

Introduction

1.1 On 20 March 2014, the then Minister for Trade and Investment, the Hon Andrew Robb AO MP, referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) an inquiry into Australia's trade and investment relationships with countries of the Middle East. The terms of reference of the inquiry were to:

... report on Australia's trade and investment relationships with countries of the Middle East with particular reference to:

- the nature of Australia's existing trade and investment relationships with countries of the region;
- emerging and possible future trends in these relationships;
- barriers and impediments to trade and investment with Middle Eastern countries for Australian businesses, including examination of supply chain costs;
- opportunities for deepening existing commercial and cultural links, and developing new ones, with the countries of the Middle East; and
- the role of the government, including DFAT and Austrade, in identifying new opportunities and assisting Australian companies to access existing and potential opportunities in the Middle East.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.2 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* newspaper on 9 April 2014 after a media release announcing the inquiry and seeking submissions was issued on 27 March 2014. The committee held the first of 22 public hearings on 18 June 2014.

- 1.3 The Committee invited relevant companies and organisations to make submissions. The Committee received 57 submissions and 19 exhibits, which are listed at Appendices A and B.
- 1.4 Public hearings were conducted by the Committee in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. The dates and locations of the hearings, together with the names of witnesses who appeared before the Committee are at Appendix D. Responses to questions on notice from the public hearings are at Appendix C.

Geographical scope of the inquiry

- 1.5 The primary focus of this inquiry has been directed towards the region stretching from Morocco in North Africa through the Arabian Peninsula, and then across the Persian Gulf to Iran. The countries considered part of the Middle East for the purposes of this inquiry were Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. These are depicted in figure 1. The on-going armed conflicts and civil unrest in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen have impacted on Australia's trade with these countries.

Previous related parliamentary committee inquiries

- 1.6 Previous parliamentary committee inquiries into trade with the Middle East have included:
- In March 2005 the JSCFADT Trade Sub-Committee undertook an inquiry into Australia's trade and investment relations with North Africa. The report was tabled in May 2006.
 - In August 2003 the Trade Sub-Committee undertook an inquiry into Australia's trade and investment relations with the Gulf States. The report was tabled in February 2005.
 - The Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee of the JSCFADT undertook an inquiry into Australia's relations with the Middle East. The report was tabled in August 2001.

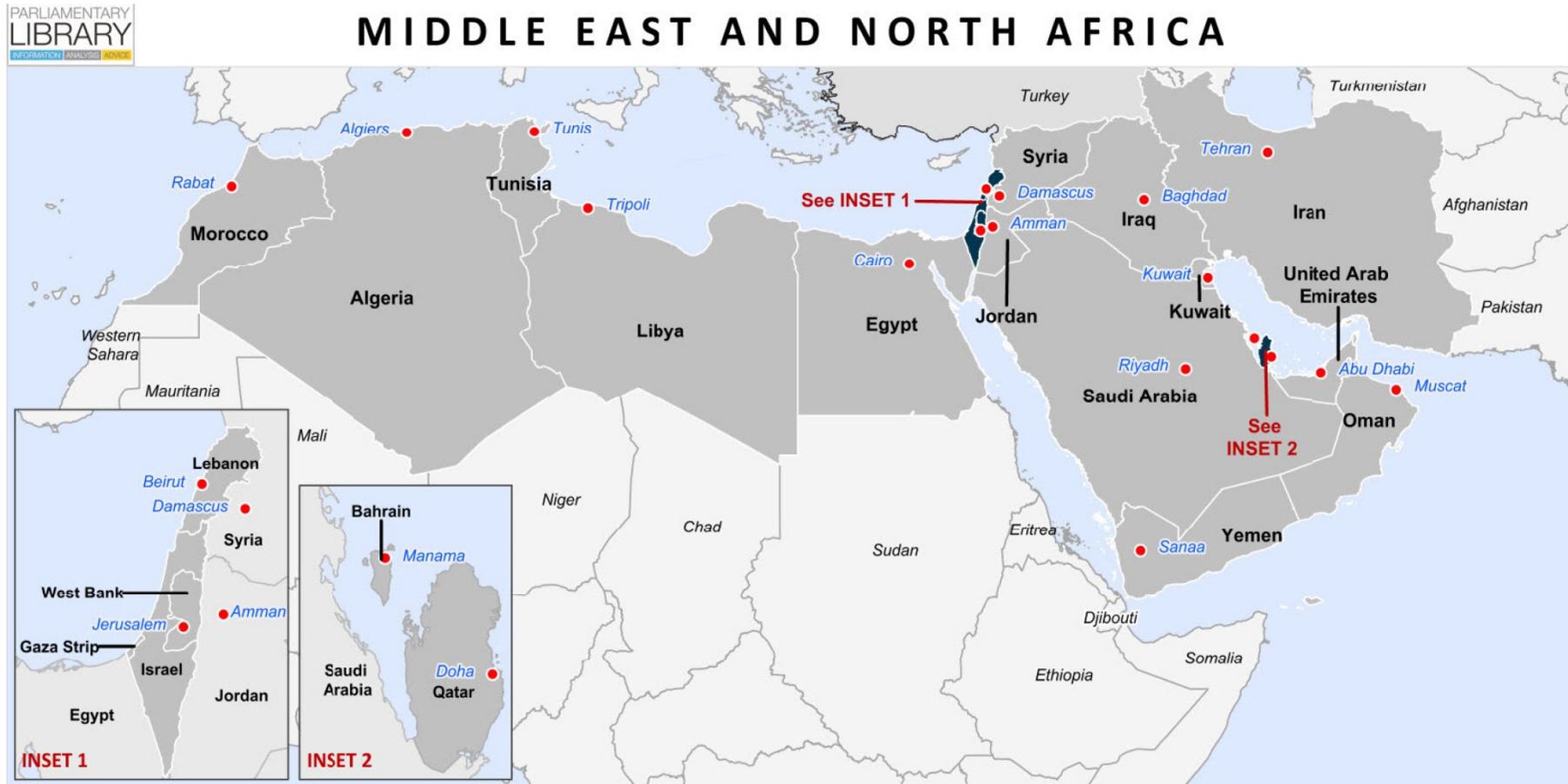
Delegation to the Middle East

- 1.7 A delegation from the Trade Sub-Committee visited four of Australia's largest trading partners in the Middle East from 6 December to 19 December 2015. Insights gained during the course of the visits to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar are integral to this report and have been incorporated in the discussion. A copy of the delegation's program is at Appendix E.

Structure of the report

- 1.8 The report is structured into five sections:
- a chapter providing a regional overview and describing Australia's current trade and investment relationships with the region (Chapter 2);
 - a chapter outlining which areas hold the most trade and investment opportunities and the countries Australia has the most potential to grow trade with (Chapter 3);
 - a chapter outlining the barriers and impediments to trade and investment (Chapter 4);
 - a chapter outlining Australia's live animal exports (Chapter 5); and
 - a concluding chapter addressing the role of government in identifying and assisting Australian exporters to access opportunities in the Middle East (Chapter 6).

Figure 1.1 Map of the Middle East and North Africa region



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