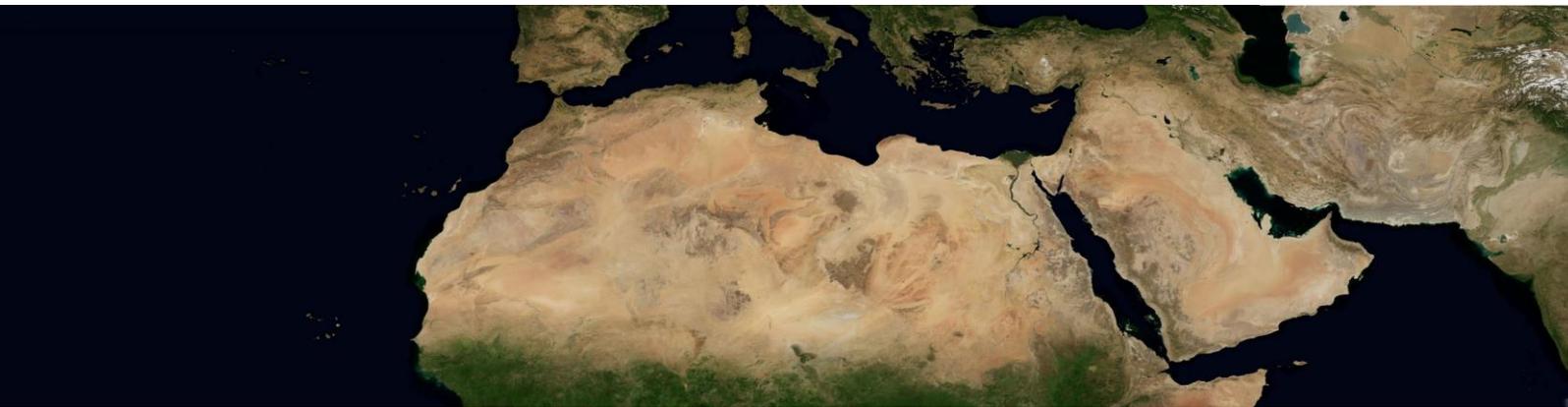




THE INKERMAN GROUP



MENA EXAMINER

28 March 2013

The Inkerman MENA Examiner is an informative weekly assessment of developments taking place across the Middle East and North Africa, providing travellers and businesses operating in these countries with a comprehensive overview of regional risk.

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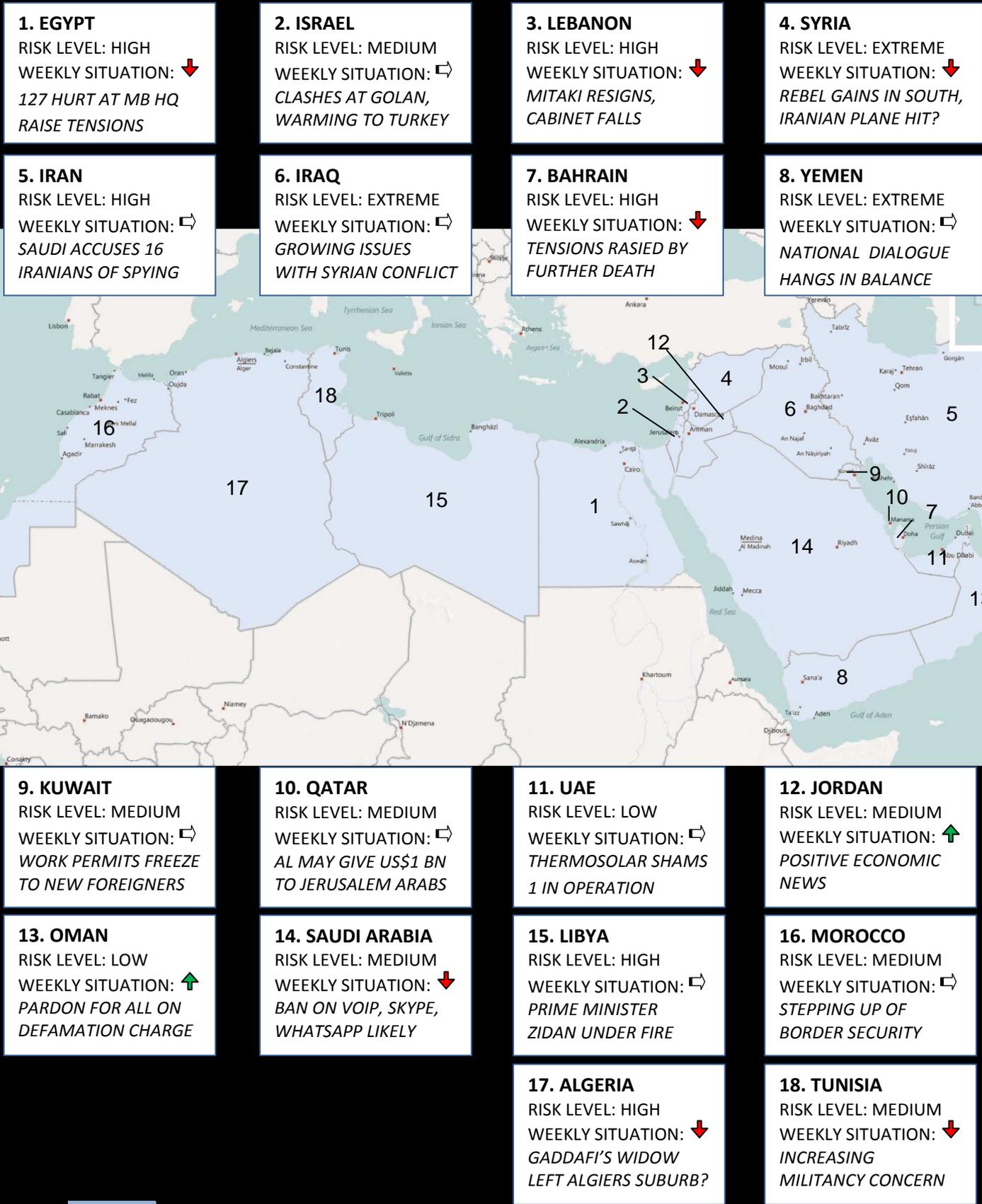
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REGIONAL FORM AT A GLANCE – 28 MARCH 2013

KEY: ↑ IMPROVEMENT
↓ DETERIORATION
↔ UNCHANGED

In what is being called the 'Arab Spring' the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa are continuing to demand reforms from their governments. This has caused mass protests and unrest as well as the potential for sweeping changes across the region influenced by social, economic and political factors.



EGYPT		SITUATION: Deterioration
		EVACUATION RISK RATING: MEDIUM
		PERSONNEL RISK RATING: HIGH

SITUATION TO DATE:	<p>As the fallout from the 22 March 2013, “Battle of Moqattam” continues, a plethora of accusations and legal charges have emerged pertaining to clashes between opposition activists and Muslim Brotherhood (MB) supporters. During what can only be described as an all out riot cars were set alight and local shops smashed, stone and Molotov cocktails were also thrown at rival crowds whilst riot police used tear gas to disperse the crowds. The actions resulted in 127 injuries, with one person who remains in a critical condition. Egypt's opposition umbrella group The National Salvation Front (NSF) condemned the violence at the MB’s Headquarters but maintains that it was the latter that initiated the country's cycle of violence. The NSF has called for a mass rally in front of the High Court building in Cairo on 29 March 2013, to demonstrate solidarity with five high profile anti-government activists who were summoned by the Prosecutor General on charges related to violent clashes, after the MB accused the Dostour Party, the Wafd Party, the Popular Current, the April 6th Youth Movement, the National Association for Change and the Kefaya Movement of being behind the calls for violence. Charges have also been filed with the Public Prosecution against former presidential candidates Mohamed ElBaradei, Hamdeen Sabbahi and Khaled Ali. Ironically, Ali was one of those injured during the clashes, in events which have now taken the political animosity between the rival camps to an all time low.</p>
THE WAY AHEAD:	<p>The arrests have been perceived as a crackdown on the opposition by President Mohammed Morsi, who threatened on 24 March 2013, to take unspecified action to ‘protect’ the country from violence linked to ongoing anti-government protests. The immediate outcome is likely to be a strengthening of a draft law that further restricts the right to demonstrate. On 27 March 2013, the Shura Council has suggested a bill which prohibits citizens from organising protests that “pose a risk to the nation's security”. As a result organisers must now submit a written notification to police three days in advance of the planned demonstration. The proposed law also stipulates that protesters must be 200 meters away from government, legislative and judicial buildings and anyone found guilty of violating the law will be sentenced to hard labour in prison and fined at least US\$7,347</p>

ISRAEL		SITUATION: Unchanged
		EVACUATION RISK RATING: MEDIUM
		PERSONNEL RISK RATING: HIGH

SITUATION:	<p>On 24 March 2013, a small skirmish broke out along the disputed border in the Golan Heights, after a Syrian machine gun-nest opened fire, twice within twenty-four hours, on Israeli patrols in the area. The attack is only the latest border skirmish in the area, which has continuously flared up throughout the Syrian Civil War. Syria claims all of the Golan Heights, though the vast majority of it has been occupied by Israel since 1981 and, though it is believed that the machine-gun nest on which Israel fired was a Syrian Government post, the Syrian Civil War has greatly increased the risk of fighting there as rebel groups, some of whom have been labelled as Islamic jihadist and terror organisations, also decry Israel’s occupation of the area.</p>
THE WAY AHEAD:	<p>The new Israeli Cabinet, which does not include any ultra-Orthodox parties for the first time since Yitzhak Rabin loss of the Prime Minister’s post in 1977, has also begun to make significant moves towards reconciliation with Turkey. On 22 March 2013, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologised to Turkey over the 2010 raid of a Turkish flotilla attempting to break the Israeli naval blockade of the Gaza strip in a phone conversation with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The raid resulted in the death of nine Turkish citizens including a Turkish-American dual citizen, severely poisoning relations between the two erstwhile allies. The souring of relations saw Turkey shift more support to Hamas and it remains unclear whether Turkey will soften its tone on support for Hamas in favour of improved Israeli-Turkish relations. The Israeli efforts to reach out to Turkey over the last week are widely seen as key to its attempts to avoid becoming the future target of the Syrian opposition, which is highly reliant on Turkish support, should the opposition succeed in overthrowing Syrian President Bashar al Assad</p>

LEBANON		SITUATION: Deterioration
		EVACUATION RISK RATING: HIGH
		PERSONNEL RISK RATING: HIGH

SITUATION TO DATE:	Lebanon continued to flirt with instability throughout the past week as negotiations over reforming the nation's electoral laws remained frozen. The paralysing effect this has had on society became even clearer when Lebanon's Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, announced on 22 March 2013 that he was stepping down. It is widely believed that President Michel Suleiman will support him continuing as caretaker Prime Minister until the next set of elections. However, whether or not those will go ahead as scheduled has become increasingly questioned in recent weeks. Reports also emerged throughout the week that both the March 8 Coalition and the March 14 coalition were working to ensure that they would be able to nominate a different candidate to be caretaker Prime Minister. The effects of Lebanon's instability have continued to wreck havoc on the lives of Lebanese citizens, particularly those who live in the agrarian Beqaa Valley, which borders Syria. The Beqaa Valley is also an important supply route and has also been the site of numerous protests against trucks driving to Syria to deliver supplies to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al Assad, who is bitterly hated by Lebanon's Sunni population and supported by its Shi'a and Alawite populations.
WAY AHEAD:	The most dramatic border incident of the past week was the kidnapping of Hussein Kamel Jaafar from the Beqaa Valley town of Arsal which has led to a spate of sectarian fighting in the region as well as reportedly leading some minor cross-border skirmishes. Hussein Kamel Jaafar is a member of the Beqaa Valley's influential Shi'a Jaafar clan and his family members announced on 28 March 2013, that they had received confirmation that he was being held by a Syrian opposition group. Hussein Jaafar's kidnapping also led to a spate of revenge abductions with the Jaafar clan kidnapping nine Sunni Muslims throughout the week, though they announced they would no longer do so on 28 March 2013, as they stated the motive behind the kidnapping was financial rather than sectarian though.

SYRIA		SITUATION: Deterioration
		EVACUATION RISK RATING: EXTREME
		PERSONNEL RISK RATING: EXTREME

SITUATION:	On 28 March 2013, two high profile incidents illustrated the deteriorating security situation around Damascus. Firstly, the Free Syrian Army claims it struck an Iranian military cargo plane as it approached Damascus International Airport (DAM). The second event came only hours later in the form of mortar shells striking the Damascus University campus in the Baramkeh District which at the time of writing had killed fifteen people. It remains unclear whether the plane crashed of its own accord, as a video was posted on YouTube purportedly showing the low-flying plane catching fire above the airport, but DAM appears to be functioning normally. Syrian President Bashar al Assad gains weapons from Iran in his fight against rebel forces so the report is highly likely, despite the obvious denial from the Syrian state news agency SANA. Elsewhere, Syrian rebels claim to have captured Gharaaz Prison in the southern border town of Derra on 28 March 2013, freeing at least 1,500 prisoners, whilst Islamist fighters from Jabhat al Nusra claim they have executed four Alawite officers in the Qadi Askar eastern suburb of the capital, after rape accusations.
THE WAY AHEAD:	Syrian rebels have been buoyed following the opening of their first embassy abroad in Qatar, the formal backing for the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) and its new leader US-educated Prime Minister Ghassan Hitto at the Arab League meeting in Doha. A new opposition group, based from al Assad's own Alawite sect, also announced support for the SNC. Hitto's election shows the increasing legitimacy of the rebel cause, however, a number of independent rebel factions remain. Hitto will need substantial funding to effectively organise a centralised governing structure in "free Syrian territories". From a strategic perspective rebels continue to score key advances in the south, including seizing the 38th division Air Defence Base, in Saida on the Damascus-Amman Highway as well as a twenty-five kilometre strip of land to the Golan Heights. Rebels are also increasingly embedding themselves in outlying suburbs of Damascus and will be difficult to root out despite the army's efforts. The continuation of car bombs nationwide is likely with the most recent taking place in the capitals north-eastern district of Rukn al-Din which killed three on 26 March 2013.

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