

Headlines:

- **The UK's Middle East Dilemma**
- **Saudi Arabia Running Dry**
- **Russia Strikes Syrian Hospitals**

Details:

The UK's Middle East Dilemma

On Monday 15th February, UK Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond accused Muslim nations of either ignoring the threat of Islamic extremism or turning a blind eye to what is going on in their mosques, schools or prisons. He further criticised the aggressive policy of Muslim leaders (who they support) of locking up dissidents by saying "Sometimes it is right to lock people up, but locking people up does not stop people thinking and for many it strengthens the extremist narrative." He ended by praising the UK counter extremism policy, urging political leaders to adopt it as a model. This policy of essentially suppressing Islamic political thought has recently been accelerated through various means. Such measures include harassing Muslim children in school, reporting students to government authorities and even getting doctors and teachers to spy on their patients or students. As the Middle East continues to recover from the Arab Spring or in cases like Syria, tries to define its future, the rising Islamic sentiments pose a significant problem of Western nations who are fighting to keep their puppets in place. The West have realised that brute force can only achieve so much, and repeated efforts are made in Arab countries to create a new breed of secular Arabs. However, just like this policy has failed to affect the Muslim community domestically it is likely that it will also fail within the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia Running Dry

On Tuesday February 16th, Saudi Arabia and Russia agreed to freeze production of Oil, as long as other oil producing states did the same. However Iran was absent from these talks, a major flaw, as they recently had international sanctions removed and the likely outcome is that they will increase oil production as the global market opens up to them. Whilst these discussions would have been ideal pre-sanctions on Iran being lifted, it however, holds less weight now as global oil supply would still increase with the exclusion of Iran. The useless deal was reflected in the oil prices, LCOc1 climbed to \$35.55 in anticipation of a deal being agreed but, post-announcement of only a weak pledge being agreed the price dropped down to \$34. With Iran currently producing a million barrels per day less than its estimated capacity, it is only likely that oil production within Iran will increase and directly result in more downward pressure on oil prices. However even if the oil prices stabilise it will do little to alter the damage done to Saudi Arabia's economy, with an estimated budget deficit of \$98 billion. Saudi Arabia would have to agree on a deal to cut production with other OPEC nations, Russia and Iran to allow for the price of oil to increase to at least \$100 per barrel before it begins to break even. With increasing costs in Yemen and forays expected in Syria the Monarchy would have a tough time in appeasing the population as the coffers run dry.

Russia Strikes Syrian Hospitals

Russia has continued indiscriminately bombing Syria as the forces of Bashar Al-Assad prepare for the onslaught of Aleppo. At least seven people were killed after a hospital in Marat Al Numan, Idlib was struck by Russian jets on Monday 15 February. In the neighboring Aleppo province, a missile hit a children's hospital in the town of Azaz, killing at least five people and wounding dozens. Doctors Without Borders (also known by its French acronym MSF) who support the medical centre confirmed over 8 people died. The 30-bed hospital in Idlib was hit four times in two series of at least two attacks within a few minutes of each other. Massimiliano Rebaudengo, MSF's Head of Mission, told the *Independent*: *"This appears to be a deliberate attack on a health structure, and we condemn this attack in the strongest possible terms. The destruction of the hospital leaves the local population of around 40,000 people without access to medical services in an active zone of conflict."* With the tide turning in al-Assad's favour Russia continues to slaughter the people of Syria paying no heed to patients in hospitals and schools. With the people of Syria demanding real change, Russia wants to destroy this sentiment forever.