Volume 27 ● Number II ● March 4, 2011

Featured Story

*Middle East and North Africa:*
Tunisian Interim Government on Unsteady Ground
The countries for the *Peace & Justice Update* have been chosen as areas of focus at the institute.

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*The Peace & Justice Updates are written by the interns at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice at the University of San Diego.*

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UPDATE SUMMARY

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Libya: Continuing Violence and Unrest in Libya Lead International Community to Act

Pro-Government Forces Surge in Libya; Protestors Fight Back

Tunisia: Tunisian Interim Government on Unsteady Ground
Continuing Violence and Unrest in Libya leads International Community to Act

As protests and violence continue within Libya, the international community has unified to condemn Colonel Moammar Gadhafi’s regime. Most recently the European Union (EU) has adopted sanctions including an arms embargo, asset freeze and travel ban on Gadhafi and his close entourage. The EU’s decision was based on a larger sanction ban for which the UN Security Council voted unanimously February 26. The UN’s resolution placed extensive economic sanctions against Gadhafi’s regime and included a referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the possibility of crimes against humanity within Libya.

Currently, U.S. Naval and Air Forces are being redirected to Libya, though no formal military action has yet been proposed. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva February 28, reaffirming the U.S. position that Gadhafi must step down “now, without further violence or delay.” The U.S. and other nations are considering the option of a no-fly zone, which would ideally reduce the possibility of another airstrike against protestors and prevent additional pro-government mercenary recruits coming from other African nations.

The U.S. and other nations have also had to address the possibility of exile for Gadhafi, should he eventually step down. With his violent response toward protestors, it is unlikely that an in-state exile will be possible (as experienced by Egyptian ex-president Hosni Mubarak), though with an increasing number of states banning travel for Gadhafi and revoking his diplomatic immunity, international exile (as experienced by former Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Saudi Arabia) may also be difficult. The U.S. has expressed that any option that would result in the cessation of violence against protestors cannot be discounted.

Colonel Gadhafi has consistently denied the root causes of the protests (e.g., civil and political repression) and in his most recent address, he denied the existence of any protests within the state. Adamantly refusing to step aside, he has vowed to fight any dissent by all necessary and available means, with resulting casualties estimated between 300-1,000 dead, with hundreds more wounded. Mass evacuations have also occurred, with the UN estimating that over 140,000 people have fled the unrest, in addition to a foot traffic rate of more than 2,000 individuals seeking asylum over the Tunisian border every hour.

A de facto provisional government has been set up by protestors in Libya’s second city, Benghazi, seeking to consolidate action against Gadhafi. The provisional government has received rhetorical support from U.S. politicians, such as Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman, who have encouraged the U.S. to recognize the alternative regime. No action with respect to this proposal has yet been enacted.

Sources: BBC.com, english.aljazeera.net
Pro-Government Forces Surge in Libya; Protestors Fight Back

Loyalists to Moammar Gadhafi’s regime have entered into eastern areas of Libya for the first time since they fell to protestors February 18. In an attempt to regain territory, the Libyan army launched an attack on the oil-rich city of Brega March 2, but was repelled by the rebel forces stationed there. The attack, which left more than 14 dead, has been declared a victory by the opposition and is serving to inspire further confidence in the anti-government movement domestically and abroad.

The loyalists’ attacks have also been accompanied by aerial bombings of protestors’ strongholds, including Ajdabiya (30 miles from Brega), a strategic point that would have placed the pro-government forces closer to the center of Libya’s opposition, Benghazi. The opposition has repeatedly appealed to the international community to impose a no-fly zone, though this proposition has received mixed reviews from the U.S., France and the U.K., among others. Other opposition strongholds include Zawlya, Misrata and Tobruk. Pro-Gadhafi forces still hold Tripoli and Sirte. Clashes between both sides are active in Zuara and Janzor, in addition to Brega.

International developments include the suspension of Libya from the UN’s Human Rights Council March 2. Additionally, the International Organization for Migration is monitoring the refugee crisis on the border between Libya and Tunisia and is working closely with European nations to coordinate evacuation of the reportedly 180,000 total refugees, with 30,000 stranded on the Libyan-Tunisian border.

Sources: BBC.com, english.aljazeera.net
Tunisian Interim Government on Unsteady Ground

Since the departure of former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia’s interim “Unity Government” has encountered a plethora of difficulties. Disputes among government officials as well as the demands of protestors for a new government free from former members of Ben Ali’s regime have forced the resignations of more than half the original interim government. The new government was fully purged of former Ben Ali party members, with the resignation of caretaker prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi (who held the same position under Ben Ali), and the resignation of ministers Mohamed Afif Chelbi and Mohamed Nouri Jouini February 28.

Beji Caid Essebsi was named the new prime minister February 28, taking control after Tunisia again played host to another anti-government protest. As he is considered a liberal, Essebsi’s appointment and the last resignations of Ben Ali’s former strongmen caused protestors to cease and celebrate. Other resignations, even from those not previously affiliated with Ben Ali’s regime have also followed, with the reasons given ranging from personal distress to dissatisfaction with the governance by the new leaders.

In addition, the Islamic Ennahdha (“Renaissance”) party, previously banned under the Ben Ali administration, was legalized March 1, raising questions as to the role Islam will play in the future structure of the Tunisian government. The Ennahdha leaders have unambiguously commented that they do not seek a government based on Islamic Sharia law within the state. As such, the popular party (the Ennahdha party placed second in state elections to Ben Ali’s party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally, in 1989), will have the opportunity to run for office in the pending elections, tentatively scheduled for mid-July.

Due to the latest uprisings, the Tunisian stock exchange was closed February 28 but is scheduled to reopen March 3. Economic fluctuation has been accompanied by a rising humanitarian crisis, due to the massive exodus of refugees fleeing violence and unrest in neighboring Libya, estimated at more than 75,000 refugees in Tunisia alone. The provisional government has provided food and other critical aid for refugees but due to its own domestic difficulties, it has already passed the point of a sustainable capacity and is currently appealing to foreign sources for additional aid.

Sources: BBC.com, engish.aljazeera.net, UPI.com