



Asociace  
pro mezinárodní  
otázky  
Association  
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Affairs

# Middle East Change Observer

No. 2

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## Libya war

As Qadhafi armoured forces progressed towards the eastern half of the country, the UN SC voted a 1973 resolution, authorising air force to stop the killing of civilians, not through a no fly zone, but also by attacks on ground forces. China, Russia and Germany abstained. Qadhafi intensified the attacks on Misurata and south of Benghazi. On March 19 a military action was started by the US, UK, France and Italy that effectively stopped the tank attacks. A heavy destruction of Libya air defence system was underway in the first two days of the operation, causing criticism by Amr Moussa.

## Egypt

The **constitutional referendum** went ahead on March 19. The Egyptians approved the constitutional amendments with 77% (and high participation est. at 60%) thus ending a period of non-legality. Egyptians were divided and held a robust public debate about the amendments. The opposition, including M. Baradei, called for a *no*, while the Muslim Brotherhood, NDP and Salafists widely lobbied for a *yes*. The Islamists came out as allies of the army and NDP transition plan and showed a superior degree of popular mobilisation, over the “civic” revolution. The NDP was accused of bribing, irregularities were observed but not a systematic vote-rigging. The state media were not to hold an overt campaign, although they seemed to support a yes vote. M. Baradei was prevented from voting at his polling station, due to crowds and thug violence.

**Transformation** – a fourth demand of the popular uprising (ouster of the president, dissolution of the parliament, change of the government) – The government disbanded the state security (*amn a-dawla*) on March 15, replacing it with a new institution charged with anti-terrorism (*al-amn al-watani*).

Minister Mansour el-Essawy said the system would play no further role in citizens' daily lives and apologized to the Egyptian people for the violations that took place on the part of some elements of the police apparatus in the past. The decision is seen as a gesture of change ahead of the referendum of March 19.

The former head of the organization has already been arrested in relation to the violent crackdown on January protests. Two officers were accused of murdering Khalid Sayid, the online activist whose brutal death fuelled the popular movement.

**Authorities** –The Syrian ambassador to Cairo met with Hussein Tantawi, thus ending the boycott of Syria, effective since 2006 and related to the Arab countries' reluctance to support Hezbollah. The reconciliation with Syria is perhaps the first significant foreign relations step Egypt has taken under Tantawi.

**Violence** – thugs (*baltagiyya*) stories were reported, explaining how people got commanded and bribed into attacking the protests and indicating a direct responsibility of ex-PM A. Shafiq.

## Advances

**Morocco's** King Mohammed VI promised sweeping constitutional reforms on television, including real powers for a popularly elected

prime minister instead of a royal appointee, as well as a free judiciary. He also announced the formation of a commission to work on the constitutional revisions, with proposals to be made to him by June. A referendum will then be held. Opposition Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) leader Abdelilah Benkirane welcomed the speech saying that Mohammed had “reacted positively to the demands made by the parties and young people.” Six people were killed in unrest that erupted after demonstrations on February 20 including five found burned to death in a bank set ablaze by people whom officials labelled vandals. On February 21 the king launched the Economic and Social Council, a body charged with advice to “pursue the realisation of structural reforms.”

The **Algerian** parliament voted to lift the country's state of emergency, a measure in place since 1992.

**Oman's** ruler Sultan Qaboos has decided to cede some legislative powers to a partially elected council, which previously only offered policy advice.

## State violence in Bahrain, Yemen and Syria

In **Bahrain** 2000 Saudi troops and UAE police officers moved in, the Bahraini military cleared the protest centre at Manama's Pearl sq. on March 16, killing 5 protesters and arresting opposition.

In **Yemen** security forces snipers and government supporters opened fire on demonstrators after prayers on March 17 as the largest protest so far gathered in the centre of the capital, Sana'a and killed 46, doubling the number of those killed in protests. A tourism minister as well as state news agency and press editors resigned in protest. A state of emergency was declared.

Two were killed in Dera'a in clashed with police, after protests broke out in four cities in **Syria**. 20 000 marched in the funeral on March 18, demanding the release of political prisoners, revolution. Protests continue in **Iraq** almost every day against the corruption and incompetence of Maliki's government, in Kurdistan protesters demand the departure of president Barzani.

## Quotes

The Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said that while the immediate objective of the intervention in Libya was to halt violence against civilians, the “*final result of any negotiation would have to be the decision by Col. Gadhafi to leave.*”

## Expected events

In **Libya** the ground war may continue especially in cities – Misurata and Benghazi – where air strikes are ineffective and dangerous and it remains to be seen whether and how the rebels can resist, whether Qadhafi consolidates his grip on West Libya and whether (and when) his own camp begins to crumble.

**Egypt** wakes to a new political reality – the restoration of legality will lead to first changes - founding of political parties and a start of a campaign.

In **Yemen** the anti-protest violence helped rally the opposition, more protests are to be expected.