



Asociace
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Affairs

Middle East Change Observer

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Libya war

The no fly zone over Libya has been installed and NATO has assumed the leading role of the operation. After a week of aerial shelling, paving their way, the rebels were able to retake Ajdabiya, after Qaddafi's troops had lost contact with the HQ, and also the two major oil-export facilities, Brega and Ras Lanuf. The national committee in Benghazi resumed exporting small amounts of oil. Women demonstrations were held across Eastern Libya in support of the Tripoli women, who managed to burst into the Western press hotel and tell her story of rape and abuse, seemingly a part of tactic of Qaddafi's soldiers. Qatari's planes have joined the effort. President Obama has announced the US involvement will be limited, yet intent on regime change.

Major protests in Syria, Jordan, Yemen

The international community's decision to back by force Libyan rebels seems to fuel wider protests.

Syria has now clearly entered the overall ME process. Many tens of thousand have marched in Deraa on March 25, more were killed during the funeral march and government installations were burnt. Protests have spread from Deraa to mostly small cities, but also to Homs, Latakia and Damascus. 20 were killed in southern Sanamayn and 12 died in Latakia, after police opened fire on protests and after a fire exchange between unidentified armed opposition and the police. 61 are reported killed nationwide. Amid repression and fear of civil war, Syria has announced the lifting of emergency and the willingness to restore some civil liberties. Pro-regime demonstrations took place in large cities. Anti-regime demonstrations openly called for the "fall of the regime." National unity demonstration in Latakia sought to diffuse sectarian tension.

In **Yemen**, tens of thousands marched on Friday's 25 "day of departure". The central government and security forces showed signs of retreating, especially to looting, to local separatists and Islamist groups. A weapon factory explosion was reported. Unruly negotiation with a coalition of students, tribe leaders, political and party defectors from the regime and even some of Salih's tribe are going on about the terms of President Salih's resignation. He said on March 27 he wanted to yield power to "safe hands". His offer to step down at the end of the year and after elections, a previous opposition demand, was rejected by the protestors.

In **Jordan** protests have first turned violent as demonstration was attacked by pro-monarchy mob and police intervened.

Saudi Arabia will hold long delayed municipal elections, though without allowing women vote.

Egypt

Political change – After a referendum, in which 77% voters voted for constitution amendments, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces made further steps towards transition. It said it will hold parliamentary elections in September, apparently giving more time

to emerging political forces to organize their political parties, and announced new law with reduced barriers for the forming of political parties, especially religious ones. The postponement of election date appears to be a gesture to outweigh the success in the referendum, as well as the display of the mobilising force of Muslim Brothers, Salafists and ex-NPD. The presidential election was not given any date yet. The army announced on Facebook to release a "temporary constitution", combining the approved amendments, old text and guiding elements for the transition.

Islamists - While the Islamist front showed its force, it also began to fracture. On March 26 young members of the Muslim Brotherhood held a news conference asking for a greater say for youth in the organization. On March 27 Abdel Moneim Abul Fotouh, a prominent member of the Brotherhood's executive Guidance Bureau, announced that he will form a more liberal party. So did Ibrahim Al Zafaarani, another senior Brotherhood leader, popular with the youth. Mohammed Badie, the Brotherhood's General Guide, and the spokesman Essam Erian, criticised the development and said that Brotherhood members would only be allowed to join the organization's official Freedom and Justice Party. In a positive gesture, the MB announced its acceptance of Copts and women running for presidency, an issue previously controversially debated among MB members, and its willingness to discuss the youth's criticism.

Power – On March 23 the council endorsed a plan to outlaw all kinds of demonstrations and sit-ins. The army continues to detain and take new prisoners (estimated in hundreds) from among the protestors. Some have apparently been tortured, others have been sentenced by military courts to multiyear sentences. Civil organisations concentrate on tracking these arrests and trials.

Symbolic change – a number of public interest lawsuits were filed against the deposed government of Hosni Mubarak, in many cases seeking to erase the Mubarak name from institutions, as his name is spontaneously being deleted from public urban installations.

Quotes

"There is evidence the Brotherhood struck some kind of a deal with the military early on," said Elijah Zarwan, a senior analyst with the International Crisis Group. **"It makes sense if you are the military — you want stability and people off the street. The Brotherhood is one address where you can go to get 100,000 people off the street."** (NYT)

Expected events

Qaddafi's forces have started fleeing from central Libya towns, ahead of the advance of air-supported rebels. The next battle will be that of Sirt, that could fall next week and then Misurata, which has been under heavy shelling from Qaddafi's forces. **Syrian** president is to announce a strategy for reforms, while protests will continue. **Egypt's** army is expected to spell out more rules for the transition period. **Yemen** might descend into deeper disintegration of central power.