly thousands, of members of the group and other Islamists were in prison at the beginning of the century. The Libyan leader's son, Saif al-Islam al-Qaddafi leads the Libyan Human Rights Association, which led negotiations for the release of political prisoners. LIFG has since renounced violence and its former allegiance to al-Qaeda.

In 1996, Human Rights Watch estimates that 1,200 prisoners were killed at the Abu Salim prison in Libya.²⁵ Many of the prisoners were political, and a riot had started in protest at the conditions. The Libyan government did not admit that any killings had taken place until some time later.

²⁴ Jordan, in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons. Retrieved 23 February 2011

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, [Libya: June 1996 Killings at Abu Salim Prison](#), 28 June 2006

Despite some attempts by the regime to open up, Libya remains basically a police state where parties are banned and dissent is crushed. Jamal al-Hajji, a dissident who had spent years in jail, said to the BBC:

It is disaster for Libya to have this regime for 40 years. There is no freedom here; there is no democracy. The UK, France, Italy, I don't know why they support this dictatorship - but we will never forget.²⁶

In spite of the repression, Libya is a relatively affluent society. Libya had the highest human development index score of any African country and a higher score than Saudi Arabia in the 2010 UN Development Programme's Human Development report.²⁷

6.1 Unrest in 2011

Libya is much more of a closed society than many of its neighbours, and reliable information is difficult to obtain. However, the arrest of a well-known lawyer and human rights campaigner is thought to have sparked the unrest on 15 February. It was reported that hundreds of protesters had gathered in Libya's second city, Benghazi, which is known for its opposition to the regime, whose support base is in the west around the capital, Tripoli. Later, state television showed pictures of hundreds of pro-government demonstrators in Benghazi.

Libyan opposition figure Mohammed Ali Abdullah said on 16 February:

People have now been empowered to make a statement. Enough. Forty-two years of oppression. Forty-two years of a dictatorial totalitarian rule is enough. The source of the problem is the same person and it starts with getting rid of him, and that's the common denominator that gets all the people to come out for these demonstrations."²⁸

More protests were reported in the east of the country, where the police station in al-Bayda, near Benghazi, was said to have been set on fire. There were allegations that the security forces had used live fire from snipers and helicopters against the demonstrations.

Dissidents called for a major day of protest on 17 February and on the same day there was a large pro-government demonstration in Tripoli. The anti-government demonstrations in Benghazi and other towns in the east, such as al-Bayda, were harshly repressed by the security forces. Human Rights Watch said that the security forces were using live fire against the demonstrators, and that the death toll had reached at least 24.²⁹

The authorities arrested Libyans who had spoken to foreign journalists and closed the internet down on the night of the 18th. Then, over the weekend of 19 and 20 February, there was an increase in reported violence. A large anti-government demonstration in Green Square in the centre of Tripoli was broken up on the Saturday with live ammunition and teargas. Protesters alleged that the security forces used machine guns against further demonstrations in Benghazi. Human Rights Watch reported that the death toll resulting from the disturbances had gone up to at least 233 in the four days of protests.³⁰

²⁶ "Libya leader's lesson in longevity", *BBC News Online*, 1 September 2009

²⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2010*, 2010

²⁸ "Live: Mid-East protests", *BBC News Online*, 16 February 2011

²⁹ "Libya: Security Forces Fire on 'Day of Anger' Demonstrations", Press notice, Human Rights Watch, 17 February 2011

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Libya: Governments Should Demand End to Unlawful Killings", Press notice, 20 February 2011

By 21 February, the government had lost control of Benghazi and a number of towns in the east, including al-Bayda, and there were reports of diplomats and senior military figures defecting from the government.

Despite rumours to the contrary, Qaddafi remained in the country and broadcast a statement on state television on 22 February. He vowed to fight to the death rather than leave Libya. There were reports of splits in the military, and some air force elements were reported to have fired directly on demonstrators. The Libyan deputy ambassador to the United Nations, who had defected from the regime, said there had been, "an attack on the people started in the west of Libya. I think the genocide started now in Libya."³¹

By the beginning of March, rebels were in control of much of the east of the country. Tobruk, al-Bayda, Benghazi and Marsa el-Brega were all in opposition hands, along with the biggest oil fields in the east. Forces loyal to the government kept control of Ras Lanuf, an important oil tanker terminal, and the oilfields inland of that town. In the west of the country, the capital Tripoli was still controlled by the government and the centre of the city was calm. The outskirts saw continued unrest, however, nearby Zawiya, another oil terminal was in rebel hands. There was fighting in Zuwarah, on the border with Tunisia. Forces loyal to the government controlled the western oil fields, but it was not clear how the government would export oil given the rebel control of Zawiya.

After a government counter-attack on the western town of Brega, close to the capital, was beaten off, observers feared that the Qaddafi regime and the opposition were in danger of reaching a stalemate.

Over the weekend of 12/ 13 March, fighting intensified in Libya. The government was reported to have regained control of the oil terminal Ras Lanuf and the town of Brega. On Monday rebel forces said that they had regained Brega, but there were many reports that demoralised rebel forces were retreating and preparing for a final showdown in their stronghold of Benghazi.

6.2 International reaction

EU heads of state met in Brussels for an emergency summit on Libya on Friday 11th March. Divisions were again apparent in their positions, with Nicolas Sarkozy of France making stronger calls for a no-fly zone. France remained the only EU country to recognise the Provisional Transitional National Council as the legitimate government of Libya. The British and French governments continued to pressure for preparations for direct action. In a joint letter to EU president van Rompuy, Mr Cameron and Mr Sarkozy in advance of the meeting the two leaders set out their recommendations for EU policy:

1. To stop further suffering of the Libyan people, Muammar Gaddafi and his clique should leave.
2. We support the efforts of the Libyan Interim Transitional National Council to prepare for a representative and accountable government. We should send the clear political signal that we consider the Council to be valid political interlocutors, and an important voice for the Libyan people in this phase.
3. We condemn, and call for an immediate halt to, the use of force against civilians by the Gaddafi regime. We support continued planning to be ready to provide support for all possible contingencies as the situation evolves on the

³¹ "Gaddafi vows to fight to the death", *Financial Times*, 23 February 2011

basis of demonstrable need, a clear legal basis and firm regional support. This could include a no-fly zone or other options against air attacks, working with Allies and partners, especially those in the region. We are working together on elements of an appropriate UNSCR.

4. We call upon the UN to evaluate and closely monitor the humanitarian situation in Libya, and to make proposals to ensure full access for humanitarian organisations and assistance to displaced people. We stand ready to help in this endeavour.
5. We support the investigation announced by the International Criminal Court Prosecutor, and the message this sends that the regime will be held to account for its actions.
6. We call on all countries to implement fully the arms embargo, including banning the provision of armed mercenary personnel and to take measures to discourage such recruitments, or departure of planes or convoys to that end, and we stand ready to co-operate with them in this regard.
7. Regarding displaced persons outside Libya, should the situation deteriorate, we should all be ready to act through further financial and material assistance, including military assets, in cooperation with international organisations and countries concerned.³²

Mr Sarkozy said at a press conference after the meeting:

Think of Bosnia. Journalists said where is Europe? There are a number of states, including the UK and ourselves, who wonder what happens if attacks on civilians continue. The question that David Cameron and I wondered about was whether we should sit back and watch.³³

German Chancellor Angela Merkel made clear German opposition to any military intervention:

I don't see that happening ... As of now, there is no military intervention on the cards. I have not hidden my deep scepticism on military action and on what such a mission might actually achieve ... It is not a good idea for Nato and the EU to play a prominent role, instead of regional organisations. This is, after all, an Arab area. We of course want to alleviate problems, but more on a political level - sanctions, that's our role.³⁴

During the EU Council meeting, the Libyan Central Bank and Libyan Investment Authority were also added to the EU asset-freezing list.

The Arab League met on 12 March, and issued a call for a no-fly zone and decided to make contact with the rebel Provisional Transitional National Council. The appeal for a no-fly zone by the Arab League was a significant step towards the international legitimisation of military intervention, but the important condition remained approval by the UN Security Council. This remains unlikely given the opposition of Russia and China. The Security Council has only twice authorised such action: Korea in 1950 and Iraq in 1991. Even approval for a no-fly zone, where no ground troops would be involved, may be quite difficult to achieve in the time

³² *Letter from the PM and President Sarkozy to President Van Rompuy*, 10 March 2011; <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/statements-and-articles/2011/03/letter-from-the-pm-and-president-sarkozy-to-president-van-rompuy-61868>

³³ "Hawkish EU states warn of Bosnia-type scenario in Libya", *Euobserver*, 11 October 2011

³⁴ *Ibid.*

available. US defence secretary Robert Gates criticised “loose talk” about the possible imposition of a no-fly zone,³⁵ and US secretary of state Hillary Clinton has said that it would be a UN decision.³⁶ Nicolas Sarkozy has also said that France would wait for a Security Council mandate before launching any action.³⁷

After a meeting of the G8 in Paris on 14 March, Foreign Secretary William Hague suggested that a Security Council Resolution was not essential, saying that it would be the “cleanest and simplest” way of conferring legitimacy on any action.³⁸ The UK and France drafted a Security Council Resolution on a no-fly zone which was due to be submitted to the Security Council on 15 or 16 March.

6.3 Refugees

Libya was home to about 1.5 million migrant workers, according to estimate of the International Organisation for Migration, the majority of them Egyptians. As the fighting worsened in Libya, the exodus to the Tunisian and Egyptian borders became a flood, with thousands leaving per day.

The British Department for International Development supplied charter planes to the International Organisation for Migration Organization to allow it to evacuate “up to 8,800” Egyptian migrants from Djerba in Tunisia to the Egyptian capital, Cairo.³⁹ The DFID has also supplied 36,000 blankets and tents for 1,500 people in Tunisia.⁴⁰

For more information on the evacuation of UK citizens from Libya, see the Library Standard Note [UK relations with Libya](#).

6.4 Libya- basic information

The Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya extends along the Mediterranean coast of North Africa. The country attained independence as the United Kingdom of Libya in 1951. Muhammad Idris al-Sanusi, Amir of Cyrenaica, became King Idris of Libya, but was deposed in 1969 in a revolution led by nationalist army officers. A Revolution Command Council was established, with Col Muammar al-Qaddafi as Chairman, and a Libyan Arab Republic was proclaimed. Qaddafi remains, effectively, Head of State, although he continues to reject that nomenclature. The administrative capital was formerly Tripoli, but in 1988 most government departments and the legislature were relocated to Sirte. However, some departments were subsequently moved back to Tripoli. Arabic is the official language.

Area and Population

Area: 1,775,500 sq km

Population (mid-2008): 6,294,181

Population density (mid-2008): 3.5 per sq km

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2008): 74.3 (males 71.8; females 77.0)

³⁵ “US defence secretary Robert Gates slams 'loose talk' about no-fly zones”, *Guardian*, 3 March 2011

³⁶ “Libya: No-fly zone should not be led by US, says Clinton”, *Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 2011

³⁷ “Hawkish EU states warn of Bosnia-type scenario in Libya”, *Euobserver* 11 March 2011

³⁸ “UK to continue to push for Libya fly zone”, *Independent*, 15 March 2011

³⁹ [International Organization for Migration](#), “Additional Evacuation Flights to Help Ease Some Pressure at the Tunisian/Libyan Border”, Press release, 2 March 2011

⁴⁰ DFID, “British Government to provide emergency relief flights for Libya crisis victims”, 2 March 2011

Finance

GDP in current prices (2008): US \$93,168m. (\$14,802 per head)

Real GDP growth (2008): 3.8%

Inflation (annual average, 2008): 10.4%

Currency: dinar

Government and Politics

Head of State: Revolutionary Leader Col Muammar al-Qaddafi

Head of Government: Secretary of the General Secretariat of the General People's Congress Muhammad Aboulghasem al-Zwai

Last election: Legislative, 8 May 1965

Next election: n.a.⁴¹

7 Morocco

Morocco has avoided the more serious violence experienced in other countries of the region. The monarchy in Morocco is widely accepted within the country and the political system in Morocco is relatively open in comparison with its neighbours.⁴² A poll for France's *Le Monde* and Moroccan magazine *TelQuel* gave the monarchy an approval rating of 91%,⁴³ but the information was suppressed in Morocco because the monarchy is considered above discussion. Nevertheless, corruption, poverty, political and economic exclusion and a lack of public services are serious problems. One memorable Wikileaks cable described the "appalling greed" of those close to the royal family.⁴⁴

Protests have been held in the country though. On 20 and 21 February, tens of thousands of demonstrators (or hundreds of thousands according to the organisers) gathered in Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakech demanding that the monarchy should give up some of its powers,⁴⁵ although no-one called for the departure of Mohammed VI. The interior minister said on the 21st that five burnt bodies had been found in a bank that was set alight by demonstrators in al-Hoceima in the north of the country.⁴⁶

After the demonstration of 20 February, the protest movement appeared to lose momentum, at least in comparison with other countries in the region. Nevertheless sporadic demonstrations did take place, with at least 50 people reportedly injured in clashes with security forces in the south western town of Agadir on 27 February. Some commentators say that Morocco could still face serious unrest.

7.1 Morocco- basic information

The Kingdom of Morocco is situated in north-west Africa. By 1958 the independent Sultanate of Morocco included the territory of France's former Moroccan protectorate, established in 1912, and most of its Spanish counterpart. The Sultan (Muhammad V)

⁴¹ Libya, in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons. Retrieved 23 February 2011

⁴² For more information on Morocco, see the Library note [Morocco 2011](#)

⁴³ "In Morocco, protest efforts not taking hold", *Washington Post*, 1 March 2011

⁴⁴ "WikiLeaks cables accuse Moroccan royals of corruption", *Guardian*, 6 December 2010

⁴⁵ "In Morocco, protest efforts not taking hold", *Washington Post*, 1 March 2011

⁴⁶ "Burned bodies found after Morocco protests – minister", *BBC News Online*, 21 February 2011

was restyled King of Morocco in 1957. In 1961 he was succeeded by his son, who assumed the title of Hassan II. In 1999 King Hassan was succeeded by his son, who took the title Muhammad VI. Morocco's sovereignty over the territory of Western Sahara (formerly Spanish Sahara) remains disputed. Rabat is the capital. Arabic is the official language

Area and Population

Area: 710,850 sq km (including the disputed territory of Western Sahara, 252,120 sq km)

Population (mid-2008): 31,605,616 (including the disputed territory of Western Sahara)

Population density (mid-2008): 44.5 per sq km (including the disputed territory of Western Sahara)

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2008): 71.3 (males 69.1; females 73.6)

Finance

GDP in current prices (2008): US \$88,883m. (\$2,769 per head)

Real GDP growth (2008): 5.6%

Inflation (annual average, 2008): 3.8%

Currency: dirham

Government and Politics

Head of State: HM King Muhammad VI

Head of Government: Prime Minister Abbas el-Fassi

Last election: Legislative, 7 September 2007

Next election: Legislative, due September 2012⁴⁷

8 Oman

Oman is a former British protectorate which gained its independence in 1951. The present ruler, Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said, overthrew his father in 1970 and pursued more liberal policies than his father, including opening up the economy to trade and providing new homes, education, communications and health services and, in 1981, establishing a consultative council.

The country has had its share of strife: in August 1994 more than 200 alleged militant Islamists were arrested and in 1997, troops were deployed to control demonstrations against the slow pace of social and political reform. The consultative council has little political power and much voting for it was determined by tribal loyalties. Turnouts have generally been low but most of the polls have been described as free and fair by independent observers.

In 2005, a further 100 alleged Islamist were arrested, apparently for plotting terrorist attacks, and others have been accused of attempting to overthrow the government and replace it with an Islamic state.

⁴⁷ Morocco, in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons. Retrieved 23 February 2011

Despite these disturbances, the Sultan is relatively popular and the country is more stable than some of its neighbours.

On 26 and 27 February, unrest was reported for the first time in Oman, as several hundred protesters clashed with the police, leaving one protester dead. On Tuesday 1 March, soldiers fired into the air to disperse protesters from a roundabout in the centre of Muscat. However, none of the protesters were reported to be calling for the overthrow of the Sultan.

8.1 Basic information

The Sultanate of Oman occupies the extreme east and south-east of the Arabian peninsula. Full independence was confirmed by a treaty of friendship with the United Kingdom in 1951. In 1970 Sultan Said bin Taimur was overthrown by his son, Qaboos bin Said al-Said. In 1991 a Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shoura) was established, with the intention of extending the participation of Omani citizens in national affairs. In 1996 Sultan Qaboos promulgated a Basic Statute of the State, a constitutional document defining the organs and guiding principles of the state. Muscat is the capital. The official language is Arabic.

Area and Population

Area: 309,500 sq km

Population (mid-2008): 2,785,361

Population density (mid-2008): 9.0 per sq km

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2008): 75.9 (males 74.3; females 77.6)

Finance

GDP in current prices (2008): RO 23,185m. (RO 8,324 per head)

Real GDP growth (2008): 12.8%

Inflation (annual average, 2008): 12.1%

Currency: rial Omani (RO)

Government and Politics

Head of State: Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said

Head of Government: Prime Minister Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said

Last election: Consultative Council (advisory), 27 October 2007

Next election: Consultative Council (advisory), due October 2011⁴⁸

9 Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is the world's largest exporter of oil and perhaps the most influential Arab state. It has been ruled since the creation of the state by the al-Saud family as an absolute monarchy. While the Saudi royal family probably enjoys widespread support and is seen as legitimate by many in the kingdom, it too suffers from the problems that afflict other Arab

⁴⁸ Oman, in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons. Retrieved 02 March 2011

societies, such as corruption, youth unemployment and political exclusion. All demonstrations are banned in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudis are increasingly concerned at what they perceive as a rise in Iranian influence. The fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan removed two important opponents of the Iranian regime. Instability in Lebanon (where Iran allegedly supports Hezbollah) and Israel/Palestine and Iraq, is a source of concern. The Saudi regime has reason to fear instability and radical Islamism in the region, both tendencies which Iran is seen as promoting.

Gradual liberalisation within the kingdom, though it has been far from dramatic, has increased the visibility of radical Islamist elements in Saudi society (though terrorist incidents have reduced in number in recent years after an upsurge in 2004) and some commentators have questioned the long-term future of the monarchy.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the Saudi government has been successful in recent years in dealing with dissent and terrorism, partly using the enormous wealth produced by oil price rises. The potential disloyalty of minorities should not be overestimated.

The present King, Abdullah, is relatively popular and is seen as a gradual reformer. However, he is 86 years old and will soon be succeeded by one of his brothers, who is unlikely to be either so popular or a reformist. At a national dialogue on reforms initiated by King Abdullah in 2003, his likely successor, Prince Nayef (interior minister and an arch-conservative) is alleged to have said in relation to rule over Saudi Arabia by the Saudis:

What we won by the sword, we will keep by the sword.⁵⁰

Second in line to the throne is thought to be Prince Salman bin Abdul-Aziz al-Saud, who is a more moderate figure than Prince Nayef. However, his succession is thought to be less likely than Nayef's.

Both these possible successors are over 70 years old and have had health problems.

9.1 Unrest in 2011

Attempting to pre-empt political unrest, King Abdullah announced in February a giveaway to Saudi citizens worth \$36 billion in pay rises and debt write-offs, and to help them buy houses and start businesses.⁵¹ This came in addition to Saudi Arabia's impressive public spending plans, reported to envisage expenditure of \$400 billion on infrastructure, education and job creation up to the end of 2014. Activists were reportedly not satisfied with the move. One said:

They are still stuck with the old mentality: giving away money! We demand true reforms, not cosmetic, temporary decisions! We demand political participation, equality, justice, codification, new legal system, true separation of powers, fighting corruption.⁵²

Demonstrations have taken place in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the Eastern Province, home to most of the kingdom's 10% Shia minority and to the largest oil fields. A prominent Shia cleric, Tawfiq al-Amer was arrested in February, accused of calling for a constitutional

⁴⁹ Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre

⁵⁰ "Citizens not serfs can save Saudi Arabia", *Financial Times*, 27 February 2011

⁵¹ "Citizens not serfs can save Saudi Arabia", *Financial Times*, 27 February 2011

⁵² "Saudi 'Royal gift' fails to woo activists", *Financial Times*, 23 February 2011

monarchy, drawing sizeable protests from the Shia. He was released at the beginning of March, in what looked like an attempt to defuse planned protests. On 10 March, the police opened fire on demonstrators in the town of Qatif and used batons and stun grenades to disperse the crowd. Qatif is near Bahrain.

On 14 March, Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates, responded to a request from the government of Bahrain to the Gulf Cooperation Council for military assistance. Some 1000 Saudi and 500 UAE personnel entered Bahrain, in a clear sign that the Saudi authorities were concerned both about the ability of the Bahraini government to handle its unrest, and of the effect that the fall of the Bahraini regime would have on Saudi Shiite opinion. Opposition activists described the incursion as tantamount to an act of war. Iran criticised the move as “unacceptable”.

9.2 Saudi Arabia- basic information

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occupies about four-fifths of the Arabian peninsula, in south-western Asia. In 1924 the forces of Ibn Sa‘ud forced the abdication of Hussein ibn Ali, who had proclaimed himself King of the Hedjaz in 1916. In 1926 Ibn Sa‘ud was proclaimed King of the Hedjaz and Sultan of Najd, and in 1932 the two areas were merged as the unified Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Sa‘ud ruled until 1953. All subsequent Saudi Arabian rulers have been sons of Ibn Sa‘ud. The capital is Riyadh. Arabic is the official language.

Area and Population

Area: 2,240,000 sq km

Population (mid-2008): 24,645,686

Population density (mid-2008): 11.0 per sq km

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2008): 73.1 (males 71.0; females 75.4)

Finance

GDP in current prices (2008): US \$468,800m. (\$19,022 per head)

Real GDP growth (2008): 4.4%

Inflation (annual average, 2008): 9.9%

Currency: Saudi riyal (SR)

Government and Politics

Head of State: HM King Abdullah ibn Abd al-Aziz Al Sa‘ud

Head of Government: Prime Minister King Abdullah ibn Abd al-Aziz Al Sa‘ud

Last election: n.a.

Next election: n.a.⁵³

⁵³ Saudi Arabia, in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons. Retrieved 11 March 2011

10 Yemen

The Yemeni Government is headed by President Ali Abdallah Saleh, who has led the country for 31 years. An election was held in 1999 which the President won, with more than 96% of the vote; the opposition was not allowed to present a candidate. The President has been accused of trying to turn his rule into a virtual monarchy, filling important posts with close family members and grooming his son to succeed him. He is supported by the pillars of the state: the army and tribal powers. The President is in his second term of office and the Constitution prevents him from seeking another term.

Yemen is a mountainous country, some of which is fertile and some desert. The present state was founded in 1990 when the former Marxist South Yemen and the traditionalist North Yemen were united in one country. The unification was not universally popular: there was a short civil war in 1994 and secessionist forces in the South are again growing. As in Afghanistan, tribal loyalties are to some people still more important than loyalty to the state, and local warlords often wield more power, while Yemeni tribes are said to be better armed than any in the region, with millions of guns circulating in the country.⁵⁴ The reach of the Government is shrinking, with one western diplomat describing the Government as 'practically caged in the capital'.⁵⁵

10.1 Record of the Saleh Government

President Saleh, is respected as a skilful political survivor. For the International Crisis Group, 'Yemen in many ways has the most open political system on the Arabian Peninsula, committed to developing instruments of a modern state and cooperating with international efforts to uproot the al-Qaeda network.'⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the Yemeni Government has had an uneven relationship with western powers. He sided with Saddam Hussein on the invasion of Kuwait, leading to the repatriation of nearly a million Yemenis from the Gulf States where they were working. It was not until the bombing of the World Trade Center in 2001 that Saleh signed up for the US-led 'war on terrorism'. Even since then, some in Western circles accused the regime of insufficient commitment to tackling Islamist militancy in Yemen, suggesting that influential Yemeni forces support and harbour al-Qaeda operatives in the country and Saleh did not intend to provoke those forces' hostility.

The Government has also been accused of exaggerating or even inventing the connection between Iran and the Shiite Houthist separatists in the north of the country, with the aim of gaining US and Saudi support for his government.

The system of patronage that has kept Saleh in power for so long has also been strongly criticised. Observers say that government spending is used to buy off tribes and warlords and to set enemies against each other, rather than to provide services and invest in the country's productive capacity. While this has been successful in maintaining the regime until now, commentators say that Government oil revenues are diminishing and its costs are increasing, while the balancing act is becoming more complicated. Many analysts think that President Saleh is relying increasingly on a small circle of family and tribe members, and that this style of government exacerbates Yemen's political problems.

⁵⁴ According to a Yemeni Government estimate, there are some 60 million small arms but, in a [recent report](#), the organisation Small Arms Survey put the figure at between 6 million and 9 million in 2003

⁵⁵ 'In Fragile Yemen, U.S. Faces Leader Who Puts Family First', *New York Times*, 5 January 2009

⁵⁶ International Crisis Group web page, [Yemen](#) [6 January 2009]

10.2 Regional rebellions

It is a largely Sunni Muslim country, but there are Shia Muslims of the Zaidi sect in the Northwest of the country. There has been a long-running rebellion against the Government, which accuses these 'Houthi' rebels of taking support from Shiite Iran, although this has not been corroborated independently and the accusation is not echoed by the US. In October 2009, the Yemeni Government announced that it had intercepted an Iranian ship carrying weapons for the insurgents.

The Houthis complain of incursions by Sunni Saudi Arabian forces into their area in support of Government troops. In November, a group of Houthi rebels entered Saudi territory and killed two Saudi border guards, provoking retaliation, including the use of air strikes. On 22 December Saudi Arabia announced that it had ceased large-scale military operations against the rebels. The conflict reportedly claimed 'hundreds' of lives in recent months,⁵⁷ and there are as many as 250,000 displaced persons, some of whom survive in appalling conditions, according to the US Administration. In February, a ceasefire was announced which it is hoped will end the conflict; the Government has announced the construction of 10,000 new homes to re-house the displaced.⁵⁸ In March, rebels released 178 captives as part of the ceasefire terms.

There are signs, however, that the ceasefire is not holding. Sporadic clashes between rebels and a pro-government tribe that has been used as a militia by the Government have "snowballed into open warfare."⁵⁹ 11 soldiers and militiamen were killed in a Houthi attack in mid-July.

The level of violence in the South is gradually increasing, both from separatist and Islamist militants, and analysts fear that the serious threat to the Yemeni state comes from the South. In May, spurred to action by the rising level of violence, Saleh offered a form of government of national unity and offered an amnesty for jailed southern separatists and Shia rebels, while pledging millions of dollars' worth of aid for the South. At the same time, troops released by the calmer situation in the North were redeployed to the South and a severe crackdown was instigated against insurgent elements, as well as restrictions on the freedom of expression.

Analysts fear that conciliatory moves may be coming too late and that their effect will be negated by the security clampdown. Some worry that a serious southern insurgency is emerging, led by disaffected southern former army officers.⁶⁰ In June, a Government building in the South was attacked and 11 people were killed. The Government arrested 30 people, nine of whom were promptly charged with membership of al-Qaeda. In July, southern rebels attacked a security post and four were killed in the ensuing gun battle.⁶¹ A southern opposition politician was quoted recently:

⁵⁷ BBC News online, [Country profile: Yemen](#) [5 January 2009]

⁵⁸ International Crisis Group, *Crisiswatch*

⁵⁹ "Yemen Clashes Reflect North-South Tensions", *New York Times*, 23 July 2010

⁶⁰ "Saleh talks rapprochement, but it could be too late to contain insurgency in southern Yemen", *Gulf States newsletter*, 4 June 2010

⁶¹ "Yemen rebel attack kills four", *Financial Times*, 15 July 2010

“For the people of the south, unity is dead. If there is a war in the south, the south is not Saada. We are 4m people, we are a nation, and we do not chant ‘death of America’ like the Zaydis [the Houthis].⁶²”

10.3 Poverty

Yemen is widely reckoned to be the poorest country in the Middle East. When per capita gross domestic product for Yemenis is adjusted for purchasing power, the country is ranked somewhere between Pakistan and Cameroon.⁶³ Oil revenues from fields in the south of the country, the Government’s main indigenous source of income, are diminishing and the costs of maintaining the military campaign and the corrupt system of patronage cannot be met for much longer. Saudi Arabia has supported the Saleh Government, providing \$2 billion in 2009 to cover the budget shortfall, but one former World Bank economist specialising in Yemen said in January 2010 that the country was facing economic collapse within the year.⁶⁴ Yemen’s problems are exacerbated by extremely rapid population growth and already very high youth unemployment.

10.4 Yemen as a haven for jihadis

In October 2000, the *USS Cole* was attacked in Yemen, in 2002 of several Yemenis were arrested in the United States and Pakistan suspected of being members of al-Qaeda, Ramzi bin al-Shibah, a Yemeni citizen, was accused of key involvement in the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US and in October 2002 the French oil tanker *Limburg* was attacked off the Yemeni coast. All these attacks were linked to al-Qaeda and have given Yemen a growing reputation as a haven for the militant organisation. On 25 December 2009, this reputation was enhanced when Umar Abdulmutallab, a Nigerian citizen, attempted to blow up an airliner flying from the Netherlands to Detroit, USA. The attacker claimed to have been trained by al-Qaeda militants in Yemen. Al-Qaeda militants were accused of a plot in April to bomb the British Ambassador’s convoy.

Gulf States specialists have described Yemen as the third most important base for al-Qaeda in the world. It is accepted that al-Qaeda pays well for cooperation from Yemenis, and in such a poor country, this is an important factor. Most of the alleged terrorist bases in Yemen are in the impoverished Sunni south of the country.

Some western governments are reported to have been dissatisfied with the commitment of the Yemenis to the fight against al-Qaeda in Yemen during the 1990s. In the last few years, however, the Saudi authorities are perceived to have been more committed to fighting terrorism in Saudi Arabia and some observers have attributed an influx of Saudi jihadis to Yemen to this shift in Saudi policy. Since 2009, Saudi al-Qaeda militants in Yemen are reported to have accepted Yemeni leadership under the name ‘al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’ (AQAP). This change has encouraged the Yemeni authorities to see the problem as a Yemeni problem and has been helped to persuade Yemen to conduct a more vigorous military campaign against global jihadis on its territory. The Government claims to have killed over 60 AQAP members in two airstrikes during December, and to be holding members of a suicide cell that was planning to attack the British Embassy. The attacks were described by the *Economist* as the Government’s ‘most sustained offensive yet against the jihadis’.⁶⁵

⁶² “Saleh talks rapprochement, but it could be too late to contain insurgency in southern Yemen”, *Gulf States Newsletter*, 4 June 2010

⁶³ Source: World Bank, 2008

⁶⁴ ‘Bankrupt and feeble nation ‘can survive for only one year’’, *Times*, 5 January 2009

⁶⁵ ‘A growing worry for the West’, *Economist*, 30 December 2009

The number of Yemenis in the US detention centre at Guantánamo Bay has complicated the US Administration's attempts to close it. 'At least a dozen' released inmates are reported to have headed for Yemen.⁶⁶ Some six months ago, the Obama Administration placed an embargo on transferring prisoners from Guantánamo Bay to Yemen. According to an official review, the 60 or so Yemenis among the remaining 181 prisoners do not have strong cases for continued detention; the moratorium is coming under increasing pressure from federal judges and may be struck down.⁶⁷

The US Administration has issued an official authorisation to kill or capture Anwar al-Awlaqi, the US cleric of Yemeni origin who was allegedly complicit in the killings at Fort Hood military base in Texas in 2009, the attempted aircraft bombing near Detroit and the Times Square attempted bombing, and who is now a senior member of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula based in Yemen. The British authorities are reported to be worried that Awlaqi, who lived in London for two years, is training British Muslims for attacks in the UK.⁶⁸

On 20 July, al-Awlaqi, was added to the United Nations 1267 Committee's Consolidated List of individuals and entities associated with al-Qaeda or the Taliban.⁶⁹

Saudi Arabia has stepped up its actions to control the flow of suspected al-Qaeda associates across its southern border. At the beginning of July it was announced that the Saudi authorities had arrested more than 2,500 people attempting to cross the Yemeni border, more than 100 of whom they suspected of being al-Qaeda militants, coming from training camps in Yemen.⁷⁰

10.5 US military involvement

Although Barack Obama condemned aspects of the Bush Administration's 'war on terror', covert operations have increased under his leadership. The US is conducting a growing covert campaign against al-Qaeda in the Horn of Africa and Yemen from its base in Djibouti, including drone attacks. Some of these strikes have been successful for the US but others have killed innocent victims. Amnesty International says that a cruise missile armed with cluster munitions was used against a suspected al-Qaeda training camp in December, resulting in the deaths of 52, the majority of whom were civilians.⁷¹ In any case, the strikes run the risk of alienating the Yemeni Government from the population, many of whom resent US and Western involvement in their country.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has said that the 25 December Detroit plot was a retaliation for US involvement in strikes against militants in Yemen. The Yemeni foreign minister has denied any direct US involvement,⁷² allegedly following the terms of a secret military assistance pact agreed in 2009. Overtly, the US provides intelligence and logistical support to the Yemeni Government.

Any strong military response involving US forces in either of the main conflicts comes with other risks attached: firstly, attracting further participation from Iran and Saudi Arabia,

⁶⁶ "Bad guys' make it difficult to close Cuba camp", *Times*, 5 January 2009

⁶⁷ "Rulings Raise Doubts on Policy On Transfer Of Yemenis", *New York Times*, 9 July 2010

⁶⁸ "MI5 warns of the al-Qaeda preacher targeting Britain", *Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 2010

⁶⁹ US Department of State, "Listing of Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)", Press notice, 20 July 2010

⁷⁰ "Border fight to halt al-Qaeda", *Times*, 2 July 2010

⁷¹ Amnesty International, "[Images of missile and cluster munitions point to US role in fatal attack in Yemen](#)", Press release, 7 June 2010

⁷² 'Minister denies "direct" US role in fighting Al-Qa'idah in Yemen', al-Jazeera TV, 4 January 2009, translated by BBC Monitoring

potentially increasing regional polarisation and negating the Obama Administration's attempts to broker compromise on nuclear weapons; secondly, spreading conflict in the sensitive Horn of Africa region. Somali al-Qaeda-affiliated groups have pledged to support fighters in Yemen.⁷³ The potential for increased problems with piracy, already prevalent off the coast of Somalia, and associated threats to the supply of oil through the Suez Canal are high on the US agenda.

Some in the US, however, are fully prepared for another US military incursion. According to reports, the Pentagon has drawn up a list of fresh targets for air strikes, but has also offered the Administration the option of massive retaliation. The US military has good access to Yemen from its bases at Bahrain, Djibouti and Diego Garcia, in the Indian Ocean.

Some commentators have warned that for the US to intervene militarily in Yemen would be to fall into al-Qaeda's trap and to get entangled in a war which cannot be won, increasing polarisation in the region and enhancing support for al-Qaeda.⁷⁴

10.6 Unrest in 2011

Attempting to pre-empt the protests, President Saleh announced in January that he would not stand for another term and, at the beginning of February, said that he would not pass power to his son and offered a government of national unity. That did not quell the dissatisfaction with his rule, however. Starting on 11 February, thousands of people demonstrated regularly in cities including Sana'a, calling for a reduction in corruption and unemployment and demanding that the president should step down.

The protests have often been met by riot police or supporters of President Saleh armed with knives and batons, and on occasion the security forces have used live fire against the protesters leaving a total of about 30 people dead. On 8 March, for example, police opened fire on a large demonstration outside the university at Sana'a, injuring 80 and killing one.

On 10 March President Saleh announced that his government would amend the constitution of Yemen to move towards a parliamentary system, decentralise governmental functions and guarantee the separation of powers. Opposition representatives said that the proposal did not go far enough.

Violence in Yemen increased over the weekend of 12/13 March. In the centre of the capital and at the university, opposition demonstrators clashed with government supporters wielding clubs and knives. Hundreds of people were wounded. In the south of the country, where the separatist rebellion continues, six protesters were reported to have died after police opened fire with live ammunition on protests there.⁷⁵

The tide against President Saleh turned when a mass anti-government demonstration that took place on March 18 outside the main university in the capital Sanaa descended into violence when police and snipers on rooftops opened fire on unarmed anti-government protesters, killing over 100 people dead and wounding hundreds of others.⁷⁶ This unprovoked attack on the protesters led to a wave of resignations from Saleh's government and Cabinet. Ministers within the government resigned including Abdullah Alsaïdi, Yemen's

⁷³ 'UK to back US efforts in Yemen', *al Jazeera online*, 3 January 2010

⁷⁴ See for example Patrick Cockburn, 'Threats to Yemen prove America hasn't learned the lesson of history', *Independent*, 31 December 2009

⁷⁵ "Yemen protest attacked by police", *BBC News Online*, 14 March 2011

⁷⁶ "Yemeni president fires government", *BBC News Online*, 20 March 2011

ambassador to the UN in response to the security forces killing the anti-government protesters.⁷⁷ International condemnation for the attacks on the anti-government protesters was swift and direct. Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a statement calling for all aid to the Yemeni government be suspended until an investigation into the attack by security forces on protesters is fully concluded.⁷⁸

In a bid to alleviate political pressure for his removal, President Saleh sacked his entire Cabinet in response and declared a state of emergency. However, this was not enough to alleviate the mounting revolt within the political elite and international condemnation over his handling of the protests.

Pressure on Saleh forced him to make further concessions when he stated on March 23 that he would stand down at the end of 2011, a year early, but refused to resign immediately. Instead he stated his aim to hand over the Presidency to 'capable, responsible hands'.⁷⁹ Saleh also promised while meeting senior officials, military commanders and tribal leaders that his son would not replace him when his term ends.

The unrest in Yemen shows no signs of abating and support for Saleh appears to be diminishing rapidly. The March 18 shootings of anti-government protesters splintered his remaining support among the country's influential institutions, clerics, and tribal leaders. Most importantly, Saleh has lost the support of his half-brother, Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, commander of the northwest military district and head of the first armoured division, someone considered to be the second most powerful man in Yemen.⁸⁰ Al-Ahmar, who pledged to support and protect the protesters, was the first of a raft of defections amongst senior high-ranking military officers and shows that Saleh's power-base has shifted away from him. However, the President's son, Ahmed Ali Saleh still commands the elite military force of the Republican Guards and his nephews run the intelligence apparatus remain loyal to the President.⁸¹

Talks between the President and his opponents reportedly broke down when, on Monday 28th, President Saleh announced he had rescinded his offer to step down at the end of the year.⁸² In the face of deteriorating security, militants believed to belong to Yemen's active al-Qa'ida offshoot took control of several key buildings in two towns in the southern province of Abyan, including an ammunition factory.

10.7 Basic information

The Republic of Yemen is situated mainly in the south of the Arabian peninsula. It was formed in 1990 by the amalgamation of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). The YAR (from 1967 also known as North Yemen) had been proclaimed after the Imam Muhammad was overthrown in 1962. The PDRY, comprising Aden and the former Protectorate of South Arabia, had been formed in 1967 by the Marxist National Liberation Front. In 1994 a civil war erupted after Ali Salim al-Baid declared an independent Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south. The capital is San'a. Arabic is the language.

⁷⁷ "Senior Yemeni officials resign after 52 demonstrators killed", *Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 2011

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch, "[Yemen: Suspend aid after attacks on Protesters](#)", Human Rights Watch press statement, press release 12 March 2011

⁷⁹ "Thousands in Yemen march against Saleh", *al Jazeera online*, 25 March 2011

⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, "[Conflict Risk Alert: Yemen](#)", 23 March 2011

⁸¹ "Yemen's President on brink as army switches sides to join rebels", *Independent*, 22 March 2011

⁸² "Yemen leader scraps offer to quit", *Independent*, 28 March 2011

Area and Population

Area: 536,869 sq km

Population (mid-2008): 22,917,485

Population density (mid-2008): 42.7 per sq km

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2008): 62.9 (males 61.3; females 64.6)

Finance

GDP in current prices (2008): US \$26,576m. (\$1,160 per head)

Real GDP growth (2008): 3.9%

Inflation (annual average, 2008): 19.0%

Currency: Yemeni riyal (YR)

Government and Politics

Head of State: President Field Marshal Ali Abdullah Saleh

Head of Government: Prime Minister Ali Muhammad Mujawar

Last election: Presidential, 20 September 2006

Next election: Legislative, due April 2011⁸³

11 Arms sales to the region

11.1 UK sales

See the table in the annex

11.2 UK revokes licences

Responding to questions in Parliament about arms exports to Bahrain, the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, said that “Any exports will be looked at under the strict criteria that we always apply in this country.”⁸⁴ On 18 February France suspended exports of security equipment to Libya and Bahrain,⁸⁵ and, later on the same day, the UK government revoked the Bahrain and Libya export licences.⁸⁶ Mr Cameron said of the revocations:

In some cases those assessments you will get right and in other cases you have to revoke export licences as we have done very rapidly.⁸⁷

11.3 EU arms exports

Using data from the European Commission’s annual report on exports of military equipment,⁸⁸ the European Network Against the Arms Trade has shown that arms exports

⁸³ Yemen, in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons. Retrieved 10 March 2011

⁸⁴ HC Deb 17 February 2011, c1137

⁸⁵ “France suspends weapon sale to Libya and Bahrain”, *Agence France Presse*, 18 February 2011

⁸⁶ “Crackdown on arms exports to Bahrain”, *Independent*, 19 February 2011

⁸⁷ “David Cameron’s Cairo visit overshadowed by defence tour”, *Guardian*, 21 February 2011

⁸⁸ European Commission, *Twelfth Annual Report according to article 8(2) of Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment*, OJC 9/1, 13 January 2011

from the European Union to North Africa increased sharply between 2008 and 2009 (the latest figures available):

EU arms exports, € 000s

	2008	2009
Algeria	351,000	275,000
Egypt	173,000	293,000
Libya	250,000	343,000
Morocco	346,000	1,360,000
Tunisia	36,000	52,000
Totals	1,156,000	2,323,000

The report also showed that in 2009 the largest EU arms exporters to these five countries were:

France - €816 million ; Netherlands - €557 million ; Italy - €303 million ; Germany - €180 million ; Malta - €80 million ; Bulgaria - €57 million ; Spain - €50 million ; UK - €44 million ; Belgium- €43 million; and Poland - €43 million.⁸⁹

12 Assets

Egypt

Estimates of the wealth of the Mubarak family have ranged from two or three billion dollars to \$75 billion, and it is not clear what basis in evidence these estimates have. The transitional Egyptian government is pursuing ministers from the previous government and has arrested several, including former interior minister Habib el-Adly and Ahmed Ezz, a former minister and steel magnate. Mr Ezz is said to have received an excessively favourable deal on taking over a state-owned steel company, then to have used connections in the National Democratic Party to protect its near-monopoly status. Ahmed Maghrabi, a former housing minister is also said to be under investigation over the sale of former state-owned land to his family’s property development company.

So far, there have been no indications that the ruling family is to be investigated by Egyptian authorities. This has led activists in Egypt to suspect that a deal was done between the transitional government and Hosni Mubarak- immunity in return for stepping down.

Egypt has sent requests to European and other governments to freeze the assets of several regime insiders. Switzerland has moved to comply, saying that it has found “tens of millions of dollars” belonging to Mubarak family members and five associates.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ “EU arms sales to North Africa double in one year”, Press notice, Campaign Against the Arms Trade, 8 February 2011

⁹⁰ “Pressure grows over Mubarak funds”, *Financial Times*, 21 February 2011

On 14 February Foreign Secretary William Hague said that the UK was in discussions with EU partners on the request from the Egyptian government to freeze assets connected to associates of former president Mubarak:

We have also received a request from the Egyptian Government to freeze the assets of several former Egyptian officials. We will of course co-operate with this request, working with EU and international partners as we have done in the case of Tunisia. If there is any evidence of illegality or misuse of state assets, we will take firm and prompt action.⁹¹

In the United Kingdom, the Serious Organised Crime Agency is investigating assets linked to seven senior figures from the former regime, including two politicians, one of whom is alleged to have £4.5 billion in assets.⁹²

On 18 January, four days after he stepped down, Switzerland instructed banks to freeze accounts of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. A few days later, the European Union froze Ben Ali's assets across the EU.

It was not until these rulers lost power that their assets were frozen, although the level of corruption in their regimes was well known before their departure. The sheer size of assets held abroad by the former rulers could be taken as prima facie "evidence of illegality or misuse of state assets." This suggests that the perceived strategic interest in maintaining good relations with friendly regimes in difficult regions outweighed the interest in fighting corruption in these cases.

Libya

The Qaddafi family is reported to have assets of "billions" of dollars. According to an analysis of the Libyan government's revenues and spending, "several billion dollars" a year are unaccounted for, and have probably been stolen by the Qaddafi.⁹³ It is known that the family has invested in property in London. Saif al-Islam, Qaddafi's son, bought a house in Hampstead for £10 million in 2009.⁹⁴ Many Qaddafi family assets are believed to be held in accounts in Dubai and other Gulf countries, and in South East Asia, where they are easier to hide.

The Libyan state has also invested large amounts of sovereign wealth overseas through the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA). In 2010, the LIA bought 3% of Pearson plc, the publisher of the *Financial Times*, and owns commercial property in London.

The LIA has also acquired assets in Italy, including a stake in the football club Juventus and the bank Unicredit. Muammar Qaddafi and Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi are known to have a close relationship and the LIA has collaborated on joint ventures with Fininvest, Berlusconi's major holding company.

Sanctions in February 2011

The United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1970 on Saturday 26 February. The Resolution demanded an end to the violence in Libya and decided to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC). It also imposed, under the mandatory provisions of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, an immediate arms embargo on Libya, a travel ban and an

⁹¹ HC Deb 14 Feb 2011, c715

⁹² "Hunt for Cairo elite's billions targets UK", *Sunday Times*, 20 February 2011

⁹³ "Gaddafis' hidden billions", *Guardian*, 22 February 2011

⁹⁴ "Gaddafis' hidden billions", *Guardian*, 22 February 2011

asset freeze on designated persons, who are listed in an annex to the resolution.⁹⁵ The travel ban includes several members of the regime, while the assets freeze includes only close family members of Muammer Qaddafi

It is reported that the resolution was drafted mainly by the UK mission to the UN, in consultation with the French. These are the only permanent members of the Security Council to have signed the Rome Statute setting up the ICC. This is the first time that the Security Council has voted unanimously to refer a state to the ICC, and as such is a victory for the UK and France.⁹⁶

Further measures, particularly the establishment of a no-fly zone, were not included in the resolution as this would have delayed a decision or made unanimity less likely. The usefulness of a no-fly zone has been widely questioned. It has been reported that the US tried to get broader authorisation that would permit military action to protect civilians and installations, inserting the phrase “all means necessary”, traditionally code for military action. The resolution does mandate “all measures necessary” to secure the prompt and safe delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need.

On Friday 25 February, the EU agreed a package of sanctions:

- An arms embargo
- An asset freeze on Colonel Qaddafi and his family and his associates
- A ban on all travel to Europe

The measures were to be agreed on Monday 28 and effective on Tuesday 1 March.

The UK, along with the EU, aims to go further than the UN resolutions in sanctioning the Qaddafi regime. The Government already froze the assets of the Qaddafi family, and has prevented the export of £900 million-worth of Libyan banknotes, printed in the UK, to Libya. An export control order banning such exports for the coming year has now been put in place; it is reported that Customs officials used delaying tactics to prevent the currency leaving the country until the official ban had been enacted.⁹⁷

13 Energy

There have been steady increases in oil prices since autumn 2010. Against this background, the political crises in North Africa and the Middle East have probably boosted prices more quickly. Egypt is a small producer of oil and has significant gas production, but it is Egypt’s control of the Suez Canal and the oil pipeline that runs alongside it that are significant enough factors for fear of disruption to lead to a price rise.

Bahrain is not a significant hydrocarbon producer but unrest there could still oil prices, because investors worry about the potential for unrest in Bahrain, which has a significant Sunni/Shia element, to spread to neighbouring areas in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia’s east coast is the location of the biggest oil fields, and large concentrations of the kingdom’s Shia Muslims live there.

⁹⁵ [“In swift, decisive action, Security Council imposes tough measures on Libyan regime, adopting resolution 1970 in wake of crackdown on protesters”](#), United Nations Security Council Press release, 26 February 2011

⁹⁶ “Rendezvous with history as Security Council agrees on Libya”, *Financial Times*, 28 February 2011

⁹⁷ “Chancellor freezes Gaddafi assets”, *Financial Times*, 28 February 2011

The unrest in Libya has had a far sharper effect on prices. On Monday 21 February, Brent Crude, the European benchmark oil price, rose 3.1 percent to \$105.70 a barrel, its highest level in more than two years. On 2 March, the price of Brent crude hit \$115.

Libya produces some 2% of world oil supplies and has the largest proven reserves in Africa and the ninth-largest in the world. So far, increased output from Saudi Arabia has covered the loss caused by reductions in Libya output. A multinational meeting was held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to discuss the oil market on 22 February.

Italian firm ENI, the biggest foreign oil company in Libya, along with BP, Shell, Statoil and Total have evacuated staff from Libya. Some oil was still being produced in Libya at the beginning of March, but the flow could dry up completely if the situation gets worse, according to oil company executives. BP had a significant presence in Libya, with 140 employees, including 40 expatriates, mainly in Tripoli. BP has suspended imminent drilling operations in Libya because of the crisis.⁹⁸

Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States are the most important group of producers and those countries will be watched closely by energy markets. Iran and Algeria are also significant suppliers of energy, and further unrest in any of these countries could push the oil price sharply higher.

The importing country most at risk is probably Italy, which obtains 24% of its total consumption from Libya, compared with 10% in France and 3% in the UK.⁹⁹ ENI has worked in partnership with the Qaddafi regime continuously, even when Libya was subject to United Nations sanctions. A new government might not view the relationship between ENI and Qaddafi favourably.

On the other hand, energy specialist Professor Dieter Helm has argued that the crisis might reduce prices in the longer term:

More democratic and representative governments might be rather better at getting the oil and gas out than the incumbent dictatorships which are being overthrown.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ "Crude prices soar as anxiety over Libya, its oil exports grows", *Washington Post*, 22 February 2011

⁹⁹ Energy Information Administration, quoted in "Unrest and Libya's energy industry", 22 February, Stratfor.com

¹⁰⁰ "Arab protests pose energy threat", *BBC News Online*, 22 February 2011

Oil production 2009

Country	Thousand barrels per day
Iran	4216
Iraq	2482
Kuwait	2481
Oman	810
Qatar	1345
Saudi Arabia	9713
Syria	376
United Arab Emirates	2599
Yemen	298
Algeria	1811
Egypt	742
Libya	1652
Sudan	490
Tunisia	86
United Kingdom	1448

Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy June 2010

There may be a noticeable effect of the crisis on the price of petrol in the UK. Drivers will have to pay a 5p rise in fuel duty on 1 April. Retail Motor Industry, a trade association, estimated at the end of February that the latest rise in crude prices could add a further 5p a litre to the cost of fuel.¹⁰¹

14 UK government visits to the region

William Hague visited Tunisia, Jordan, Yemen, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates during the week of 7 February. Mr Hague described the discussions in a statement:

I held talks in Tunis with interim Prime Minister Ghannouchi, who is overseeing ambitious plans to open up Tunisia's political system, reform its constitution, revive its economy and prepare for free elections. I strongly welcomed these intentions and the steps that have been taken to sign up to international conventions on human rights. I met some inspiring young students whose motivations were a desire for the freedom, employment and human dignity that we enjoy in Europe. I believe that there is now a clear opportunity for a closer relationship between the UK and Tunisia. I discussed how the UK might support projects in Tunisia through our new Arab partnership fund, with new funding announced to this House on 1 February, which will support economic and political development across the region.

In Egypt, as in Tunisia, there is now a precious moment of opportunity for the people of Egypt to achieve a stable and democratic future. Yesterday, I spoke to the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, and to the Prime Minister, Ahmed Shafik. I

¹⁰¹ "Petrol may rise by 10p a litre over unrest in Middle East", *Guardian*, 24 February 2011

welcomed the statements of the higher military council promising a peaceful transition to civilian and democratic government, new elections and a reform of the Egyptian constitution.

Tahrir Square is calm today after yesterday's announcements of the dissolution of Parliament and the suspension of the constitution. I encouraged the Egyptian Government to make further moves to accommodate the views of opposition figures and was pleased to hear from Prime Minister Shafik that members of the Opposition should be included in a reshuffled Cabinet during the week. We would also like to see a clear timetable for free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections and a genuinely inclusive dialogue about the country's future. We welcome the military council's commitment to all regional and international obligations and treaties.

Egypt is a sovereign country and we must not seek to dictate who runs its affairs. But we have been clear throughout this crisis that it is in our national interest as well as that of Egypt for it to seek to make a successful transition to a broad-based Government and an open and democratic society, and to an Egypt which carries its full and due weight as a leading nation in the Middle East and in the world. I believe we have been right to speak particularly strongly against repression or violence against protesters, journalists and human rights activists. We call now for the release of those detained during the demonstrations and steps to end the state of emergency, which curtails basic rights. The UK will always uphold the right to peaceful protest and freedom of speech.

Looking to the future, it is vital and urgent to work with the European Union and other nations to support economic development and more open and flexible political systems in the region. We have begun discussions with the United States about co-ordinating our assistance. The Prime Minister discussed this with President Obama at the weekend, as I did with Secretary Clinton. We can help with the building blocks of open societies, knowing as we do that a stable democracy requires much more than just holding elections. We are also working closely with the noble Baroness, Lady Ashton, and her officials. A task force has been set up in Brussels to put together a plan for immediate assistance and long-term support for Tunisia, and a plan of long-term economic and institutional assistance for Egypt.

The UK Government are in close communication with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to ensure that the international financial institutions are doing all they can to provide appropriate and timely support to Egypt. We have also received a request from the Egyptian Government to freeze the assets of several former Egyptian officials. We will of course co-operate with this request, working with EU and international partners, as we have done in the case of Tunisia. If there is any evidence of illegality or misuse of state assets, we will take firm and prompt action. My right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will discuss economic support and possible freezing measures relating to assets with European Union Finance Ministers tonight and tomorrow in Brussels, and has requested a discussion at ECOFIN tomorrow.

I hope the House will also join me in paying tribute to the staff of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London and those who, over the last three weeks, have calmly and professionally run our embassy within yards of Tahrir Square while assisting the departure of thousands of British nationals from Egypt, and to the Ministry of Defence and the UK Border Agency. We will keep our travel advice under constant review.

The changes taking place in the region provide opportunities that should be seized, not feared. Egypt is a nation of more than 80 million people who should soon have the

opportunity to choose their president and their representatives democratically. In Tunisia, more than 10 million people may now finally have the opportunity to unleash the economic potential that their geographic location and talented population put within their grasp, and to enjoy democratic freedoms.

However, this moment is not without risk. Nowhere is that more apparent than in Yemen, where I spent a day in meetings with President Saleh and members of the Opposition. I had three clear messages for the Government there. First, we want them to make progress on national dialogue with the opposition parties, including agreement on changes to the constitution and action to address the grievances of people in Yemen. Secondly, we have asked for and are now examining a prioritised and budgeted development plan for poverty reduction from the Yemeni Government so that we can establish a multi-donor trust fund for Yemen and be confident that funds are properly used. These issues will be the main focus of the next Friends of Yemen meeting in the coming months. We also look for intensified Yemeni efforts against the al-Qaeda threat on its territory. I know the House will salute the courage of our embassy staff in Yemen, who face the highest threat of any of our posts overseas and have twice been attacked by terrorists in the last year.

There is also a serious risk that Governments will draw the wrong conclusion from instability in the Middle East and pull back from efforts to restart the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. We should draw the opposite conclusion, which is that we need to see an urgent return to talks so that people's legitimate aspirations for two states can be fulfilled through negotiations. Together with the recent steps that the Jordanian Government have taken to promote domestic reform, this was the main subject of my discussions with King Abdullah of Jordan. In a region of uncertainty, the certainty provided by an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians could be of immense significance.

Our Government are a friend to both Israelis and Palestinians. We are calling for both sides to show the visionary boldness to return to talks and make genuine compromises. Talks need to take place on the basis of clear parameters. In our view, the entire international community, including the United States, should now support 1967 borders as being the basis for resumed negotiations. The result should be two states, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both, and a fair settlement for refugees.

Finally, we must not allow our attention to be diverted from the grave danger of Iran's nuclear programme. Iran claimed that it supported protesters in Egypt, but denied its own people the right of free expression today and placed opposition leaders under house arrest. Meanwhile, the threat from its nuclear programme has not diminished. Given Iran's refusal to engage in genuine negotiations over its nuclear programme at the recent talks in Istanbul, we are now in talks with international partners about steps to increase legitimate peaceful pressure on Iran to comply with UN Security Council resolutions and the requirements of the IAEA.

All the issues that I have described underline how important the region is to our national interests. That is why our Government began from our first day in office a major, long-term effort to intensify Britain's links with the countries of the Middle East, north Africa and the Gulf-in diplomacy, in trade, in defence and in education, health and civil society-as part of a distinctive British foreign policy towards the region.

I reaffirmed last week to leaders in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates that we are committed to intensifying our engagement on foreign policy issues and will step up over the coming months our discussions with the Gulf states on Iran's nuclear programme. We will also pursue firm engagement with countries where we do not see eye to eye but have a considerable interest in edging them towards a more

constructive role, a process that I began when I visited Damascus two weeks ago for talks with President Assad.

At this time of opportunity and uncertainty, the UK will be an active and distinctive voice in the Middle East. We will send a constant message about how important it is to move in the direction of more open and flexible political systems and sound economic development, while respecting the different cultures, histories and traditions of each nation. Although we cannot set the pace of this change and must respect each country's right to find its own way, we will be a reliable friend and partner to all those looking to do so and a staunch defender of the UK's interests in the region.¹⁰²

David Cameron arrived in Cairo for a visit on 21 February. This was the first visit of a world leader to Egypt since the fall of Hosni Mubarak and described as “unusual” for a western leader to visit a country so much in flux. Mr Cameron was accompanied by senior representatives from BAE Systems, Qinetiq, Cobham Group, Thales UK, Babcock International and Atkins.¹⁰³ The Labour Party spokesman on defence Kevan Jones criticised the timing of the tour:

The defence industry is crucially important to Britain but many people will be surprised that the prime minister in this week of all weeks may be considering bolstering arms sales to the Middle East.¹⁰⁴

In Egypt, Mr Cameron was due to meet representatives both of the transitional government, including acting head of state and defence minister Mohammed Tantawi, and of opposition groups. Talks with the Muslim Brotherhood were not planned, however.¹⁰⁵ The trip had been planned for some time, and Egypt was added as a destination after the unrest there.

When Mr Cameron arrived in Kuwait, he made a speech to the parliament there in which he expressed regret for the policies followed by Britain and the west in the region. He said that the assumption that the Muslim world was unsuited to democracy amounted to “prejudice bordering on racism.” He went on:

For decades, some have argued that stability required highly controlling regimes, and that reform and openness would put that stability at risk. Countries like Britain faced a choice between our interests and our values. And to be honest, we should acknowledge that sometimes we have made such calculations in the past. But I say that is a false choice. As recent events have confirmed, denying people their basic rights does not preserve stability, rather the reverse.¹⁰⁶

Mr Cameron also said that democratic reform required “patience” and could proceed at different speeds, in what was interpreted as a concession to conservative Gulf monarchies.

¹⁰² HC Deb 14 February 2011, c714-31

¹⁰³ “Cameron calls for move to democracy”, *Financial Times*, 22 February 2011

¹⁰⁴ “David Cameron's Cairo visit overshadowed by defence tour”, *Guardian*, 21 February 2011

¹⁰⁵ “David Cameron arrives for Egypt visit”, *BBC News Online*, 21 February 2011

¹⁰⁶ “Cameron regrets role of west in dictatorships”, *Financial Times*, 23 February 2011

Arms sales statistics

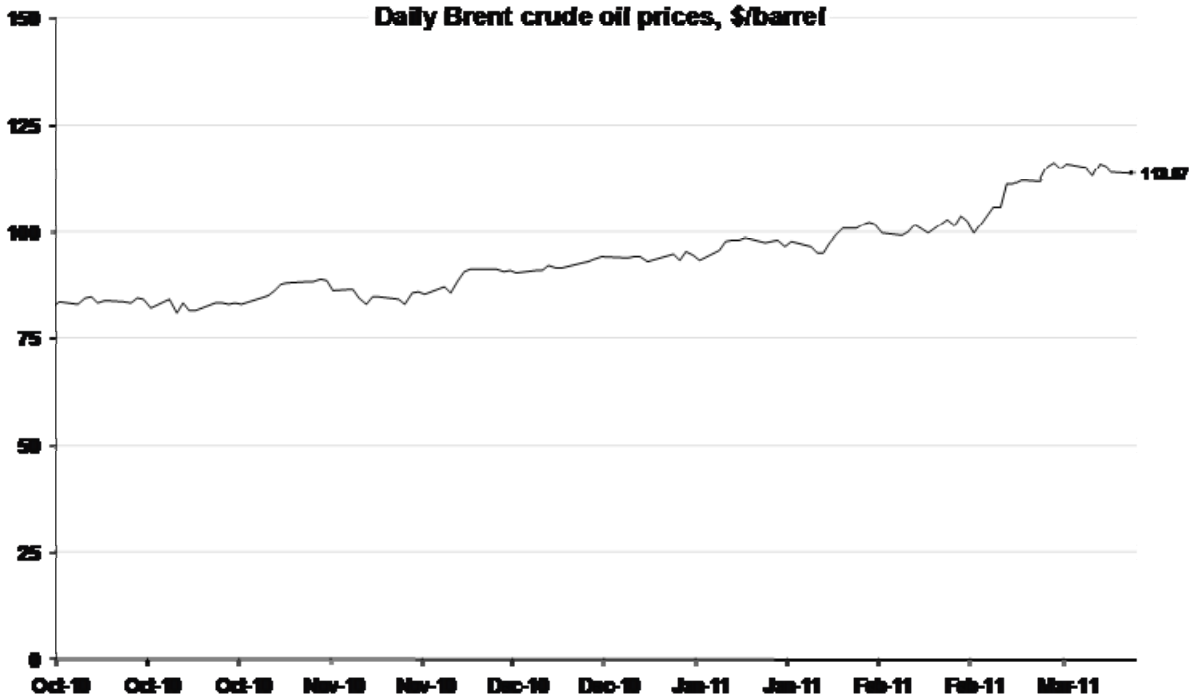
UK strategic export licences granted for exports to the Middle East

Country	All strategic export licenses	Total value of military & military/other licences	Total military licences	Examples of products sold Q4 2009 to End Q3 2010
Algeria	270,262,166	270,008,961	5	Combat helicopters
Bahrain	6,361,444	3,063,425	45	Aircraft parts; assault rifles; tear gas; ammunition
Egypt	16,804,843	4,007,966	31	Bombs, missiles, body armour,
Iran	424,174,977	0	0	Non-military such as civil aircraft components, imaging cameras
Iraq	476,555,614	4,772,784	31	Body armour, weapon sights, gun parts
Israel	26,733,874	4,639,459	91	Armoured plate, gas mask filters, signalling equipment, radar equipment
Jordan	20,972,889	11,994,142	51	Armoured vehicles, gun parts, gas mask filters
Kuwait	14,487,907	6,473,940	38	Anti-riot shields; patrol boats; military software
Lebanon	6,206,142	784,282	5	Body armour; shotguns
Libya	214,846,615	33,899,335	25	Ammunition; crowd-control equipment; tear gas

Country	All strategic export licenses	Total value of military & military/other licences	Total military licences	Examples of products sold Q4 2009 to End Q3 2010
Morocco	2,165,881	1,149,102	18	Bomb-making parts; 'swarming' ropes; thermal imaging equipment
Oman	13,986,422	9,361,120	122	Combat aircraft parts; parts for unmanned 'drones'; tank parts
Qatar	13,122,884	3,875,753	22	Crowd-control ammunition; military cargo vehicles; missile parts
Saudi Arabia	139,718,960	64,311,296	98	4-wheel drive vehicles; armoured personnel carriers, air surveillance equipment
Syria	2,676,460	30,000	1	Small arms ammunition
Tunisia	4,504,745	131,273	10	Radar equipment; gun parts
United Arab Emirates	210,415,462	15,890,384	152	Military software; heavy machine guns; weapon sights
Yemen	285,247	160,245	4	Body armour; ammunition
Total	1,864,282,532	434,553,467	749	

SOURCE: FCO, compiled by the Guardian

Oil prices



Source: Financial Times; IAG Library electronic holdings