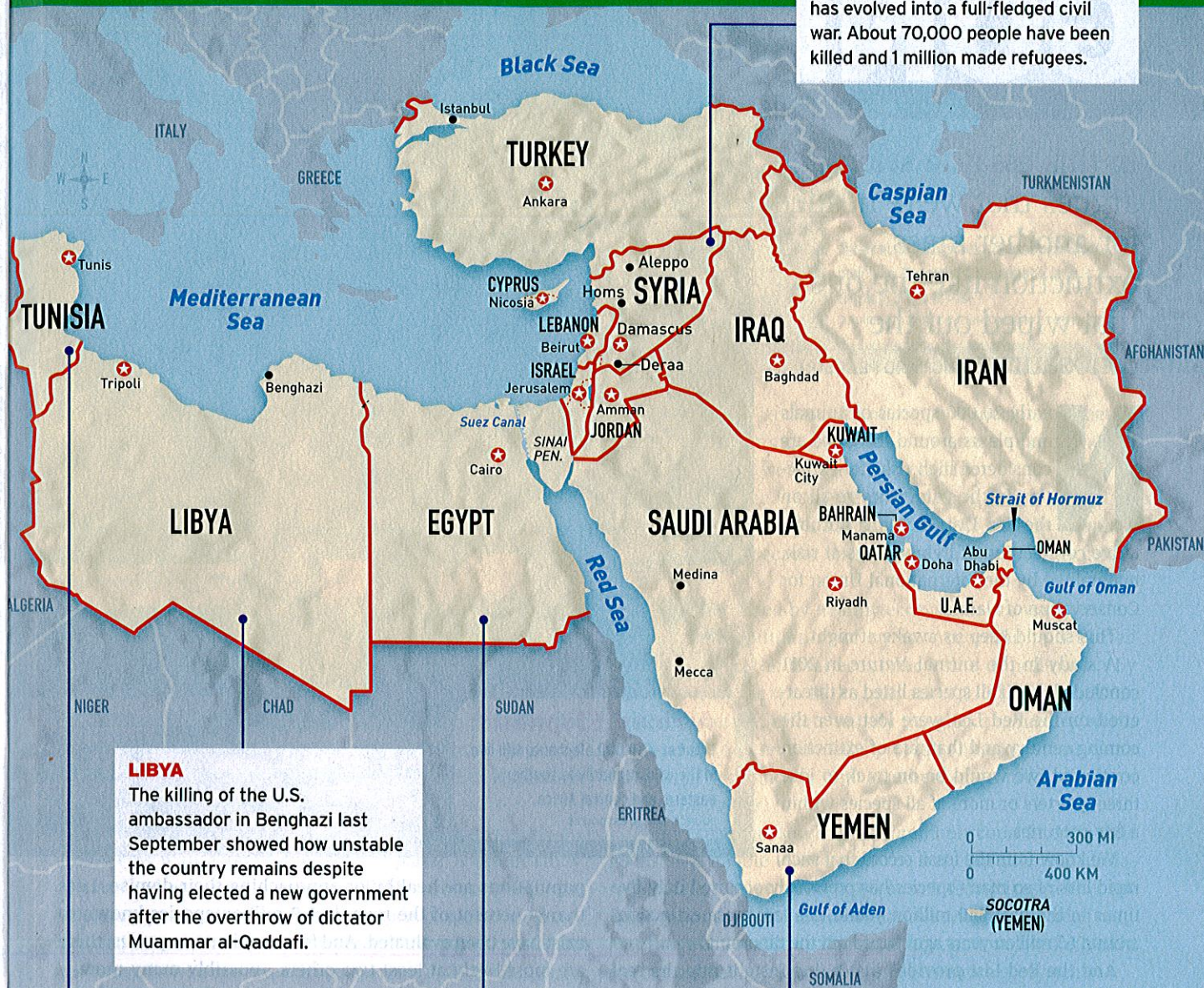


ARAB SPRING UPDATE

It's been more than two years since a series of popular uprisings in the Middle East began toppling autocratic regimes in the region. Here's where things stand in a few key countries.

SYRIA

What began as peaceful protests against President Assad in March 2011 has evolved into a full-fledged civil war. About 70,000 people have been killed and 1 million made refugees.



LIBYA

The killing of the U.S. ambassador in Benghazi last September showed how unstable the country remains despite having elected a new government after the overthrow of dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi.

TUNISIA

In the nation where the Arab Spring began, the assassination of an opposition leader sparked clashes between demonstrators and police in February. The turmoil threatens the transition to democracy after the 2011 ouster of the autocratic president.

EGYPT

The rule of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi has been marked by chaos and instability. The once-mighty tourism industry has collapsed since the 2011 ouster of longtime President Hosni Mubarak, and Egypt's economy is in crisis.

YEMEN

Hailed as a model of peaceful transition after its strongman president stepped down in 2012, Yemen is struggling with a collapsing economy, a separatist movement, and an increasingly powerful local Al Qaeda group.

OTHER COUNTRIES:

The U.S. remains concerned that the violence in Syria will destabilize neighboring **LEBANON**, which has a long history of sectarian violence. **JORDAN**, a key U.S. ally, has sought to quiet protests by introducing a constitutional court and promising to give a new legislature more authority.

Who's Who in Syria

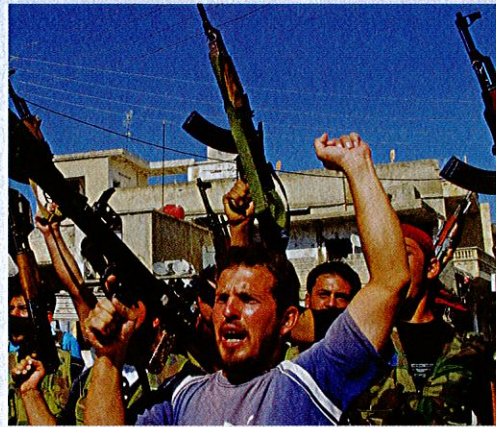
Key players in the civil war

BASHAR AL-ASSAD (right), Syria's dictatorial president, inherited the post in 1999 from his father, Hafez al-Assad, who ruled ruthlessly after he took power in a 1970 coup. Despite early hopes that the younger Assad might allow democratic reforms, he has cracked down on dissent as harshly as his father.

SUNNI MUSLIMS account for 75 percent of Syria's population and are the backbone of the opposition.

ALAWITES are a Shiite Muslim sect that makes up 12 percent of the population but controls all the levers of power. (The vast majority of Shiites in Syria are Alawites.) Assad is an Alawite, as are most of the ruling elite, including military officers.

CHRISTIANS make up 10 percent of Syria's population. Minority groups like Christians and Alawites—who have supported the Assad regime—fear what would happen if Sunnis come to power.



THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY (above) is the main rebel group in Syria, made up mostly of Sunnis; its goal is to force Assad from power. It now numbers more than 100,000 fighters—a hodgepodge of activists, militants, and defectors from Syria's military. It's getting weapons from Turkey and Saudi Arabia with C.I.A. help.

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