

Whispering Bell Monitor

Regional Overview- June 2011

Guillermo Gaspoz, Regional Information Manager, Whispering Bell Security Risk Management

Introduction

Whispering Bell Monitor offers its latest overview of the Middle East and North Africa region. Based on the latest developments, this document highlights major trends at the political and security levels, as well as prospective scenarios for the near future. It also reviews the position of selected countries in the tiered threat assessment framework, which has been especially designed by our team to reflect on the unprecedented developments that currently take place across the region. At the end of each country assessment, WB Monitor provides advice aimed at travelers, personnel and foreign residents in these countries.

Brief review of Whispering Bell Monitor's tiered system for country classification:

- **Tier 1** countries are those in which the situation is judged "critical" and where sudden changes with dramatic consequences for local populations, authorities and businesses can be expected.

In the current state of affairs, Libya and Yemen enter this category (as of June 30).

- **Tier 2** countries are those in which the situation is judged "alarming" and where sudden changes with important consequences for local populations, authorities and businesses could be expected.

In the current state of affairs, Syria and Bahrain belong to this category (as of June 30).

- **Tier 3** countries are those in which the situation is judged "of concern" and where sudden changes with potential consequences for local populations, authorities and businesses could be expected.

In the current state of affairs, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Lebanon enter this category (as of June 30).

Country-by-country assessments

Tier 1 countries: critical situation.

Libya

Ongoing military conflict. During the past month, the Libyan conflict has been characterized by the low mobility of its frontlines. Parties engaged in the conflict have only achieved gains of little

strategic relevance to their military objectives. In eastern Libya, troops loyal to Muammar Ghadafi and rebel fighters continue to engage in fierce battles over the coastal town of Brega, which remains under the control of the regime. Most notorious advances for rebel forces were registered in the Western Mountains region, specifically along the strip of land that stretches from the western city of Nalut (by the Tunisian border) to Zintan, southwest of the capital Tripoli. Control over the border point of Wazin provides rebels with a strategic supply line. In the last weeks, Ghadafi forces have launched repeated offensives against rebel positions in the Western Mountains with an aim to shut down the supply line and prevent any further advance towards Tripoli. The port city of Misrata, liberated from a Libyan army siege mid-May, was slowly gaining a sense of normalcy until Ghadafi loyalists located in the outskirts of the city started to shell rebel positions again using heavy artillery and rockets, resulting in casualties and material damage. Despite continuous reports of localized protests by anti-government activists and sporadic clashes with security forces, the capital Tripoli remains under the tight control of the Ghadafi regime. The most imminent threat to the regime is the continuation of NATO airstrikes against fixed and moving army targets, both in the capital and in the remaining of the country where the regime is still dominant. Low levels of violence spilling over from the Libyan conflict were reported within Tunisia, near the Dahiba border town as clashes took place by forces infiltrating Tunisia. Rockets fired by Ghadafi forces have also landed in Tunisian territory, causing injuries and material damage.

NATO intervention. In the past weeks, NATO has stepped up its air campaign against Libyan army facilities in Tripoli, particularly in and around Ghadafi's compound in the area of Bab Al Aziziyah. Frequently, although not consistently, NATO aircraft also back up advancing rebel forces by hitting Libyan army convoys, ammunition storages and rocket launchers on the battlefield, mostly in Zlitan, Nalut, Yefren and Brega. By eliminating a great number of control and command facilities, the NATO air campaign appears to have severely weakened the Libyan army's ability to carry out coordinated attacks against civilian populations and rebels. In the last two weeks NATO has begun to experience some credibility and internal unity problems, mainly due to the alleged killing of civilians during airstrikes and the emergence of voices within the alliance calling for an end to the Libya mission, namely by Italy. Although France and the United Kingdom have vowed to continue their military engagement as long as necessary, several NATO member states are reluctant to extend the mission or commit further capabilities.

Libya's opposition movement. The National Transitional Council (NTC) has been emboldened by the growing number of EU states that have either recognized it as the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people or granted it political recognition. Several high-level Western officials, including EU Diplomatic Chief Ashton, Italian FM Frattini, British Foreign Secretary Hague and US Assistant Secretary of State Feltman, paid visits to Benghazi and opened diplomatic missions there with a view to coordinate humanitarian and policy efforts. This said, the Libyan opposition movement continues to face financial uncertainties that threaten to derail its ability to run the affairs of areas under its control. In addition to the financial challenges, one must also mention the difficulties to provide proper training and equipment for those fighting at the frontline. The NTC has been promised up to \$1.3 billion by Italia, France, Qatar and Kuwait in the form of financial and material assistance. Several Western countries are also analyzing the possibility of channeling frozen assets

from the Ghadafi regime to the Libyan opposition, but this too needs to be worked out from a legal standpoint before it can be implemented.

Negotiations and international diplomacy. International efforts to reach a ceasefire and broker a political solution to the conflict have so far been unsuccessful. This being said, several external actors have taken an active role in trying to understand the intentions of Tripoli and Benghazi and assess the possibility of a compromise. The greatest hurdle to achieving a ceasefire has been the refusal by Ghadafi to leave power and the NTC's insistence that he should quit before talks with the regime can begin, although this now appears to be changing amid reports that Ghadafi could contemplate to step down if allowed to remain inside Libya. Despite repeated messages by Ghadafi that he and his supporters will fight against NATO and rebels until death, people in his entourage seem ready to discuss a potential exit strategy. A breakthrough in negotiations would not be surprising in the coming days or weeks.

Humanitarian situation. The humanitarian situation in Misrata has sharply improved since the end of the siege in mid-May, allowing the arrival of supplies and medical assistance. Several non-government organizations have now set base in Misrata. However, the return of rocket attacks against central parts of the city and the port area has reinstated a sense of insecurity among residents. Thousands of civilians in western Libya have fled to Tunisia to seek refuge from violence and persecution. Several towns along the border are now mostly emptied of civilians. Tunisian refugee camps and border towns are coping with the influx.

Potential scenarios in the coming month:

- **Almost certain. Fighting to intensify in western Libya.** Clashes between Ghadafi troops and rebel forces in Western Mountain and in the area between Zlitan and Misrata are expected to continue. Rebel forces are likely to hold their ground and attempt opportunistic advances against Ghadafi forces. Rebel moves will continue to be highly calculated as the likelihood of sustaining heavy casualties remains high, mainly due to poor training, lack of discipline and proper weaponry. In the Western Mountain region, Ghadafi forces will keep shelling towns and attacking rebel positions in order to break their supply line from Tunisia, which if maintained could enable rebel fighters to advance towards Tripoli. Fighting is also expected to continue in and around Zlitan, as rebels within the town and those advancing from Misrata seek to weaken troops loyal Ghadafi controlling the area. In the rest of the country, the stalemate will not be dramatically broken by either side.
- **Highly likely. Airstrike campaign by NATO to continue.** NATO airstrikes will continue to target suspected military facilities in Tripoli, but at a lower rate than before due to concerns over possible civilian casualties and lesser support for the mission from within the alliance. Rebels will consolidate their hold in the Western Mountains region. The country still faces the prospect of de facto partition between a NTC-controlled East and a Tripoli-dominated West. Despite the NTC's diplomatic and military achievements, these are insufficient to force the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, at least in the short term. A definitive conclusion to the military conflict is not in sight.

- **Credible. Humanitarian ceasefire.** A temporary ceasefire could be agreed on humanitarian grounds, allowing representatives from both sides to hold direct or indirect mediated talks to find a political solution. Only in these circumstances would NATO airstrikes stop. The situation on the ground would nevertheless remain fragile as sporadic attacks from either side could call for the resumption of hostilities. The future of Ghadafi, his relatives and close aides is likely to be the source of dispute in any negotiations.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

Foreigners should avoid traveling to Libya and those still in country should leave immediately. There is a continuous risk of fatality and serious injury from heavy weaponry attacks from Ghadafi forces on populated areas and along main roads. Foreigners in western Libya wishing to leave the country should look to evacuate through the bordering crossing in Ras Jdir. Professional advice and assistance is highly recommended. Exit through the Libyan-Egyptian border is the safest option for travelers and other foreigners in the eastern part of the country. Consular assistance should be requested before attempting to leave or enter Libya. NATO airstrikes in Tripoli also pose a risk to civilians close to military facilities and other infrastructure used by the regime. Internal GSM communications are currently working fine in eastern Libya through Libyana network. However, international calls are not possible. Internet is only available through satellite connection.

Yemen

Political stalemate. Four months into the political crisis, the stalemate in Yemen continues. The most significant development in Yemen's political scene since May has been the appointment of Vice-President Mansour Hadi as the acting president of the country following a June 3 attack that severely injured President Saleh and a number of prominent government officials, forcing Saleh to seek medical treatment in Saudi Arabia. Investigations following the attack have revealed that it was caused by a bomb planted by a detractor within the entourage of the president. The attack took place after Saleh once again rejected a power transition plan suggested by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and supported by Western governments. Acting President Mansour Hadi has been under strong pressure from opposition parties and the protest movement to launch a process of power transition. However, Hadi's ability to maneuver is severely constrained as Saleh's relatives still control the security apparatus. Several regime figures are pressing for the return of President Saleh, with repeated statements that his health condition is good and his return imminent.

Continuous street mobilization. Protests continue to be held across Yemen on a daily basis. The cities of Sana'a, Taiz, Ibb and Hudaidah have emerged as clear anti-government hubs. Protesters have formed revolutionary committees to adopt decisions and appoint representatives to the opposition and the government. Since early June, protesters have urged Hadi to form an interim council to overlook the process of power transition, to no avail. Protesters are also demanding an end to American and Saudi interference in Yemen's domestic affairs. The relationship between the protest movement and opposition parties is mixed: though both sides are pushing for the ouster of President Saleh, they differ on the implementation of the GCC initiative, which protesters deem

insufficient to guarantee political change. In Sana'a, supporters of Saleh continue to stage large gatherings, mostly on Fridays.

Security environment. The overall security environment in Yemen has dramatically deteriorated over the last month, mainly due to confrontations between security forces on the one hand, and tribal militias and Islamist fighters on the other. Most of the violence has occurred in Sana'a, Taiz, Aden and in the southern Abyan province. In Sana'a, tribal fighters responding to Sheikh Saqed Al-Ahmar confronted security forces loyal to President Saleh. Clashes took place for almost two weeks, during which both sides sustained heavy casualties and several government buildings were occupied by tribal militias. Sheikh Sadeq Al-Ahmar, chief of the Hashed tribal confederation and member of the powerful Al-Ahmar family, had earlier turned his back to Saleh and called on him to resign. Clashes ended early June thanks to a ceasefire brokered by Saudi Arabia. Violence has also been rife in the city of Taiz, where tribal fighters took positions and confronted security forces as they vowed to protect peaceful anti-government protesters from repeated crackdowns. Ceasefire attempts have so far been unsuccessful, and clashes continue on a daily basis in the city's streets.

Islamist militancy in southern Yemen. The situation also deteriorated sharply in southern Abyan province, particularly in the coastal town of Zinjibar, which has reportedly been taken over by hundreds of Islamists fighters under the banner of "Ansar Sharia". Islamists are exploiting the current crisis to expand their area of influence in the southern provinces. They appear to be driven by a will to impose the Islamic law on villagers. While some Al-Qaeda elements might well have been involved in the latest violence, most Islamists currently fighting are assumed to be organized at the local level only. The Yemeni Air Force launched several airstrikes against Islamists' positions. Clashes with security forces also took place on the ground. The violence has most recently reached the port city of Aden, as Islamists managed to penetrate the city with the assumed intention of conducting terrorist operations, including the car bomb attack against a police station on June 25.

International stance. External parties involved in Yemen, mainly the UN, Western and GCC governments, initially abandoned mediation efforts to end the political crisis following Saleh's third refusal to sign a power transition deal. However, the departure of Saleh to Saudi Arabia created new opportunities for negotiation. Foreign envoys made their way to Sana'a and held talks with opposition representatives and with Vice President Hadi to try to re-launch the GCC initiative. The position of main external players Saudi Arabia and Washington has not significantly changed: instability will reign in Yemen as long as Saleh remains president, and a transition of power to the vice-president is the best option to guarantee a return to political stability and public order. Saudi Arabia continues to play a central role in the unfolding of the Yemeni crisis: Riyadh was key to broker a ceasefire between security forces and tribesmen in Sana'a thanks to strong links to Yemeni tribal figures and could well prevent Saleh from leaving the Kingdom if it wishes so. Saudi Arabia is mostly concerned about the potential for a political vacuum in Yemen and will therefore do the necessary to ensure that the political and security situation does not escalate any further. Though Riyadh has traditionally supported Saleh, his inability to bring about an end to the crisis has encouraged Saudi authorities to explore other options, namely a transition of power.

Humanitarian situation. Extremism and political violence have widely affected civilian populations since the crisis broke out four months ago. Developments in the last month have been even more

dramatic. The violence that rocked Sana'a late May forced tens of thousands of residents to flee the capital. Clashes between Islamists and security forces in and around Zinjibar also sent thousands to nearby towns. Estimates from the United Nations put the number of internally-displaced people at around 45,000 in Abyan province alone. Attacks against oil infrastructure caused severe disruption to the production and distribution of electricity and fuel, with subsequent impacts on the food supply chain and provision of education and health services.

Potential scenarios in the coming month:

- **Almost certain: Street mobilization to continue.** The protest movement has not lost momentum despite the lack of positive responses to its demands. Mass mobilization capability has given protest leaders the credibility to pose as interlocutors and eventually emerge as influential representatives of the anti-government and pro-reform movement. Revolutionary youth councils are almost certain to grow as powerful players in the coming month as traditional political forces map their options to deal with the current crisis. In the absence of a political solution, escalation tactics by protesters could once again lead to violence from security forces and armed government supporters.
- **Highly likely. Political future to remain uncertain.** President Saleh has, until now, resisted pressure to transfer power. Though he looks unlikely to resume presidential duties in the short term, his relatives and close aides in the government and security forces are still in control. If his health condition allows him to return to Yemen, he is sure to further resist power transition options that require him to step down. He may well suggest alternatives to ensure a hold on power but any such proposals are likely to be violently rejected by the opposition and protest movement. Over the short-term, the stalemate is very likely to continue. Saleh is not expected to return in the short-term, increasing the likelihood of a protracted conflict with security impacts at the local and regional levels.
- **Credible. Violence to intensify in Taiz, southern Yemen.** Violence generated by the deployment of tribal militias protecting protesters in Taiz is unlikely to end anytime soon. Unless a broad political solution is reached between the government and higher tribal authorities, any ceasefire is likely to be fragile and easily challenged by either party. Information coming from Abyan province and the city of Aden points to the spread of Islamist militancy and serious difficulties faced by security forces to prevent violent attacks against army and government targets. US drone attacks against suspected Al-Qaeda operatives might result in these local groups embracing an anti-Western agenda, therefore increasing the threat of terrorism against Western interests.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

Foreigners should avoid all travel to Yemen at this time. Several governments, including the British government, have urged citizens to leave Yemen immediately while commercial means remain available. Those that need to travel or who are currently residing in Yemen should be briefed on the prevailing threats and should be confident in their local security arrangements. While in country, movements should be limited to the essential only and stringent security precautions must be in place at all times. The use of professional security service providers might be necessary for those moving

outside the capital Sana'a. Foreigners should likewise avoid approaching political-motivated gatherings and limit the time spent close to sensitive locations, such as government buildings and public squares, to mitigate risks of incidental violence. Travel to southern Abyan province must be avoided for security reasons. Visiting Aden is not recommended at this time due to risks of terrorism and violence by Islamist militants.

Tier 2 countries: alarming situation.

Syria

Protest activities. Anti-government protests have continued across Syria over the past month. Some areas within the country have attracted more attention than others due to the frequency and size of demonstrations. Protests intensified in the outskirts of Damascus, and also in cities in central Syria such as Homs and Hama, as well as in Latakia, Aleppo and Daraa. Sizeable demonstrations generally range from several hundred to a few thousand protesters. Marches have been mostly peaceful in nature demanding the introduction of democratic reforms, the end of the Baathist political domination, and the resignation of President Assad. In some cases, however, activists have also used iron bars, petrol bombs and guns to attack security forces, prompting even greater levels of violence.

Response from security forces. The regime's strategy to deal with unprecedented opposition has not significantly changed since last month. The response has mainly involved the use of the military and law enforcement, but also combined political statements aimed at appeasing domestic dissent and reassuring the international community. Army contingents, backed up by tanks, have been sent to protest hubs to purportedly arrest armed gangs and restore order. Residents frequently claimed that incoming security forces sealed entire towns or neighborhoods, conducted house searches and arrests, and used gunfire against protesters and tank artillery against residential areas considered opposed to the regime. The 'Shahiba', armed supporters of the regime, have also been pointed to as responsible for the bloodshed that resulted from heavy crackdowns. Over the past month, security forces moved in to restore control in two main areas of the country: the cities of Homs and Hama (and various towns between them and near the Lebanese border); and several towns in Idlib province in northern Syria close to the Turkish border, particularly the town of Jisr al-Shoughour, where observers reported a deadly mutiny within the army over the use of violence against civilians. The government claimed that up to 120 soldiers were killed by armed gangs on that occasion. Operations by Syrian security forces continue in these two areas of the country. Clashes and civilian casualties tend to rise between Friday and Sunday every week, when large protests are held.

Political response from the regime. The regime has made repeated reform promises in an effort to placate opposition forces inside Syria and limit criticism arising from the international community. The most significant pledges included investigations into human rights abuses within the security apparatus, the establishment of an anti-corruption entity, reforms to the electoral law, amnesty for

political and criminal detainees, the launch of a national dialogue, and the possibility of constitutional amendments to diminish the monopoly of the Baath Party. Detractors of the regime have said that words now need to translate into concrete action and that these measures, if implemented, still do not go far enough. In the latest developments, the government allowed opposition figures to hold a meeting in Damascus and set July 10th as the date for the launch of a national dialogue.

International response. International condemnation of the violence by the Syrian regime increased meaningfully over the past month. American and EU officials repeatedly said that the legitimacy of President Assad has reached an all-time low, and applied new sanctions against officials, including travel bans and assets freezes. In addition to Western pressure, Turkey adopted harsh criticism urging Damascus to enact democratic reforms and cease attacks on peaceful demonstrators. The international response to the latest political overtures by the regime has been mixed: while some governments welcomed the proposed reforms, others reacted cautiously and demanded their outright implementation.

Humanitarian situation. Violence in northern Idlib province has forced more than twelve thousand people to cross over to Turkey and seek refuge in border towns where camps have been set up by Turkish authorities and the United Nations. Several thousand people are also said to have settled in makeshift tents near the Turkish border, reluctant to cross the border due to fears that they would not be allowed back. Several hundred people also crossed the Lebanese border to find shelter in nearby towns, near the Syrian city of Homs. Internally-displaced people within Syria are reportedly facing shortages of food and medical supplies. The number of refugees in Turkey appears to have now stabilized, and depending on the evolving situation on the ground, displaced people will slowly regain their villages in northern Syria.

Potential scenarios in the coming month:

- **Almost certain. Protests and violence to continue despite dialogue.** Protesters will continue to stage rallies across Syria despite the risks of being engaged by security forces and armed regime supporters. Many youth groups have not been deterred by previous crackdowns and do not believe in the promises of reform formulated by the regime. Moreover, they are confident that persistent street mobilization will sooner or later pay off. Though street protests are expected to remain peaceful, agitators can easily infiltrate and make calm demonstrations escalate to reach high levels of violence.
- **Highly likely. Army deployment to towns and poor situation of refugees.** Security forces will be deployed to towns and cities where anti-regime protests appear to emerge or consolidate. Light weapons, machine guns and tank artillery are likely to be used to target activists. In addition, protesters face the prospect of detention, forced disappearance and torture. Crackdown in border areas with Turkey and Lebanon prompt residents to flee and cross into neighboring countries. However, by avoiding the risk of violence, refugees expose themselves to shortages of food and medical supplies and hard living conditions. Return to their places of origin is made difficult by fears of reprisals by security forces or rival sectarian communities.

- **Likely. National dialogue divides opposition, opening room for clampdown.** Participation of various opposition parties in the national dialogue sponsored by the government create divisions among the anti-regime movement and breaks the momentum created by previous large demonstrations, giving authorities an incentive to move on to clamp down on dissent. In addition, the adoption of armed resistance by anti-government groups and further defections within the security forces could be turning points and lead to a descent into civil conflict.
- **Credible. Mounting tensions between Syria and Turkey.** Tensions between Syria and Turkey over the issue of refugees, as well as disagreements on how to deal with protesters could result in limited-impact skirmishes along the Turkish-Syrian border, where Syrian army movements have increased in recent days. Sectarian tensions, including violence, flares up between Sunni and Allawite communities.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

Travelers should avoid non-essential travel to Syria at this time. Foreigners currently residing in Syria are advised to leave the country pending improvements in the security situation. We remind that several Western governments, including the British Foreign Office, have urged their citizens to leave Syria immediately while commercial means are still available. Western citizens face the risk of being forcibly detained and interrogated by security forces. While in country, personnel should assess their need to stay and exercise extreme caution. They are also advised to limit movement and avoid approaching public gatherings, especially on Fridays. Presence in Syria must be reported to appropriate embassies or consulates. Relatives/colleagues outside the country should be kept informed of any domestic travel. Aid workers deployed to the Turkish-Syrian border should exercise caution as shootings are common in the area from inside Syrian territory.

Bahrain

Protest activities. Since the lifting of the state of emergency on June 1, anti-government groups have staged a number of large Friday demonstrations in Bahrain, predominately in Shia districts. As army tanks pulled out from the capital, several thousand people took to the streets to demand the release of prisoners, investigations into human rights abuses and greater political and religious rights. At times police forces intervened to disperse the crowds using tear gas and rubber bullets. Some protesters have also been arrested due to perceived threatening behavior during rallies. Incidents opposing law enforcement and protesters have, however, been limited over the past month and have not resulted in casualties or severe injuries on either side.

Security environment. Displays of dissent and random acts of violence continue to occur in Bahrain, particularly in Shia-populated areas where anti-government sentiment is rife. The security environment does however appear to have stabilized significantly, to the point that Saudi troops are announced to begin a phased-out withdrawal from Bahrain early July. This step could also be

decisive for the resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which deteriorated sharply following the deployment of Saudi and UAE forces last March.

Political dialogue. Authorities announced the launch of a national dialogue, due to begin on July 1. A high number of Bahraini political and social movements have been invited, and expatriate clubs were also expected to take part. Ahead of the talks, which are expected to tackle reforms for greater political inclusion and ways to combat corruption, the government lifted bans on political parties that had been sanctioned following March protests. Several opposition parties are still debating whether they should enter into discussions with the Bahraini government or not. Shia political parties are arguing that dialogue has been made impossible due to the continuing detention of several of their leaders. Mid-June, a military court gave life sentences to a number of anti-regime activists, including prominent figures within the opposition, many of which were already on detention while the rests were tried 'in absentia'. Other concerns from opposition parties are that the high number of movements represented in the dialogue might dilute their voice and that appointed government interlocutors are not necessarily prone to reform.

International response. Bahrain's crown prince visited Washington early June and met with President Obama, who urged him to address human rights violations during and after the crackdown, and to guarantee a fair trial for those activists currently detained, as a way to create an appropriate environment for the proposed national dialogue to succeed. The warning from the US administration was followed by a decision from the Federation International de l'Automobile (FIA) to cancel plans to hold the Formula One race in Bahrain later this year due to concerns expressed by several F1 teams. The FIA decision bears negative reputational and economic impacts on Bahrain.

Potential scenarios in the coming month:

- **Almost certainly. National dialogue takes place, trials and protests to continue.** Bahraini authorities carry on with plans to hold a national dialogue, despite reservations from large opposition parties and chances that it could fail very quickly if key issues are not addressed. Trial of activists suspected of taking part in the revolt and plotting against the regime continue, while allegations of torture and unlawful detention by detainees' relatives and human rights groups are dismissed. Anti-government groups continue to hold regular protests in Shia-populated areas without major disruptions or violence. These demonstrations are not necessarily approved by authorities but trigger no major reaction from security forces.
- **Likely. Friday protests prompt crackdown, limited violence.** Friday demonstrations held by activists opposed to the regime could take place outside areas and hours authorized by the government, prompting the intervention of police forces and the use of tear gas, rubber bullets and other means to disperse the crowds. Provocations from either side fuel tensions and lead to short-lived scenes of violence and arrests, initiating a cycle of protests that attracts foreign media, creates concern in the international community and disrupts efforts to reach national reconciliation. Protests of this nature are also likely to take place following controversial court decisions in which suspected activists receive jail sentences. Firefights and sporadic violence against individuals are also likely in Shia neighborhoods.

- **Credible. Saudi troops' withdrawal eases tensions with Iran.** The withdrawal of Saudi troops, at least most of them, encourages UAE forces to do likewise, lifting roadblocks toward the normalization of Iranian relations with Gulf countries, as well as easing current sectarian tensions inside Bahrain.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice

Security forces have restored public order in Bahrain, with the exception of Shia neighborhoods where protests and clashes take place frequently. These areas should be avoided. Curfew hours have been lifted on June 1. Trips between the capital city center and the airport are said to be safe and traffic flows normally. Security screening at the airport can be lengthy due to fears of entry of weapons and material that could be used to incite protests. Some army checkpoints remain in place, though most of them have been lifted. Foreigners are advised to follow instructions from authorities at all times and stay away from public gatherings that could attract security forces. Registration at appropriate embassies is highly recommended.

Tier 3 countries: situation 'of concern'.

Egypt

Violence returned to Egypt late June as security forces clashed with families of those killed during the revolution and groups of youths disappointed by the perceived judicial impunity of prominent figures of the Mubarak regime. The most significant incidents took place in the evening of June 28 in Tahrir Square in Cairo, where up to a thousand people, mostly protesters but also policemen, were reportedly injured by tear gas, rubber bullets and flying rocks. Tensions flared up after a court adjourned the trial of former interior minister accused of ordering the killing of civilians during the unrest earlier this year. Developments in Tahrir Square prompted demonstrations in several other cities. Revolutionary youths feel that the ruling military council is not addressing core issues, namely the imprisonment of former officials and members of security forces suspected of corruption, killings and human rights violations. Violent clashes frequently take place in Cairo between anti- and pro-Mubarak activists, during which police forces are often accused of not doing enough to protect peaceful protesters from 'thugs' supporting the former president.

Sectarian violence is also on the rise in Egypt, both in the big cities like Cairo and in villages in the southern parts of the country. Clashes take place as Coptic Christians demand legislation that take into account their religious particularities, but also over the controversial construction of churches in towns which both religious communities inhabit. The overall security environment is reported to have worsened in Egypt: petty crime is rampant and there have been a number of high-level prison breaks. Strikes disrupting public services and transportation remain very frequent across the country as worker unions demand better working conditions, greater salaries and the revocation of officials appointed during the Mubarak era.

Though there has been no violent repercussion to the killing of Osama Bin Laden inside the country, the appointment of Egyptian Ayman Al-Zawahiri as the new Al-Qaeda leader heightens the level of threat of terrorism attacks by Egypt-based extremist militants.

-Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

Travelers and foreign residents in Egypt face no imminent threat in the context of the recent political convulsion and ongoing violence. However, public gatherings in Tahrir Square in Cairo, government and judicial buildings should be avoided as clashes between protesters and security forces have once again become recurrent. While Western embassies and tourist sites remain possible targets of attacks by extremist groups, such risks are diminished by greater presence of security forces in these locations. Trips to Sinai province should be avoided due to volatile situation there.

Morocco

The most significant political development in Morocco during the past month is the announcement by King Mohammed VI of a reform plan that would see the country become a constitutional monarchy. The parliament and judiciary would be empowered and become more independent from the executive. The King will delegate a number of prerogatives to the prime minister, which the King will select from the political party winning parliamentary elections. All of these proposed reforms are being put to vote via a referendum on July 1. The proposal has received the support of all mainstream political parties, worker unions and social groups, and is therefore highly likely to be approved by the majority of voters. This being said, the pro-democracy 'February 20 Movement' has shown opposition to constitutional reform by staging sizeable protests across the country a week prior to the vote, calling for a boycott. This movement claims that the proposed reforms do not go far enough and that the King will still retain religious and military titles and prerogatives deemed incompatible with the division of powers and the idea of democracy. Unlike protests last May, in which security forces used violence to disperse crowds, the latest demonstrations took place without major incidents. Some minor Islamist parties are also against a referendum that will grant citizens greater freedom of faith, which to them challenges the exclusivity of Islam as the unique religion of the Kingdom.

Opposition to the monarchy does exist in Morocco, but the movement is small in comparison to other countries in the region and has remained largely peaceful in the way it formulates its demands. The King has been very reactive to protests that first took place in March and the implementation of the proposed reforms will expectedly ensure long-term political stability and predictability in Morocco.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

Leisure and business travelers are advised to be cautious while in Morocco, as there is a high risk of terrorism following the late March blast in Marrakesh and the killing of Osama Bin Laden. AQIM operatives could seek to conduct attacks in locations frequented by Westerners, so these places should

be avoided. Demonstrations against the government by pro-democracy activists, though mostly peaceful, should also be avoided.

Tunisia

Parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in July have been postponed to October 23. The decision by the government to delay the vote was welcomed by most political parties and supporters of the revolution who were concerned that the electoral calendar was not giving them enough time to organize themselves and mobilize their respective support base. In addition, there were fears among pro-democracy forces that an early poll would have favored Islamist parties. Interim authorities enjoy the trust of most Tunisians and the international community. During the last G8 summit in France the small North African country was announced as the beneficiary of a substantial financial aid package aimed at helping to restart the national economy and create jobs, further indicating that post-revolution Tunisia is on the right track. Former president Ben Ali is being tried in absentia on several charges, along with relatives and other regime figures. Ben Ali, currently residing in Saudi Arabia, has already received a 35 year sentence. These political, economic and judiciary developments appear to be keeping revolutionary youth fairly content despite initial disappointments. However, Islamist activists have caused sporadic disturbances across the country, confirming that some discontent prevails within this fraction of the population. Late June, around a hundred of alleged Islamists stormed a movie theater in the capital Tunis showing a film on secularism and attacked film-goers, prompting police forces to intervene. The security situation in the capital remains calm following the lifting of a nightly curfew in mid-May. Security concerns have arisen in the eastern part of the country as a result of the spillovers of the Libyan conflict. Thousands of Libyan refugees are now in temporary camps in Tunisian border towns, causing tensions among local residents as a result of the sudden influx. Sporadic violence has taken place inside and outside the camps. In addition, clashes between Libyan rebels and Ghadafi forces for the control of crossing points have at times gone beyond the border and affected normalcy inside Tunisian territory, resulting in some injuries and material damage.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

Travelers in Tunisia should avoid travel close to the Libyan border unless essential. The rest of the country remains calm except for random protests taking place in the capital Tunis. The night-time curfew has now been lifted. Foreigners have not been targeted by any group inside Tunisia since the revolution took place. Tourist sites are seen to be free of risk. This being said, the internal situation must be monitored at all times as deterioration in the security environment leading to sporadic violence remains possible, especially in Tunis and important cities in southern Tunisia.

Algeria

Frequent low-intensity protests by issue-specific groups continue to take place throughout Algeria, mainly related to socio-economic dissatisfaction, scarcity of employment opportunities and lack of decent accommodation options in the cities. Demonstrators do have political demands, but these do not appear to be challenging the legitimacy of the regime as witnessed in neighboring countries in recent months. Small social and political movements opposed to the government have failed to form a unified front. In addition, authorities manage to control social discontent through financial subsidies and other mechanisms that offer short-term remedies to specific problems. A high-level committee tasked by President Bouteflika to gather recommendations for a constitutional reform has completed its work and several amendments are reportedly being considered. With few exceptions, Algeria's main political parties are supportive of the reform push, which could see a more independent judiciary, restrictions on the powers of the president, the introduction of a prime minister and greater media freedom. The recommendations have not yet been made public and there is no calendar for them to be examined by the executive or implemented.

Although the general security environment in Algeria is stable, there remains a significant risk of terrorist attacks against foreign interests by operatives of Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), which is known to have a considerable presence and support base in Algeria.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

Visitors should consider personal safety before traveling to Algeria. The threat of terrorism against foreign citizens remains high. Protests in public spaces do not pose a threat to foreigners, though these should avoid approaching politically-motivated gatherings. Travel outside Algiers is not recommended. The use of the road network could expose travelers to risk of abduction by criminal and extremist syndicates operating in southern Algeria and in bordering areas with Libya, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

Saudi Arabia

Protests demanding reforms and contesting the Saudi military presence appear to have ceased in the Kingdom's Eastern Province. There are currently no signs of opposition to the monarchy, except for a movement of Saudi women demanding the right to drive. The movement, organized mainly through social media, has attracted a great deal of worldwide media attention but has so far failed to provoke a change in the conservative practice prohibiting women to drive cars. The Saudi Kingdom has been spared by the protest wave that other countries across the region have witnessed, mainly due to the inexistence of basic forms of political rights and strong restrictions imposed on the media. Nothing currently indicates that the security and political situation in Saudi Arabia might deteriorate in the short to medium term.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

The threat of terrorism is present in Saudi Arabia. Though Al-Qaeda is known to have a strong support base in the Kingdom, authorities have been successful at dismantling operation networks through the

killing and detention of suspected militants over the past decade. Business travelers and foreigners residing in the country should avoid unnecessary public exposure and limit their movements within known and secure areas.

Oman

Oman has not witnessed further protests over the past month. The security situation across the country remains untroubled. A few dozen individuals arrested in March and April for the participation in protests in the cities of Sohar, Muscat and Salalah have been tried and given light sentences, for inciting violence, carrying guns without license, disrupting traffic and damaging public property. The small protest movement failed to gain momentum and the ruler Sultan Qaboos remains highly respected in the country.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

Travelers and foreign residents face no major security risks in Oman. Foreigners are however advised against approaching politically-motivated public gatherings as this could result in interrogation and arrest by security forces.

Lebanon

The formation of a new government cabinet mid-June has brought back a sense of political stability in Lebanon after several months of failed and arduous negotiations between the country's main political forces. The new cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Mikati, is dominated by a bloc in which Hezbollah plays a leading role, a fact that has created some concern in Western countries as well as in Saudi Arabia and Israel. The first weeks of the new cabinet have been tense due to two main developments. The first is the sudden eruption of sectarian violence between Sunni and Allawites in the northern city of Tripoli on June 18, which left seven people dead and several dozens injured. Calm was only restored after security forces intervened. The clashes were prompted by a march supporting the Syrian regime, seen as a provocation to Sunnis living in a nearby neighborhood of Tripoli. The second major development is the indictment of alleged Hezbollah members by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) on June 30, which could lead to sectarian and politically-motivated violence and irreparable divisions within the government. Lebanese authorities must now decide how to handle the situation: they can either take action on the arrest warrants and face domestic instability and possibly violence, or they can ignore the indictments in contravention of Lebanon's international commitments for the sake of preserving national unity.

Whispering Bell Monitor advice:

Given the political and sectarian tensions currently affecting the country, travelers should consider delaying any movement in Lebanon pending reaction from political forces and their support bases to

the STL indictment, or until the situation stabilizes. Foreign companies might as well consider contingency planning for personnel already in country.