



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
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Association
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Middle East Change Observer

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Syria: is the regime winning?

The military crackdown on Syria's opposition escalated during weekend, affirming the government's intent to end the uprising by force. Tanks were sent to major cities Hama, Homs and Baniyas. Baniyas, Jabla and part of Homs are besieged, with communications severed. Shelling and fighting was reported from Homs, and heavy gunfire from a number of southern villages. At least 10,000 protesters have been detained, according to the NYT, and dozens killed. Military presence was reduced in Deraa and water and electricity restored in Baniyas. Syrian television broadcasts images of soldiers' burials. Rami Makhlouf, Bashar Asad's cousin and major regime-linked entrepreneur, declared to NYT that the regime will fight till the end and threatened with consequences for regional stability if it falls.

The government appears to feel more secure. Urban opposition is incapable to mount coordinated protests and, according to Al-Jazeera, the Kurds decided not to weigh in with numbers. Reports of limited defections continue to circulate, yet the government's pillars seem firm. Nevertheless, the regime faces a landscape indelibly changed by the seven weeks of unrest, undermining the longstanding promise by the government of economic modernization, if not political reform.

Libya: diplomatic support for rebels

The rebels pushed Qadhafi forces out of Misrata, control the airport there and fight in a more coordinated way around Ajdabiya. NATO announced the start of a second phase of its military operation aimed at command centres.

The ruling National Transitional Council in Benghazi was deadlocked in its attempts to agree on an executive committee as two high-profile members, Mustafa Jalil and Abdel Hafiz Ghoga, clashed over weapons imports. A 15-strong committee was supposed to be agreed a week ago. Only 8 names of the committee were agreed on May 8, with Jalil's ally, Mahmoud Jabril, confirmed as foreign minister. The rebels still have two generals, each insisting that he is the commander: Adbul Fattah Younes, Qadhafi's former interior minister, backed by the TNC, and Khalifa Heftar, an army general who defected to the US in 1980s. Representatives from 25 Libyan local councils and tribes have met for the first time in Abu Dhabi, expressing support for the uprising against Gaddafi. A representative from Sirte, Qadhafi's hometown, was among the more than 20 delegates in attendance. The Contact Group on Libya met on May 5 in Rome, calling for an international recognition of the National Transitional Council and for providing the rebels with advanced weaponry and funds.

Egypt: sectarian clashes in Cairo

Sectarian violence - 12 died and hundreds were injured in clashes between Copts and Muslims in Cairo's neighbourhood of Imbaba on May 8, hours after a TV interview with Kamilia Shehata, a Coptic woman who some Muslims allege converted to Islam and was held against her will by the Church. Later Christians protested outside the state television building, accusing the military government of indifference. A police report and Christians in the

neighbourhood placed the blame for the violence on the Salafis. According to local report, the actual battle lines had more to do with tribal allegiances than religious or political ideas.

Opposition - Thousands of activists from groups and political parties that supported the Egyptian revolution gathered in Cairo on May 7 for a conference aimed at coordinating efforts to protect the gains of the revolution and ensure transition to full democracy. The conference was organized by the National Council, a body created by a noted architect and visionary activist Mamdouh Hamza. Among major names in attendance were presidential candidates Ayman Nour, Hisham al-Bastawisy, and Hamdeen Sabahy, although they did not address the conference. Mohamed Al-Baradai did not attend. The Muslim Brotherhood did not officially participate but members attended unofficially.

The conference, titled the "First Conference of Egypt: Towards Protecting the Revolution", brought all revolutionary groups together and generated proposals on key issues of the transition. Among others, National Council demands that a new constitution should be written and put in place before the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Justice - On May 11, a court convicted the country's former tourism minister Zuheir Garana of corruption and sentenced him to five years in prison. Egypt's prosecutor general ordered that the detention of ousted President Hosni Mubarak be extended for another 15 days pending investigation of accusations of illegally amassing wealth and of his role in the use of live ammunition against pro-democracy protesters. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) announced military trials for 190 people arrested in the violence.

Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen: protests

In **Morocco**, thousands have participated in an anti-violence march after the terrorist attacks in Marrakech, and demanded political reforms. Authorities arrested three suspects and said the leader in the attack had links to al-Qaida. However, there's been no claim of responsibility.

Tunisia has reinstated a night-time curfew after 4 days of unrest and clashes between protesters and police, triggered by a warning by a former minister that Ben Ali loyalists might seize power in a coup if Islamists won the July election

In **Yemen**, Yemen's ruling General People's Congress offered a new timetable for President Saleh to relinquish power. The president threatened with more force against protest.

The king of **Bahrain** announced that the state of emergency he imposed in mid-March will end on June 1.

Expected events

Several international activist groups called for a "march of millions" into Gaza on 15 May, the 63rd anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel. Egyptian pro-democracy, pro-Palestinian and sport groups - are among the organizers. The call marks the tendency of international politics becoming a matter of activist street militancy.