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May 25-31, 2011**

### **Syria**

International pressure on Damascus is mounting. After the US imposed sanctions on the Syrian leadership earlier in May, the EU foreign ministers agreed to impose travel bans and to freeze the assets of President Assad and nine other Syrian senior officials. Within days of the EU announcement, Canada invoked similar travel and economic sanctions.

While Russia blocked any reference in the G8 communiqué to the possibility of deferring the issue of Syria to the UN Security Council, the communiqué's compromise language illustrates the international community's increased pressure on the regime. The G8 leaders stated that they were "appalled" by the death of peaceful protesters and called on the Syrian leadership to immediately stop using force against its people or the G-8 countries would "consider taking further measures".

At the same time, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah—the leader of the Lebanese party Hizbullah—called on the Syrian people to give the government time to effectuate reforms, arguing that President Assad believes in reforming the system and is determined to implement change. The Hizbullah leader denied that his party has dispatched fighters to assist the Syrian regime in quelling the protest movement. Anti-Iran and -Hizbullah slogans were chanted in a number of Syrian cities in response to Nasrallah's defense of the regime and his pictures were burned in Deir Ezzor in eastern Syria.

Syrian protesters declared Friday "the day of the Guardians of the Homeland"—a reference to the Syrian armed forces—in an effort to encourage the army to join the uprising. Security and military forces appear, however, to be stepping up their campaign in an attempt to end the protests. Tens of people were killed or wounded over the weekend and tanks have entered two suburbs of the city of Homs, Rastan, and Talbiseh. The heavy-handed repression by police and military officials may lead demonstrators to consider a recourse to arms.

The government is cracking down on protesters' use of social media, but, in contrast to what occurred in Egypt, it has refrained from a general shut down of the internet. Security officials are forcing dissidents to turn over their Facebook passwords and have switched off 3G mobile networks in order to prevent the uploading of protestor videos to YouTube. The electricity and phone service has been cut off in neighborhoods where discontent is mounting.

Facebook and, in particular, its "Syrian Revolution 2011" page, has been a vital platform for activists to mobilize protests and to disseminate information. Syria has over 580,000 Facebook users. In response to government measures, protesters have created multiple Facebook pages under different names and have given their Facebook passwords to friends in case they are arrested or disappear and their comments opposing the Assad regime need to be quickly removed from personal webpages.

Syrian activists acknowledge their debt to the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, further improvising and improving on their tactics on a daily basis in an effort to avoid retribution by the regime and to sustain the protest movement. Daytime demonstrations have moved to the evening in order to make it more difficult for security forces to identify individual protesters and to single them out for arrest. After dark, protesters can disperse to unlit alleyways to escape arrest—a tactic Syrian activists call "tayyara" or flying.

### **Yemen**

The authority of President Saleh's government continues to erode rapidly and Yemen appears to be edging closer towards a civil war. Tribal fighters in the capital of Sanaa, have gained control of key ministries, including the Interior Ministry. Brigades from the Republican Guard—the President's main forces—have surrendered to tribal fighters east and west of the capital who have succeeded in blocking their deployment to Sanaa.

According to well-informed sources, the Vice President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of the Yemeni Consultative Council have tried to convince President Saleh to sign the agreement mediated by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in

an effort to avoid civil conflict. Disregarding their advice, President Saleh remains convinced that he will be able to stem the uprising and maintain his control of the government.

On Sunday night, President Saleh ordered units of the Republican Guard and Central Security—commanded by his son and a nephew, respectively—to clear the protestors from Liberty Square in the city of Taiz, where they have been camping for more than four months. Dozens of civilians were killed and approximately 1000 were wounded. Reports indicate that President Saleh is preparing to attack protesters in other cities and towns.

The absence of a political solution to the Yemeni uprising has led to an escalation of violence in Sanaa. Fighting between President Saleh's forces and those of the leader of the powerful Hashid tribe, Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar—a supporter of the Youth revolution—broke out on Monday. The Republican Guards fired missiles at Ahmar's residence, killing approximately fifty people, including prominent personalities who were trying to mediate an end to the fighting. This attack has further alienated other tribes from President Saleh's regime.

Friday's G8 declaration expressed growing concern regarding the situation in Yemen and urged President Saleh to immediately “ensure that the legitimate aspirations of the Yemeni people are addressed.” Reports indicate that King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia has also called on President Saleh to immediately leave office. Having turned his army against the Ahmar family, which has close ties to Saudi leaders, President Saleh has no doubt done some damage to Saudi-Yemeni relations.

US officials are continuing to consult with Arab and European allies in an effort to bring the deteriorating situation to the attention of the UN Security Council. A UNSC Presidential Statement asking Saleh to accept the GCC-mediated agreement is being considered. In the absence of compliance, and in the event of an escalation of fighting, sanctions could be imposed on the President and his family. Last Sunday, John Brennan, Assistant to President Obama, called President Saleh to brief him on Washington's plans and to urge him to sign the Gulf agreement.

The sudden withdrawal of government forces from the city of Zinjibar, in the Abyan province, made it possible for al-Qaida fighters to occupy the city and to take over government offices. Military commanders who defected from the regime have issued a communiqué accusing the President of facilitating al-Qaida's takeover of Zinjibar. They see this as an attempt to scare the West into supporting President Saleh by convincing them that al-Qaida will take over if Saleh leaves. The split within the military is wide and deep.

The Republican Guard and the Special Forces, the elite forces that are in charge of the President's protection, are not necessarily immune from division. Each side, however, calculates that its opponents are weak and, therefore, the temptation to resort to military means to resolve the impasse is very high.

### **Jordan**

Demonstrations took place after Friday prayers in the cities of Amman and Maan—where railroad workers went on strike, paralyzing rail services. Protesters called for political reforms and increased efforts to combat corruption. A silent protest was also convened in front of the Jordanian Parliament, calling for constitutional democracy, not just amending of the constitution.

### **Libya**

President Barack Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron have indicated that they are bracing for a long battle in Libya, not just to remove Col. Qaddafi from power, but to guide the burgeoning democracy movement in other Arab states to a successful conclusion.

NATO leaders have decided against bombing Libya's infrastructure, an idea voiced by many officials, including Britain top military commander, Gen. Sir David Richards. President Obama has urged patience, underscoring that the combination of bombing, sanctions, and import cutoff will force Qaddafi from power.

Following the Summit meeting in France, G8 leaders declared that “Qaddafi and the Libyan government have failed to fulfill their responsibilities to protect the Libyan population and have lost all legitimacy. [Qaddafi] has no future in a free, democratic Libya. He must go.” Russia agreed to this formulation after initial objections.

### **Morocco**

Last Sunday, Moroccan authorities detained several demonstrators who were protesting under the banner of “insistence on change.” Prominent Moroccan human rights advocates expressed indignation at the treatment of protesters by security forces, considering it to be an escalation of repressive methods toward peaceful protests and a sign of the regime's lack of determination to effectuate democratic change. The opposition movement is organizing a nation-wide protest on June 5 in response to these arrests.

Moroccan security forces have accused the 20<sup>th</sup> February movement—which is demanding constitutional reforms—of violating the law, claiming that the movement has become an umbrella cover for extremists, from the left and right, who are calling for the downfall of the regime. Officials have, however, denied allegations that the government has decided to forbid the movement from protesting.

### **Bahrain**

Sources suggest that the opposition plans to resume protests for democratic reforms as soon as the emergency law is lifted on June 1.

According to reports, Saudi officials have approached Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Central Asian states to lend diplomatic support and, possibly, military assistance to the Gulf Cooperation Council's presence in Bahrain. Saudi national security adviser, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, has reportedly asked for Pakistani support in Bahrain, including the possible integration of Pakistani troops into the approximately 4000 Saudis already posted there. Malaysia has already indicated its willingness to send troops to Bahrain.

### **Saudi Arabia**

Protesters in eastern Saudi Arabia, an area mostly populated by Saudi Shiites, believed their movement would spread to other parts of the country, but the protests remained confined to the East. The youth movement ended its protests there, following pressure from community elders and the arrests of 150 demonstrators. Activists believe that the protests for democratic reforms and an end to sectarian discrimination will eventually resume. Riyadh remains concerned that Iran is manipulating Shiite sentiments and the desire for reforms in order to further Iranian foreign policy objectives.

Manal al-Sharif—an information technology expert—was detained for five days on Sunday on charges of disturbing public order. Sharif was arrested while driving in the eastern city of Dammam with her brother sitting next to her, challenging the law that forbids Saudi females from driving.

Her arrest has been highlighted on both Facebook and Twitter, with a call to Saudi women to drive en masse on June 17. The campaign has so far attracted 12,000 followers on Facebook. Saudi Arabia is the only country that forbids women from driving. The Saudi government wants to prevent the rise of a movement, using social media having observed similar protest movements in other Arab states. An online petition to free Sharif, addressed to King Abdullah, has attracted more than 600 signatures by both men and women.