In Focus: Suspension of the Egyptian Constituent Assembly
By Ida Benfield

The BBC reports that, following the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi took temporary control of the state, aiming to transform Egypt into a democracy. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), chaired by Tantawi, is currently holding the presidential powers until a new president is elected in May 2012. During the transition period, a national unity government was introduced in December 2011, while parliamentary elections were held in January 2012. Election results showed that 73% of the parliament’s 508 seats were won by conservative parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and the Salafists’ Al-Nour party. Of the remaining parties, the New Wafd Party won the most votes, equating to less than 8% of the parliament’s seats. Formation of a Constituent Assembly is considered key in drafting a new constitution for the country.

In recent months, several challenges regarding the formation of the Egyptian Constituent Assembly and the method by which its 100 members were chosen have caused considerable public stir, reports the BBC. The central issue hinges on whether those elected to the Constituent Assembly accurately represent the diversity of Egyptian society. The fact that the Assembly members were chosen by Parliament, and therefore may only represent the parliament’s Islamist majority, has been identified as the main cause for the imbalanced representation. According to Reuters, lawyers and activists filed lawsuits claiming that women, minorities and youth were underrepresented in the Assembly. Lawyers and various minority parties argue that the Islamist majority of the

(continued on page 10)
Djibouti

The Ethiopian News Agency reports that Canada International Development Agency (CIDA) has contributed more than USD 4.8 million for the World Food Programme’s (WFP) planned humanitarian logistics base in Djibouti. This base is expected to improve vessel handling and bulk storage capacity, enabling WFP to respond more quickly to its operations in Ethiopia, northern Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. It will also save USD 1.5 million a year in transport and storage costs. WFP’s Ethiopia office will build and manage the hub. According to WFP Ethiopia, the cost for the hub is an estimated USD 20 million and construction is expected to be completed in August 2013.

Eritrea

Shabait says that in order to increase Eritrea’s fish supply and meet domestic market demands, the Ministry of Marine Resources plans to provide training on fishing techniques, including fish preservation and processing, and will distribute new equipment to traditional fishermen. The ministry hopes the fishing programme will encourage the modernisation of private fishing activities in the country. There are 3,300 fishermen in Eritrea of which 1,200 work in an association.

Reuters reports that South Boulder Mines Ltd, an Australia-based company, upgraded the Colluli potash mine in Eritrea to a Tier 1 asset, after learning of an 85% increase from initial reserve estimates. The company owns 90% of the potash project and the increase in available potash will extend the mining life of the 17-year old pit. Only a few countries produce potash, which is a vital crop nutrient.

Ethiopia

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Rajiv Shah says that Ethiopians’ healthcare has improved, reports Voice of America. The increase in health clinics in rural Ethiopia has decreased child mortality and saved the lives of an estimated 36,000 children in 2011. Two decades ago, every fifth child under the age of five died in Ethiopia. In the last twelve years, a 14% decrease in children suffering from stunted growth has also been achieved.

Abdirhman Sheikh Hassan, a UN security official arrested in July 2011 while working in the Ogaden region, is now on trial for terrorism, reports Voice of America. Hassan was allegedly the leader of the banned Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and tried to overthrow the Ethiopian government. A court date is set for 15 May in Addis Ababa.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) Climate Prediction Center’s Africa Hazards Outlook for 12-18 April 2012, informs that while the start of seasonal rainfall was delayed in March, moderate to heavy rainfall in April has somewhat countered the negative impact on the crops. Above average precipitation is expected for the next seven days.

The first anniversary marking the commencement of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project was celebrated in the Guba woreda (district) where the dam is currently under construction, according to Walta Information Center (WIC). Construction began in April of 2011 and is expected to be 13% complete by the end of July 2012. The dam will have the capacity to generate 6000 mw of electric power.

Somalia

BBC reports that al Shabaab is moving north into the semi-autonomous region of Puntland. The militants are operating out of the Galgala/Golis mountain range and, according to the article, “they are there to strengthen ties with al Qaeda in Yemen”. Somalia Report informs that Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) as well as the United States military might start monitoring the area.

On 03 April, African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) announced that they launched the Joint Fusion and Liaison Unit, in partnership with the TFG, to enhance information sharing and improve coordination. The unit will be another step in their efforts to prevent al Shabaab terrorist activities.

BBC reports that on 09 April, a bomb detonated in a market in Baidoa, injuring more than 30 people and killing at least 12. Most of the casualties were women and children. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the incident and, according to their spokesperson, their intended targets were Ethiopian and Somali troops. In February of this year, Ethiopian troops took control of the city, which was an al Shabaab stronghold since December 2008, reports Africa Review.

Ibrahim Omar Leban was found guilty on charges of kidnapping and attempting human trafficking, states Radio Garowe. He was
sentenced to 12 years in prison for kidnapping nine children between the ages of seven and 14. According to Ethiopian officials involved in human trafficking cases, children are taken outside the country, forced into hard labour or the sex trade, or killed to remove their organs which are then sold on the black market. Public awareness campaigns about human trafficking are being organised in Puntland and Somaliland.

Somali Piracy

Reuters reports that Somali pirates recently acquired Libyan weapons, such as mines and shoulder-held missile launchers. While there is currently no evidence of the use of the new weapons, a senior maritime security analyst predicts that the pirates will use them in bolder attacks against merchant vessels.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports that the Iranian Navy successfully freed 28 crewmembers of the Panama-registered and Chinese-owned cargo ship Xianghuamen. The vessel and its crew had been hijacked on 06 April in the Gulf of Oman by Somali pirates. According to Daily Nation, 13 pirates were arrested, including Mohamed Garad, one of the world’s most wanted pirate leaders, who has been linked to hundreds of hijackings.

The MV Eglantine was freed from pirate control, reports the Seafarer Times. The Iranian Navy launched a rescue operation on the Iranian-owned bulk carrier and detained 12 pirates. During the rescue operation, two Filippino seamen died, one from a gunshot to the head and the other from suffocating in the engine room. The vessel was hijacked by Somali pirates on 26 March off the coast of India, with 23 crewmembers taken hostage.

On 12 April, NATO Allied Maritime Command HQ Northwood (MC Northwood) reports that the Danish warship HDMS ABSALON, part of NATO’s counter piracy mission Operation Ocean Shield, freed 12 crewmembers of an Iranian-flagged dhow and arrested 16 suspected pirates. The HDMS ABSALON disrupted the dhow, which had been hijacked in March 2012 and was used by Somali pirates as a mothership.

The MV Leila, a Panama-flagged vessel, was released in Bosasso by pirates on 12 April, reports Reuters. The vessel is on its way to Berbera, in the semi-autonomous region of Somaliland. According to the ship’s Somali agent, Ahmed Farah Mohamed, a ransom was paid for the ship’s release, but the head of Somaliland’s anti-piracy task force, Mohamed Osman, said that this information could not be verified. Somaliland is against the payment of ransom and adopted in February new legislation that classifies piracy as a crime and also allows pirates convicted abroad to be transferred to Somaliland. Garowe Online reports that there are 37 alleged pirates being held without fair trial in the Maldives, nine in Kenya and still others in Mauritius. Director of Puntland’s Counter Piracy Directorate of the Ministry of Marine Transport and Ports Abdirezak Mohamed Dirir (known as Ducaysane) said that the TFG has not yet initiated the extradition of prisoners. Dirir encourages family members of the detainees to raise this issue with their ministers and members of parliament to find a solution to their detainment.

European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia Operation ATALANTA has welcomed more warships to supports its mission to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia: the Italian frigate ITS SCIROCCO, the Dutch HNLMS VAN AMSTEL and the Spanish ESPS REINA SOFIA. From 05 to 11 April, two other EU NAVFOR warships escorted the WFP ship MW Golden Bridge, carrying humanitarian aid. The ship was traveling from Mogadishu to Berbera. EU NAVFOR forces currently include three Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircrafts (MPRAs) and 11 vessels.

According to Asian News International (ANI), the Indian spokesperson of the Congress party, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, calls for countries to establish a global treaty in order to effectively combat the maritime piracy issue. In addition, he advises the use of “strongest possible actions” to deter future attacks on merchant vessels. This call to action followed the 02 March hijacking of the MV Royal Grace by Somali pirates. The crew consists of 22 men, including 17 Indians. Indo-Asian News Service reports that India is leading an effort to establish a naval standard operating procedure (SOP), which was debated during the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in South Africa from 11 to 13 April 2012. Daily News reports that the event was attended by almost 500 military representatives from 38 countries. According to the article, “this year’s theme was building partnerships and sharing information among navies to clamp down on piracy”.

Gulf of Guinea Piracy

The executive secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), Miguel Trovoada, urges member states “in drafting and harmonizing the legislation against piracy in the region”, since current policy varies amongst them, states Angola Press. In order to strengthen the maritime security capability in the region, Mr Trovoada sees the need for a joint summit of member states from the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and GGC, reports another Angola Press article.

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Algeria
Algeria’s foreign ministry confirmed reports that its Consul and six consular staff were abducted from the northern Mali town of Gao on 05 April, says Reuters. According to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), one day after the kidnapping of the seven officials, Algeria evacuated all diplomats and their families from the country. The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJOA), a splinter group of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), has taken responsibility for the kidnappings, reports Radio France International (RFI).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has announced it will expand the capacity of its family reunion programme, increasing visits for Sahrawi families in Tindouf refugee camps in southern Algeria and their relatives in Western Sahara. The programme facilitates five-day visits, which reunite husbands, wives, children and parents and “relieve suffering due to the separation of the Sahrawi families”. An estimated 12,800 people have benefited from the visit programme since 2004 and 42,000 remain on waiting lists.

The Associated Press (AP) reports that the first president of Algeria, Ben Bella, died of natural causes in Algiers on 11 April. Ben Bella is viewed as one of the most important characters of the Algerian revolutionary movement against France, Algeria’s former colonial ruler, and an icon of the pan-Arabic ideology and anti-colonialism. Bella became Algeria’s first president in 1963.

Libya
The Libyan Justice Minister Ali Ashour told reporters that the country is preparing to try Seif al-Islam, one of Moammar Gaddafi’s sons, on charges of corruption, murder and rape, reports Al Jazeera. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has ordered Libyan officials to hand over Seif al-Islam to stand trial for charges, and cites obligations within UN Security Council resolutions which require officials to cooperate with the court. The ICC claims that Seif al-Islam is being abused in custody and that Libyan officials would be unable to conduct a fair trial. According to AP, Seif was captured by the Zintan brigade and is currently being held in an undisclosed location. Leaders say his trial in the country will bring justice to the Libyan people and would demonstrate its judicial capability.

The National Transitional Council (NTC) announced it is halting the government compensation programme to rebel fighters due to on-going corruption investigations. According to the NTC spokesman, Mohammed al Hareizi, officials found that many of the names appearing on lists of fighters generated by local military councils were deceased persons or persons who did not participate in the fighting. Officials say that, instead of giving authority to local military councils, a database should have been created that would force all participants to provide a national ID. In response to the suspension of the compensation programme, violence erupted at NCT cabinet headquarters in Tripoli on 10 April, according to an article in Magharebia. The Libyan government issued an appeal for revolutionaries to reject violence and emphasised their intention to protect public funds from abuse.

The United Nations has confirmed that a convoy enroute to Benghazi carrying the head of the UN Mission to Libya was the target of an attempted bomb attack, reports Reuters. The improvised explosive device thrown at the convoy is known as a “gelateena” a type similar to what was used by rebels against Gaddafi forces in 2011. Security experts say that this low-tech attack does not denote an insurgency; however, it is unclear if the perpetrators were pro-Gaddafi loyalists or Islamist militants.

Mali
AP reports that on 06 April, after more than 50 years of fighting for sovereignty, Tuareg rebels declared independence for the northern region of Mali they call Azawad. The Tuaregs, whose origins differ from other ethnic groups in Mali, complain that they have been excluded from public benefits by southern Mali. Thus, during the chaos of the military coup, the Tuareg rebels quickly moved to seize northern Mali with the help of Ansar Dine, a militant Islamist group presumed to be associated with AQIM.

BBC reports that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Mali coup leaders signed an agreement on 06 April negotiating a return to constitutional rule; however, Captain Amadou Sango has indicated that he wants to play a continued role in determining how the country transitions. Meanwhile, Malian president Amadou Toumani Toure announced his resignation on 08 April, saying he was not pressured to do so, reports AP. His resignation makes possible the invocation of Article 36 of Mali’s constitution, which designates the speaker of the national assembly as interim president. Reuters reports that Speaker Dioxouda Traore was sworn in as interim president on 12 April. Traore’s primary focus is to prepare the country for elections within 40 days. ECOWAS leaders have agreed to the creation of a regional force to secure Mali through peacekeeping operations if the current talks fail.
Various militant Islamist factions and the Tuareg rebel-led National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) in northern Mali appear to be "vying for power," reports AP. Islamist group Ansar Dine is said to be gaining popularity as it seeks to act as a police force, even supplying an emergency calling number for residents. The MNLA say they are seeking to prevent the spread of al Qaeda in the region and have already evacuated known foreign residents from northern Mali. MNLA leaders say they have established contact with Malian officials, which is viewed as a “positive” development, reports AFP. The MNLA say they will not reverse their declaration of an independent northern state; however, the group is open to establishing a possible federation with Mali. Malian politician and mediator Tieble Drame told Reuters that Mali’s interim president Dioncounda Traore, is seeking dialogue with the Tuareg-led MNLA and Islamist group Ansar Dine. However, Drame says that these talks will not include “armed foreign jihadists groups”, which the government insists must leave northern Mali.

A Swiss national was abducted by armed men from her home in Timbuktu on 15 April, according to BBC. The woman was said to have been a Christian missionary who stayed after the town was seized by Tuareg and Islamist groups. In other news, Reuters reports that two French hostages held by AQIM in northern Mali since late November 2011 appeared in a video appeal to French President Nicolas Sarkozy. According to the article, AQIM is seeking negotiations and a prisoner exchange.

Mauritania
The former mufti, or sharia legal expert, to Osama bin Laden, Mahfouz Ould al Walid, was extradited to Nouakchott last week from Iran, according to Magharebia. The third-in-command of al Qaeda’s operations in Afghanistan was captured in Tehran. His extradition to Mauritania was a result of intensive talks between Iran, Mauritania and the United States. In other news, Moroccon officials report that they disrupted an Islamist group planning to attack government buildings and banks in the Agourai region, according to Magharebia. Morocco was quick to underscore the importance of vigilance in addressing terrorist threats in the country as well as working with regional partners to ensure regional stability.

Nigeria
Malian security officials say that Boko Haram is now supporting the Tuareg-led rebel movement in northern Mali, reports International Business Times. An estimated 100 members of Boko Haram, from Nigeria and Niger, are said to be in Gao and allegedly led the attack and kidnapping at the Algerian embassy in that city. However, the AQIM fringe group MUJOA has also made claim to the attack that occurred 05 April.

AP reports that, on 08 April, the city of Kaduna fell victim to a suicide car bomb attack that killed at least 38 people. The All Nations Christian Assembly Church and the ECWA Good News Church were damaged during Easter sermons. Nigerian authorities assert that Boko Haram may be behind the bombing. Another attack occurred later on 08 April in the city of Jos. According to limited information from authorities, only a few were wounded. In response to Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan’s threat that he will shut down Boko Haram in three months, the group released a video suggesting that they will bring down the government in three months, reports Vanguard.

Tunisia
The Ministry of Interior announced that it is lifting the ban on demonstrations on Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis, just two weeks after the restriction was imposed. Recent police violence against protestors is currently under investigation, reports AFP. Al Arabiya reports that the opposition to the ruling Islamist Ennahda party has accused the government of purposefully sending militias to attack demonstrators on what has become known as “Black Monday.” At least a dozen protestors and eight policemen were injured on 09 April in some of the worst clashes since the revolution. Similarly, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) issued a press release calling for the protection of freedom of expression and for an investigation of recent violence against protestors, according to Tunisia Live.

In an effort to revive an ancient moderate religious centre and to counter extremism, Tunisian officials reopened the eighth century Zaitouna Mosque to students, reports Reuters. The mosque was closed in 1964 to prevent the influence of religion. Fathi al Khamiri, who is leading the efforts to restore the Zaitouna, says the intention is “to restore Zaitouna’s education and religious role in Tunisia and North Africa in order to spread the principles of moderate religion.”

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Egypt
The *New York Times* reports that the Muslim Brotherhood had originally pushed for a strong Parliament and a weak presidency; however, delays in the adoption of a *new constitution* (see In Focus ‘Suspension of the Egyptian Constituent Assembly’) could result in the establishment of a strong presidency, as the next president will likely be elected prior to the adoption of a new constitution and thus allowing for extensive powers until a new constitution is enacted. It is believed that the possibility of a strong presidency prompted the Muslim Brotherhood to field their own presidential candidate, something the group had previously promised not to do. Their decision has been widely criticised and viewed as the Muslim Brotherhood *overreaching its power*, reports *Al Jazeera*. In a poll conducted by the Egyptian Institute for Public Opinion Research (Bassira), nearly 40% of Egyptian *voters were undecided* ahead of the upcoming May 23-24 presidential election, reports *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*. The *Associated Press (AP)* has published a profile of Egypt’s *main presidential candidates*.

Egyptian Planning Minister Faiza Abu El-Naga stated that Egypt would sign a USD 3.2 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) *financing package* in June 2012, reports *Reuters*. The IMF has stated that Egypt must first gain consensus for the loan from the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party and line up billions of dollars in additional loans from other international donors before the IMF loan can be finalised. However, the Muslim Brotherhood presidential candidate, Khairat al Shater, indicated that his group *would not confirm* the IMF loan unless the terms are changed to encourage financial transparency as well as the establishment of a new timeline that would allow only a small portion of the loan to be disbursed while the army-backed transitional government holds power. *Ahram* reports that Egyptian *finance ministers* are currently attending the Spring Meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Washington DC.

*The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)* reports that numerous Egyptian children’s rights organisations are demanding the government address the growing number of *child abductions* occurring throughout the country. According to media reports, abduction of a child occurs every day and anecdotal evidence suggests that the two main motives are to gain organs and ransom money. Security expert Maher Zakhry told *IRIN* that “our country’s deteriorating security conditions make this crime more possible”.

On 09 April militants blew up a *gas pipeline* in Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula that transports fuel to Israel and Jordan, reports *AP*. Because the gas flow had been cut following a blast in March, no major damage or fire occurred. This is the fourteenth attack on pipelines since Hosni Mubarak was ousted in 2011.

South Sudan
*Business Standard* reports that ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), the overseas investment arm of Indian state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd (ONGC), has discontinued *crude oil production* in South Sudan in response to the geopolitical dispute between South Sudan and Sudan. According to *Reuters*, the Japanese firm Toyota Tsusho completed a *feasibility study* on the construction of a pipeline to transport South Sudanese oil to a port in Kenya. It is expected that Toyota Tsusho will soon present a financial proposal on constructing the pipeline. Oil exports comprise 98% of South Sudan’s state revenues; the shutdown of the oil production has resulted in a *national inflation rate* of 42% and a decreasing number of employment opportunities. The lack of state revenue has also led authorities to collect import duties more aggressively, thereby increasing prices even further.

Journalist Tom Rhodes reports on the practice of young girls being given away as compensation to *settle family feuds* in parts of Eastern Equatoria state in South Sudan. With an absence of state prisons, this practice is viewed by many elders as a way of resolving conflicts between community members. However, some women, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and state organisations such as the Women Civil Society Network are working with government officials and traditional leaders to change the practice.

The UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) urged South Sudanese security forces to respect human rights as it continues its *campaign to disarm* civilian populations. There had been reports of alleged beatings, mistreatment and harassment of civilians during house-to-house searches by security forces in Jonglei state; however, UNMISS stated that the violations seemed to be individual and random cases rather than systematic. Overall, the process has been largely peaceful and orderly in both Jonglei and *Upper Nile* state, says UNMISS.

Sudan
Sudanese Industry Minister Abdelwahab Mohammed Osman announced his resignation due to the postponement of the opening of African’s biggest *sugar factory* in Sudan, reports *AFP*. However, President Omar al Bashir has rejected the resignation. According to
the Sudan Tribune, Osman blamed the delayed opening on US economic sanctions which have been in place since 1997 and prevent Sudan from acquiring the operating software needed for the plant. Local sugar production is a top priority for the country, given that much of the sugar consumed is currently imported and prices of imports have increased due to dwindling amounts of hard currency following the loss of oil revenues, reports Reuters. The plant was expected to allow Sudan to achieve sugar self-sufficiency by 2014 and would become a source of export revenue.

The deadline of 08 April for South Sudanese to leave Sudan has passed, resulting in Sudan declaring all South Sudanese nationals in Sudan to be foreigners, reports the Sudan Tribune. South Sudan followed the move in-kind by also stating that all Sudanese in South Sudan were now foreigners. Voice of America (VOA) reports that South Sudanese living in Sudan who are not registered with the government have been stripped of their identity cards and other documents, issued by the Sudanese government prior to the separation of Sudan and South Sudan.

According to a White House memorandum, US President Barack Obama has authorised the release of USD 26 million in emergency aid to “respond to the unexpected and urgent needs resulting from the conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states of Sudan”. The governor of South Kordofan has stated that international humanitarian assistance is not needed and that the government has provided enough resources, reports AFP. However, the UN has reported that most government aid has gone to those in government-held zones.

Recent conflict between South Sudan and Sudan
The International Business Times reports that the conflict between South Sudan and Sudan is likely to dominate a summit on African security being held in Ethiopia. Fighting has escalated dramatically along the border and limited access to the remote region has made it difficult to verify claims made by both sides. Al Jazeera reporters witnessed an attack by Sudanese jets on an oil pipeline in the contested region of Heglig on 04 April. South Sudanese forces responded with anti-aircraft fire and reported that a Sudanese MiG-29 jet fighter was brought down during the fighting, reports the Sudan Tribune. A spokesperson for the Sudanese government denied the attacks and called the reports fabrications. AFP says that South Sudanese troops seized Sudan’s main oil field in Heglig from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) on 10 April and according to the Sudan Tribune, South Sudan’s government shut down oil production from the Heglig oil field. South Sudan accused Sudan of bombing a Heglig oilfield again on 15 April which resulted in damage to the oil field, reports Reuters. Sudan has denied the allegations and asserted that any damage to the fields has been caused by South Sudan. The Sudan Tribune also reports that South Sudan has accused the north of dropping five bombs on Bentiu, the capital of South Sudan’s Unity state on 12 April, which Sudan denies. On 15 April, South Sudan’s Unity state’s information minister Gideon Gatpan reported that bombing raids killed 10 civilians and wounded 14 more. UNMISS confirmed that two bombs fell inside their camp but believe that it was unlikely that the UN was being specifically targeted.

According to IRIN, Heglig is still a disputed region claimed by both countries. Almost half of Sudan’s oil comes from Heglig, making it an important source of revenue for the north. The BBC reports that Heglig is internationally recognised as Sudanese territory and the African Union has demanded that South Sudan withdraw. The UN Security Council has also demanded that both sides immediately de-escalate the conflict and return to the African Union High Level Implementation Panel on Sudan (AUHIP)-facilitated negotiation process which had previously collapsed when Sudan called off talks on 11 April. The US State Department has condemned South Sudan’s attack and seizure of Heglig as “an act which goes beyond self-defence and has increased tensions”, reports the East African. The European Union has also called on both sides to cease hostilities and to respect each other’s territorial integrity. AFP reports that Egypt has offered to help mediate the conflict, despite analysts saying that any type of negotiations were unlikely, given the current charged political climate. Along these lines, on 16 April the Sudanese parliament voted unanimously to brand the government of South Sudan as an enemy, reports AFP. Furthermore, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir has stated that South Sudan will only leave Heglig if a “clear mechanism and guarantee” are in place that will ensure Sudan cannot use the area to attack South Sudan, reports VOA.

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17 April 2012
Governance
Syria’s ceasefire went into effect at 0600 on the morning of 12 April, although Syrian forces failed to adhere to another requirement of the six-point peace plan which obliged the Syrian government to withdraw all troops, tanks and heavy weapons from cities 48 hours before the ceasefire went into effect. While UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan said in a statement that “Syria is experiencing a rare moment of calm on the ground”, other reports indicate that sporadic fighting continues in a number of cities throughout the country. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem announced ahead of the ceasefire that the Syrian government had already begun withdrawing troops from several cities as part of the UN-brokered deal.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported on 13 April that the Syrian government offered amnesty to opposition fighters, urging them to surrender without “blood on their hands”. According to Syrian state television, the rebels were urged “to hand themselves in, along with their weapons, at the nearest police center”, adding that the men would then “be released and all legal procedures against them would be terminated”. At the same time, Syria called on all displaced people to return home.

Efforts were underway late last week to send a team of UN observers to monitor the situation on the ground in Syria, says the BBC. UN Security Council Resolution 2042 (2012), unanimously adopted on 14 April, authorised sending an advanced team of 30 unarmmed military observers “to liaise with the parties and to begin to report on the implementation of a full cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties”. AFP reported that the first of the 30 international observers arrived in Syria on 15 April and would begin work the following day. A spokesman for the UN peacekeeping department Kieran Dwyer told AFP that the observers would come from active missions throughout the Middle East and Africa “so we can move people quickly and they are experienced in the region”.

US President Barack Obama has approved an aid package for Syrian rebels that will include communications equipment and medical supplies, reports AFP. According to a US official quoted in the article, “[c]onsistent with our longstanding efforts to support the peaceful opposition in Syria, the US is providing non-lethal material assistance to the non-violent, political opposition”. According to the US official, the US government plans to increase the aid package over time.

Security
The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) has accused terrorists of planting a roadside bomb in Aleppo that killed one Syrian officer and wounded at least 24 others. According to the State-run news source, “[a]n armed terrorist group used an explosive device to target a bus transporting officers and non-commissioned officers to their unit in Aleppo”. The attack occurred after the UN-brokered ceasefire went into effect on 12 April. The Syrian government claims the bomb was an attempt to “sabotage” the ceasefire. There has been no independent confirmation of the incident.

Thousands gathered for protests on 13 April in what was considered a test of the Syrian regimes commitment to Kofi Annan’s peace plan, reports AFP. Eight civilians were reportedly killed in the resulting clashes. Head of the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) Burhan Ghalioun said that demonstrations planned for Friday, 13 April, would be “the biggest possible so that the Syrian people can express their will”. The Syrian Interior Minister later announced that only pre-authorised demonstrations would be allowed by police.

Opposition forces have reported continuing violence despite the 12 April ceasefire deal. Fighting was reported in Zabadani, Hama and Homs, with the Local Coordination Committees claiming 15 people were killed after shelling and sniper fire rained on Homs, Qusair, Bayada, Idlib and Damascus, reports BBC. AFP says that shelling in the Khaldiye and Bayada neighbourhoods of Homs was the fiercest on 15 April since the ceasefire went into effect, with shells falling at “an average of three shells a minute”, according to the head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdel Rahman. Troops were also reported to have fired on demonstrators outside the Parliament building in Damascus. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights puts the death toll since the beginning of the ceasefire at 32 people, most of them civilians.

Syrian gunfire has once again hit refugees in a Turkish refugee camp across the border from Syria, says AFP. According to Anatolia News Agency, the incident was the third of its kind in one week. Syrian troops reportedly fired on a dozen individuals attempting to cross the border into Turkey on 12 April. An earlier incident that occurred on 09 April left four Syrians and two Turks wounded, with two of the Syrians later reported to have died from their injuries. Gunfire was also reported on 11 April, though no injuries were reported. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called the incidents a “very clear violation of the border” and has suggested that his country may request NATO assistance in protecting its border.
Humanitarian Assistance
Turkey has begun receiving international assistance for the nearly 25,000 Syrian refugees being hosted in its country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reportedly dispatched 1,500 tents and an equivalent number of blankets to refugees on the ground in Turkey.

UNHCR has opened a dedicated website to post information on the Syrian refugee crisis. The website lists the current number of registered Syrian refugees and provides updated reports on the organisation’s response. UNHCR reports a current total of 44,619 registered Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries; among them, 23,971 in Turkey, 10,386 in Lebanon, 9,022 in Jordan and 1,240 in Iraq.

According to an article by the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), civil society has played a major role in the refugee response in Jordan. IRIN notes that community-based organisations in Jordan are increasingly trying to co-ordinate their activities to improve their response to the crisis, but in the early stages of the crisis much was done for Syrian refugees on an ad-hoc basis. IRIN identifies the major actors in Jordan’s refugee response as civil society groups and Muslim organisations. One such actor is the Syria Women Organization which comprises the children of an earlier wave of Syrian refugees who fled their country in a 1982 crackdown on the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood as well as the Islamic Charity Centre Society and Al-Kitab wal Sunnah Association. The Syrian diaspora is also identified as a major player, sending a variety of supplies in the form of cash or food and clothing from across the globe, much of which is distributed by Syrian activists based in neighbouring countries. Red Crescent Societies from the Gulf region have also been credited with offering a great deal of assistance for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

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MEDITERRANEAN BASIN NOTICE BOARD

New CFC Mediterranean Basin Report

Please read our latest thematic report entitled, “Security in the Sahel and Beyond: AQIM, Boko Haram and al Shabaab”. This document discusses current security threats in the Sahel and surrounding regions, with the rise of groups such as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram and al Shabaab. A brief background and current events will be presented for each group, along with a review of regional cross-cutting issues.

We welcome your feedback and comments as well as any resources or information pertaining to this topic that we may make available to other Cimic-Web users.
parliament has misused their political power by appointing members to the Constituent Assembly with a similar political ideology, writes Voice of America (VOA). On 10 April, the Administrative Court suspended the formation of the Constituent Assembly process without stipulating its rationale. BBC reports that the halting of the process was meant to allow review of the process with legal advisors.

In response to the suspension of the Constituent Assembly, a panel of judges will investigate the legality of the method by which the Constituent Assembly members were chosen, reports the National. Originally, 60 of 100 seats were given to Islamists and 40 seats to liberals and minorities. However, the constitutional declaration from March 2011 does not identify any specific method of how to select members of the Constituent Assembly. Marina Ottoway from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace writes that the Egyptian constitutional declaration also lacks any specific rules and regulations regarding how the new Egyptian constitution should be written. The only details that are given indicate that the Egyptian parliament’s two chambers should cooperate with each other in electing 100 members to the Constituent Assembly. Consequently, Ottoway argues that two components, the legality of the Constituent Assembly and its members’ ideologies, have been under public scrutiny. She argues that secular parties continue to believe FJP will include sharia law in the constitution, which FJP has consistently rejected. Instead of religious ideologies, Ottaway states that “the relationship between [the] executive and [the] legislative power” is one of the main differences between the liberals and the Islamists. The liberals seek “a strong president (…) assuming that he will not be an Islamist;” whereas the FJP seeks a “prime minister responsible to the parliament, with the elected president controlling (…) security and foreign policy.”

As a result of the controversy, 20 members of the Assembly had already withdrawn before the Administrative Court’s suspension, the National writes. On 02 April, al Arabiya reported that the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church withdrew from the Constituent Assembly, finding it “pointless” to continue partaking in the drafting of the constitution due to the Assembly’s skewed representation. The Coptic Church is the principal Christian institution in Egypt, with Christians comprising 10% of the Egyptian population. Correspondingly, liberals also withdrew from the drafting claiming that the representation of the Assembly was an insufficient representation of the Egyptian ethnic and religious diversity, despite the fact that FJP decided to base the constitution on the “al-Azhar Document and the Democratic Coalition for Egypt Document,” which according to the newspaper al-Ahram are founded on democratic values.

Since the disbandment of the Constituent Assembly, Egypt’s transition to democracy has been questioned by experts. CNN reports that according to some analysts, it is unlikely that the constitution will be completed before the presidential elections, which means that a new president could potentially be inaugurated without checks and balances in place. As it stands, Bloomberg Businessweek reports that, on 22 April, the Egyptian legislation, political parties and the current military leader of Egypt, Tantawi, will meet to assess the structure of the Constituent Assembly. Al Masry al Youm reports, Tantawi is striving for a finalisation of the constitution by 30 June, before the inauguration of a new civilian president.

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