MidEast News Wire

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November 30, 2010

Among the tens of thousands of documents released by WikiLeaks saying all kinds of good and bad things about world leaders, there seems to be one leader which almost everyone seems to agree about: that is of course the leader of Iran, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The documents point to a great fear and distrust of Iran, especially among the countries of the Middle East such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Jordan.

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, according to the released documents, has repeatedly pressed the US to stop Iran’s nuclear program and to destroy their nuclear facilities. In King Abdullah’s own words, “to cut off the head of the snake.”

The King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa as well as Zeid Rifai, a Jordanian lawmaker separately but in agreement have also urged the US to stop Iran. Rifai is reported in one document to have told an American official to “bomb Iran, or live with an Iranian bomb.” Abu Dhabi crown prince Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed stated that “Ahmadinejad is going to take us to war.”

According to a recently leaked cable sent by the US State Department last December, Qatar is the “worst” contributor to the struggle against terrorism in the Middle East. The cable, released along with the avalanche of over 250,000 classified documents by WikiLeaks this week, goes on to state that Qatari security was "hesitant to act against known terrorists out of concern for appearing to be aligned with the U.S. and provoking reprisals."

Another cable from the same time period urged counterterrorism as a talking point when the Emir visited the US in January, 2010.

These two cables, previously secret, reveal a gap in what the US State Department has said publicly and what they presumably really believe in their internal memos and cables. In 2008 the State Department called Qatar’s terrorism support since 9/11 “significant” in a Congressional Research Report delivered to Congress.

Analysts have offered their opinions on the reason for the contradiction in the State Department’s remarks concerning Qatar.

"Keeping U.S. basing rights in Qatar and ensuring the stable flow of oil and LNG gas [liquefied natural gas] are both more important than Qatar's willingness to deal seriously with its citizen’s involvement in terrorism," says Toby Jones, an assistant Middle East history professor at Rutgers University. "The cost of [the United States] pressuring them publicly to take counterterrorism seriously, it seems, might come at too high an economic cost."

December 6, 2010

In one more bit of information from the seemingly endless storehouse of Wikileaks documents it has been revealed that in 2009 Hilary Clinton, the U.S. Secretary of State, accused Saudi Arabia as the main funding source for terrorists. In the memo released on the Wikileaks website Clinton is quoted as saying, “Donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide.”Clinton continues to state that the Saudi government is unwilling to cut off the flow of money to these groups. In addition she mentions Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE as also giving money to terrorist organizations.

This bit of secret revelation is so far the one document receiving the most responses in the Middle East and was signed by Ms. Clinton. Its strength is that it confirms that what until now was just an assumption that the war the US is conducting now in Afghanistan and Pakistan is paid for by rich citizens of the Gulf States whose governments continue to fund the terrorists we are fighting against.

The second edition of the Middle East Missile and Air Defense Symposium opened on Sunday, December 5th, 2010 at the Armed Forces Officers’ Club in Abu Dhabi. The Institute of Near East and Gulf Military Analysis launched the symposium under the patronage of the Armed Forces General Headquarters in partnership with the UAE Air Force and Air Defense.

Attended by many diplomats, military and political leaders from the Gulf region and elsewhere the symposium is expected to last two days.

Sunday’s schedule included an opening session and two plenary sessions with speakers from the UAE Armed Forces, the CEO of INEGMA and General Mattis of the US Central Command (CENTCOM.)

Monday’s sessions will includethe following subjects: ‘UAE Network Enabled Capability: A Local Solution to a Global Problem’, ‘Adapting to Seize the Opportunities of Technology’, ‘Reducing Risks and Consequences with the Deployment of Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense’, ‘Consolidating Extended Low Tier Air Defense’.

December 13, 2010

In a distinctly out-of-character display of silence, Iran has quietly been conducting war games along the border with Iraq without fanfare or announcement. Iran announced the conclusion of their military maneuvers, in contrast to their usual display of bravado by giving extensive publicity to military exercises mostly designed to show off weapons systems. It has not been made clear why the large military exercise was not announced beforehand by Iran.

Two months ago Iran had announced that it would hold war games during the month of December, and that was the last anyone heard of these games until it was revealed, indirectly, that the games were already over. The Iranian state news agency IRNA reported on Monday that two military officers had been killed in a car accident on their way home from the large exercises by the military ground forces. No further details were given.

Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff is planning on meeting soon with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of Iraq. Later Mullen will visit U.S. military installations and talk with the U.S. military forces before they begin the year long process of ending their mission in Iraq.

There is an agreement between the U.S. and Iraq for the U.S. to be out of Iraq by the end of year 2011. However the Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has stated that the U.S. would be willing to consider the possibility of continuing U.S. presence in Iraq if Iraqi officials request it.

According to Nouri al-Maliki, however, he sees the agreement being fulfilled, as he believes that the Iraqi military is quite capable of taking care of its own security. The tenuousness of the situation, however, was underscored the day before Mullen’s visit when a suicide bomber murdered 17 people outside government offices in Baghdad.

December 20, 2010

American Tourist Murdered in Israel

Kristine Luken, with her friend Kaye Susan Wilson were on a nature hike last Saturday in a forest in Israel when suddenly two Arab men attacked them with what Wilson believes was a ‘bread knife.’ Susan was able to live and tell the story to police and reporters from her hospital bed after being stabbed and pretending to be dead. When the Arabs were safely gone Wilson managed to walk over to a nearby parking area and get help. Her friend Kristine was not so lucky. The Christian Evangelical woman in her mid-40s was found dead, hands and feet bound together, on Sunday, with multiple stab wounds.

Ms. Lukens was not Jewish, but a great lover of Israel. Her and her friend Kaye Susan Wilson, a professional tour guide, both love hiking and decided to go into the forest during the Christmas vacation. The forest they were in was inside the green-line when they were attacked, but not far from several Arab villages. Investigators of the murder believe that although it appears to be a terrorist attack and not a crime committed for criminal reasons, it is unlikely that any terrorist group was involved but rather was a terrorist attack initiated and carried out by individuals.

Wikileaks Document Reveals Vulnerability of Yemen’s Nuclear Material

According to a cable sent by an un-named Yemeni official dated January 9, 2010 and sent to U.S. Embassy, about a week went by with no security at Yemen’s National Atomic Energy Commission’s nuclear facility. "Very little now stands between the bad guys and Yemen's nuclear material," is a quote from the cable which was reprinted in the newspaper The British Guardian.

The cable stated that the one guard at the facility was removed from the site on December 30, 2009, leaving the nuclear facility completed unguarded. The one closed circuit TV camera had not been functional at the facility for a period of six months previously. Yemen is the poorest of all the Arab countries, and they also play host to an especially active branch of Al-Qaida. The Yemeni branch of Al-Qaida has not only attacked the Yemeni government on numerous occasions, but it plotted, but failed, to attack and explode an airplane last Christmas in Detroit.

The cable urges the U.S. embassy to persuade the US government to secure the nuclear material.

December 27, 2010

Seattle Says “No” to Anti-Israel Advertisements

In the face of an international outcry King County executive Dow Constantine announced that Seattle busses would not place vitriolic political billboards on busses this holiday season. The original billboards clearly anti-Israel in nature, boldly stating “Israel War Crimes-Your Tax Dollars at Work” on a background of Gaza strip post-battle scenes of destroyed buildings and confused people. In response the pro-Israel camp proposed to sponsor billboards stating “Palestinian War Crimes” adjacent to an exploded Israeli bus in flames.

Explaining his decision to not run either of the billboards on Seattle busses Constantine stated that:

"The escalation of this issue from one of 12 local bus placards to a widespread and often vitriolic international debate introduces new and significant security concerns that compel reassessment."

As a result to the incident Seattle and King County officials have decided to put at least a temporary stop to all new advertising of a non-commercial nature on the county’s busses.

Jewish organizations from around the world expressed relief on Friday after staging a protest campaign via e-mails, letters and phone calls to not place the billboards.

Not so happy was the Seattle Mideast Awareness Campaign who had sponsored the anti-Israel billboards. In their view King County and its officials are not allowing free-speech on what they see as a legitimate foreign policy issue of the United States.

"The county gave in to bullying. Opponents who want information about Israeli war crimes silenced mounted a campaign to silence us. That seems outrageous to us," said Edward Mast, a Seattle playwright and pro-Palestinian activist.

Bethlehem is Star in Christmas Celebrations

Hosting numbers larger than in any previous year since Israel handed over control of Bethlehem to the Palestinian Authority, visitors poured into the traditional Christmas Christian capital by the tens of thousands for holiday celebrations.

The weather was perfect, and cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian governments helped ease the ability of tourists and visitors to enter into the ancient city and enjoy their religious pilgrimage. The only hitch in the arrival of tourists were the sever snowstorms which closed down several European airports, hindering the ability of many tourists to arrive in time for the ceremonies.

Manger Square hosted the traditional revelry which included the singing of Christmas carols sung in both English and Arabic; and the ancient Midnight Mass which began as a procession from Jerusalem to Bethlehem led by the Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal and finished as a church service.

January 3, 2011

Israel Heading Towards the Sun for Its Electric Supply

A national master plan has been formulated in Israel and is now awaiting cabinet approval which will optimize the country’s reliance on solar energy to meet the country’s electrical needs. The plan calls for photovoltaic panels to be installed on roofs and agricultural areas which will produce electricity which will feed into the electrical grid of Israel. The plan is new in that it uses already existing structures to place the photovoltaic panels, creating the solar power infrastructure without needing to spend huge amounts of money building free standing solar energy farms. Not only does the plan save money, it also saves the even more precious land in Israel for other uses.

A shoot out in Saudi Arabia left one suspected Al-Qa’ida operative dead while a second was taken into custody. The shooting took place at a checkpoint in central Saudi Arabia on Saturday when a couple, which appeared to be a man and a woman but were revealed later to be both men, began to shoot at the police. The Saudi police returned fire, killing one of the suspects. After the incident Saudi officials stated that despite this incident they believe that they are making good headway into the prevention of Al-Qa’ida operations in the kingdom. In recent months the Saudis have arrested about 150 members of Al-Qa’ida, making what officials believe is a large dent in Al-Qa’ida’s ability to function there.

January 10, 2011

As riots continue to rage in Tunisia, the neighboring North African country of Algiers joined in with riots of their own, leaving 18-year-old Azzedine Lebza dead as the first casualty, another two dead and as many as 800 injured.

The riots have been continuing for the past three weeks in Tunisia, inspired by widespread economic insecurity, including inflation and the great divide between the life situations of the rich and the poor. The United States State Department issued the first statement on the events in Tunisia this past Friday when Philip Crowly, the State Department spokesman said the “American administration was concerned by the Tunisian government's interference with the internet, urging restraint on all sides."

Algeria joined into the fray on January 5 with rioting in response to rising unemployment and a decision by the government to increase the prices of many staples such as flour, sugar, and oil for cooking. Despite a government decision to cut the cost of import duties and taxes on those products, rioting continued into Sunday.

The Jewish Community of Yemen in Decline

According to the spiritual leader of the once large Jewish community in Sana’a, the capital of Yemen, Rabbi Yahe Yousif Mousa, there are today only 400 Jews left in Yemen, down from about 50,000. Those 400 remaining Jews are divided into two small enclaves, one in Sana’a, where there are about 100 Jews,and the remainder in Reida. The two communities have very little to do with each other.

The Jews there are completely integrated into the Yemeni society, going to each other’s weddings, visiting at their homes, and going to school together. The Jews in Yemen were forced to leave their homes in Sa’ada by the Houthis in 2004, when all their property was confiscated and they were lucky to flee with their lives and the shirts on their backs.

January 17, 2011

The Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, said at his weekly cabinet meeting that the recent unrest in Tunisia points to the general problem of turmoil, unrest and instability throughout the Middle East. This fact of the general state of instability underlines the problem for Israel of signing peace treaties and expectations for the future. This is why, Netanyahu emphasized the great need for security guarantees to go along with any treaties signed with neighboring countries.

"We don't know if a peace agreement would be respected and so any peace deal would have to include on-the-ground security arrangements," the premier said.

Despite the fact that the Obama administration generally agrees with the resolution which the Palestinians are planning on bringing to a vote in the United Nations Security Council this week, Washington has hinted that it will veto such a resolution.

The draft resolution contains condemnation of Israel’s continuing building of towns in the disputed territories known as the West Bank. It included the eastern part of unified Jerusalem in its wording, and declares that Jewish building is illegal. The resolution also calls on a freeze of Jewish construction so that peace talks between the sides can resume.

Washington is against using resolutions such as this one as a way to encourage peace negotiations, and sees bringing motions before the Security Council as counterproductive and not bringing the sides closer to an agreement, but further from it.

January 24, 2011

In Baghdad on Monday a car bomb exploded, killing six pilgrims. This is just the latest deadly attack committed against Shiite Muslims who are on their way to perform religious rituals in the Iraqi city, considered holy by many, stated police and hospital officials.

In addition to the 6 dead, 13 others were wounded in the explosion which took place in a parking lot in close proximity to busloads of pilgrims in the outlying area of Karbala, 55 miles from Baghdad. A second bomb was discovered and disarmed before it exploded, police added.

Last week 56 Shiite pilgrims were killed as a result of a triple suicide bombing which took place along two separate highways which lead to Karbala from Baghdad. An additional 180 people were injured, the majority of who were Shiite Muslims on a pilgrimage to Karbala.

Hundreds of thousands of Shiites are gathering in Karbala on Monday night to mark the conclusion of Arbaeen. Arbaaen is a 40-day period of mourning which observes the death of the Imam Hussein in the 7th century. The Imam Hussein is one of the most revered of Muslim leaders among the Shiites.

Although no group has taken responsibility for the attacks, it is believed that Sunni religious extremists with ties to al-Quaida are the perpetrators, especially since suicide attacks are the trademark of the Islamic State of Iraq.

In response to the arrest of woman activist Tawakul Abdel-Salam Karman, hundreds of students, lawmakers and activists took to the streets for the second day of protests in Sanaa, the capital city of Yemen. Yemini police arrested Karman for her role in leading anti-government demonstrations. Karman is a senior member of the opposition Isleh Party in Yemen, which represents the interests of Islamic fundamentalism.

Police arrested Karman early on Sunday, and since then have had to use tear gas and force to disperse the demonstrators, who are demanding her release. The Interior Minister Mouthar al-Masri spoke on state television on Sunday, calling on demonstrators to march and gather only within the limits of the law, adding that the protesters do indeed have the right to express their views, but only within the appropriate limits.

January 27, 2011

Today marks the third day of protests and violence in Cairo as activists, hoping to force the removal of President Hosni Mubarak, take to the streets. In what observers see as unprecedented protests, the demonstrators have clashed repeatedly with police resulting in the death of at least three protestors and one policeman. Analysts believe that the protestors have taken their cue and their inspiration from the protests that have rocked Tunisia over the past week, as the Egyptian disturbances protest the 30-year reign of Mr. Mubarak.

Hosni Mubarak has a reputation as a strong-armed leader, and such violent demonstrations on this scale have not previously ignited under his rule. In response to the throwing of rocks and petrol bombs Egyptian police have fired tear gas and rubber bullets at the activists. On Wednesday demonstrators burned tires and threw stones at police in central Cairo, and in Suez a government building was set aflame.

January 31, 2011

As unrest in Arab countries continues to spread from Tunisia and now Egypt, governments are cracking down on one of the chief ways activists have been organizing their protests, and that is by shutting down the internet. Syria joined Egypt in disrupting its internet service as a pre-emptive action. By such a move the Syrian leadership hopes to prevent the Egyptian and Tunisian unrest from spreading into its own borders.

Controlling the internet is nothing new in Syria. In previous government interference with the free movement of information Syria has blocked programs that allow people to chat on Facebook from their cell phones. As riots continued to escalate in Tunisia, control of the internet became more drastic, and then finally, as the violence spread to Egypt the internet was shut down completely.

In Egypt it is being reported that Facebook, which was used as an organizing tool for the successful demonstrators in Tunisia, has been shut down for days. Since last night Egypt’s internet service has been curtailed entirely.

January 31, 2011

As activists in Tunisia inspired the protestors in Egypt, so too will Egyptian demonstrations motivate rebellion in Syria. The truth behind this piece of street wisdom is far from clear, with analysts saying that quite the opposite is closer to the reality. Certainly Syrian President Assad feels confident that his people are satisfied with his leadership and foreign policy, although this hasn’t stopped Assad from shutting down the internet.

The reasons Syria and similar regimes throughout the middle east feel relatively safe is because they, as opposed to the governments of Egypt and Tunisia, have taken stridently anti-US and anti-Israel positions. Notwithstanding that poverty and societal insecurity are the real fuel igniting the violent upheavals, the fact that Tunis and Cairo are moderates when it comes to foreign policy towards the west makes them that much more vulnerable.

In the case of Syria especially, there is the added dimension of a historically oppressive regime to making revolt an even more unlikely prospect. As an extra added dimension the Syrian leadership is actually joyous at the turn of events in Egypt, and will celebrate if Mubarak is eventually ousted. Unless of course the analysts are reading the situation incorrectly, and oppression, poverty, and insecurity trumps hatred of the west, making Assad and his fellow dictators in a more precarious situation than anyone seems to suspect.

February 2, 2011

The unrest in the Middle East which has been raging in recent weeks has taken a new and disturbing turn as the governments of Yemen and the Sudan have begun to attack journalists in an effort to suppress the news of demonstrations and protests from spreading to their citizens.

Mohamed Abdel Dayem, the coordinator in the Middle East and North Africa for the Committee to Protect Journalists stated:

"We are disturbed by the targeting of journalists that is spreading across multiple countries in the Arab world. The governments of Sudan and Yemen are physically attacking journalists in an effort to disrupt the free delivery of news to local and international audiences. Those governments seem to not have learned anything from the mistakes made by the governments in Tunis and Cairo."

Reports from the Sudan describe the beating of several journalists while at least another eight have been detained. In Yemen journalists have been equally ill-treated, with harassment occurring while they stand among protesters who are calling for the removal of President Ali Abdullah Saleh from his office.

February 3, 2011

As violence continues to escalate in the Middle East analysts in the United States are wondering what the best approach to achieving security in the region might be. In wake of the rocket attack of a convoy of British embassy personnel which took place in the Yemeni capital of San’a recently the United States is considering a proposal to dedicate $1.2 billion to upgrading their military presence there over the next six years with increased equipment and training in order to better combat the threat of al-Qaida in Yemen.

Those critical of the ‘more money for guns’ approach wonder if the cause might be better served, as well as being more cost-effective to take a more global or holistic approach; a position which has at its root the improvement of such basic societal issues as economic development and internal stability, not just in Yemen but in the entire region.

Indeed, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be worked into a unified program which will most likely have better results than either of the approaches worked alone.

February 7, 2011

Officials of South Sudan are considering creating a new capital city for their newly created independent country. Declaring that the present main city of Juba will not be able to adequately accommodate the needs of a true capital, South Sudanese leaders are deciding if they should just enlarge and modernize Juba, built a capital near Juba, or pick another location which is better suited to the needs of a capital.

"A committee has been formed to look into a more suitable place for a capital ... that is befitting an independent nation. There are so many things that Juba doesn’t have now in terms of services," said Anne Itto, from the South’s ruling party.

The independent country of South Sudan is scheduled to join the family of nations this coming June, after independence was overwhelmingly favored in a vote which took place this past January. Although the official results have not yet been released, preliminary numbers revealed that almost 99% of voters voted for secession from northern Sudan. The vote was made possible by an historic peace deal which was signed in 2005 after decades of brutal civil war over ideology, religion, oil and ethnicity.

Since the signing of the peace treaty, Juba has been growing steadily but in a less than orderly manner. Situated along the White Nile, it has played the role of the unofficial seat of the South’s semi-autonomous government, but now, as independence looms, a decision about the capital will have to be made soon.

February 7, 2011

High Hopes Rest on Salva Kiir’s Shoulders

Now that the vote has decided that South Sudan will become an independent country this coming July, hope for a successful secession has been vested into the hands of what many analysts are describing as an unassuming leader, Salva Kiir.

Kiir’s modis operandi will be consensus building, in contrast to the years of violent conflict which the Sudan was engaged in during the decades of civil war between north and south until the signing of a peace treaty between the sides in 2005.

Kiir has already reached hero status in Southern Sudan after successfully staging the vote for secession which received the go ahead from almost 99% of the voters.

Voters will continue to rely on the former army intelligence officer to guide them to the development of the newest country in Africa, a country which produces oil but is terribly under developed at the moment.

Great challenges loom on the horizon for Kiir as the next 5 months leading to independence will require tricky negotiations over vital issues such as the division of oil revenues, defense and trade with northern Sudan, their former arch enemy during the bloody civil war.

Salva Kiir is a tall man who likes to sport a flashy cowboy hat; but the demeanor is a disguise behind which many say lays a keen negotiator and consensus builder who is capable of leading his country to a peaceful and prosperous future.

February 8, 2011

Jailed Yemeni journalist Abdul-Elah Haidar Shaye was granted a pardon by President Ali Abdullah Saleh even before the recent anti-government demonstrations broke out in Yemen last week, but he had not yet been released. As part of concessions President Saleh made to the protestors was included the agreement to finally release Haidar Shaye. However this eventuality never transpired due to intervention from President of the United States, Barack Obama.

According to reports Obama called President Saleh on February 2nd to congratulate him on his new political reforms, but voiced concern over the proposal to release Shaye. Last August Shaye was arrested at home during the night and held for over a month without contact with his family or a lawyer. His trial began in October when he was charged with and found guilty to “participating in an armed gang, having links with Al-Qaeda and for taking photographs of Yemen security bases and foreign embassies to be targeted by the terrorist organization.”

He was sentenced to five years in prison and became known in Yemen as “the media man” for Al-Qaeda. Shaye’s lawyers assert that the charges were fabricated not only because he reported on Al-Aaeda but also because he has accused the Yemeni and US governments of covering up the true perpetrators of a December 2009 bombing in the southern province of Abyan in which 55 people, 21 of whom were children, were killed. An additional 14 Al-Qaeda opperatives were also killed in the incident. Shaye reported that the US was responsible for the incident; information which he bases on documents which were leaked which include a recording of a meeting between the head of the US central command General David Petraeus, and President Saleh, in which Saleh is quoted as saying, “We’ll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours.”

February 9, 2011

The governor of the northern Yemen province of Sa’adah met with the head of the International Commtittee of the Red Cross (ICRC) this week to discuss the available options for increasing the amount of food aid to the area.

Governor Taha Hajjer met on Tuesday with Klaus Spreyermann to explore the ways in which provisions can be delivered to the distressed districts of his region and the mechanisms of distributing that food in a dependable and timely way. Coordination is needed with the executive units of the displaced persons camps to assure proper delivery and distribution.

Hajjer reassured Spreyermann that he and his administration are prepared to do whatever is needed to facilitate the ICRC programs so that the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) will receive the crucial help that they require for survival. Hajjer praised the efforts of the ICRC and its regional partner the Red Crescent Society which operates in the province of Sa’adah.

February 10, 2011

Mustafa Souag, the head of the news department at the Arabic language station of Al Jazeera said this past Monday, "We knew something was coming. Our main objective was to provide the most accurate and comprehensive coverage that we could by sending cameras and reporters to any place there is an event. And if you don't have a reporter, then you try to find alternative people who are willing to cooperate because they believe in what we are doing."

And what Al Jazeera is doing, and has been doing for the past 15 years, has been bringing an element of freedom into Arabic broadcasting of the news that exists nowhere else in this part of the world. And this revolution in freedom of the press which has been brewing for 15 years seems to have led to another revolution in the political fabric of Middle Eastern governments, so far in Tunisia and Egypt, with the possibility of more on the horizon.

Beginning in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, Al Jazeera showed the world, but more importantly showed the people of the Middle East, that the Tunisian regime was in fact not impregnable nor its security forces invincible; this was just the government’s propaganda whose purpose was to keep the Tunisian people down. Al Jazeera broadcast live and in real time that it was in fact possible for the millions of disaffected people of Tunisia to demand more from their leaders; more from their government; to demand their legitimate rights. This news literally broke the bubble of oppression and showed Al Jazeera viewers that change was really possible everywhere in the region.

Al Anstey, the managing director of Al Jazeera English explained how Al Jazeera responded to the events they covered in Tunisia: "We did not foresee the drama of events, but we saw how events in Tunisia rippled out and we were mindful of the fact [that] things were changing, and so we prepared very carefully. We sent teams to join our Cairo bureau and made sure that we were covered on the ground in other countries in the region so when the story unfolded we were ready to cover all angles."

As the unrest spread to Egypt Al Jazeera was forced to face-off with a more formidable foe. State-run Egyptian channels showed less-than-truthful versions of the dramatic events in a feeble attempt to answer Al Jazeera’s more accurate coverage. Some Egyptian journalists even resigned their positions in anger and disgust, including a popular TV talk-show host, Mahmoud Saad, who was later shown in Tahrir Square being carried on the shoulders of grateful demonstrators.

The outgoing Egyptian Information Minister Anas al-Fiqi tried to shut down satellite transmission and even had several Al Jazeera journalists detained, including Ayman Mohyedin, who was finally freed after 9 hours in custody. Despite this systematic campaign on the part of the Egyptian government to shut down Al Jazeera in Egypt they were able to keep broadcasting throughout.

"The regime did everything they could to make things difficult for us, but they did not succeed," said Souag. "We still had the most comprehensive reporting of the events in Egypt."

Now we are left with the question, ‘How far will the ripple effect of the popular uprising go?’ Hints of ripples have been felt in poorer countries such as Algeria, Yemen, Jordan and Bahrain, but what about the wealthier states like Saudi Arabia, or Qatar, the wealthiest country in the world and the home of Al Jazeera?

Although a popular uprising in Qatar, where the GDP is heading past $145,000 per capita seems highly unlikely, political security for Saudi Arabian leaders does not seem a forgone conclusion. It might seem that, given Saudi Arabia’s power and wealth that they might be more able to silence Al Jazeera than Egypt was, Souag disagrees.

"Al Jazeera was absent from Saudi Arabia for a long time, so we don't have pictures or information from within the country," explained Souag. "Finally the Saudis allowed us to open an office about two weeks ago, and so we have a correspondent there now, and if there is something that needs to be covered we will report it in the same way as events anywhere else."

February 15, 2011

With the help of the internet and opposition websites such as **Saham News** and **Kaleme**, tens of thousands of protesters organized and marched down **Revolution Boulevard** towards **Azadi Square** in **Teheran** on Monday before they were violently dispersed by security forces that used batons and tear gas to do the job over most of the day.

When it was all over on Monday evening dozens of protestors were detained by police while others were chased and beaten according to videos posted on the internet. The semi-official Iran news agency **Fars** reported one person killed and several others in serious condition due to shooting by the police, while the government blamed “agitators and seditionists” for the violence.

**Revolutionary Guard** member **Commander Hossein Hamedani** told the official Islamic Republic News Agency his opinion of the demonstrators. "We definitely see them as enemies of the revolution and spies, and we will confront them with force."

Uploaded to YouTube are videos of demonstrators marching, burning posters of **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** and other actions, violent and otherwise.

Those who had called for rallies in support of the insurgency in Egypt and the downfall of President Hosni Mubarak after almost 30 years rule had their homes blocked by the Iranian government.

United States Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton** made the following statement after her meeting with the US House Speaker **John Boehner**: "There needs to be a commitment to open up the political system.” She added that the crackdown “is an indictment of the hypocrisy of the Iranian regime” which “hailed” the Egyptian uprising but “"once again illustrate their true nature."

A week before the Iranian rally two opposition leaders were detained by Iranian security forces after they had called for their supporters to come to Azadi Square. One of them, **Mir Hossein Moussavi** is the force behind the opposition website, Kaleme, which was where the call for a rally was published. Kaleme also reported that cell phone service and phone lines to the area where Moussavi lives had been cut off and also said that Moussavi’s wife **Zahra Rahnavard** was not permitted to leave her home on Monday.

Outside **Mehdi Karrubi’s** house (the other detained opposition leader) surveillance equipment which had been installed by the government had been destroyed or stolen according to Kaleme.

February 16, 2011

Bahrain Joins Voice of Internet Organized Protest

Protesters clashed with police in Bahrain on Monday as the opposition called the incident the “Day of Wrath” which left at least 14 people injured and two dead of their wounds.

Inspired in large part by the success of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt which, in both cases, succeeded in toppling the ruling regimes; the demonstrators in Bahrain are demanding political and economic reforms.

The clashes took place in the village of Diya, east of the Bahrain capital of Manama., where soldiers used tear gas and other force to scatter the protesters who were able to organize via internet social networking sites such as Facebook.

The interior ministry of Bahrain issued a statement saying that it would open an investigation into the deaths, and in an earlier statement the Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah al-Khalifa expressed “his deep condolences to the family of the man who died of wounds he sustained in the events in Diya.”

Additional locations of protest have been reported by the Doha-based Al-Jazeera TV station, describing violent clashes in two Shiite villages west of Manama, Darraz and Sanabis, according to eyewitness accounts.

February 21, 2011

Benghazi Death Toll Soars as Protesters Lose Their Fear

Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan leader for more than 40 years, was never well-liked in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi, where very little of the county’s oil wealth has been felt. But fear of Gaddafi has always kept the population there docile, that is, until the general unrest which has been spreading throughout the Arab Middle East finally reached the shores of Libya, and especially Benghazi.

Benghazi is 620 miles east of Tripoli, the nation’s capital, situated on the Mediterranean Ocean. Last Tuesday protests in the city began, but not until the weekend did tensions and violence really mount when security forces began attacking the protesters from behind their high-walled fortified compounds. Bloody clashes continued to escalate as mourners, accompanying the victims of the government attacks, were themselves fired upon as they walked past the city’s barracks. Protestors returned fire with rocks and Molotov cocktails, but aside from those feeble weapons, were unarmed.

Doctors and other eyewitnesses are claiming that so far at least 200 unarmed demonstrators have been killed by large-caliber automatic weapons. Most protesters believe that the people will respond with outrage, and will fearlessly take to the streets as a reaction to the brutal force shown by the government, the opposite affect Gaddafi was probably aiming for. Some people there have describe Benghazi has having turned into a ‘war zone.’ Some local residents have formed vigilante groups to protect neighborhoods from the government’s brutality.

Despite the violence in Benghazi, many there believe no change can come to Libya as a whole unless the protests spread to Tripoli, which has in effect begun to happen. Dozens of lawyers staged a ‘sit-in’ by the court buildings to demonstrate against Gaddafi’s regime. The sound of guns were reported in two suburbs of Tripoli, Fachlum and Tajura; protesters gathered in the working class area of Gourghi in the western part of Tripoli; and Libyan forces have used teargas and live bullets to send the crowds of demonstrators home. According to reports from Al-Jazeera thousands of protesters and Gaddafi supporters came head to head in Tripoli’s Green Square. One eye witness told reporters that, “We haven’t had such disturbances before."

February 23, 2011

South Sudan Discusses Diplomatic Relations with Israel

On the cusp of becoming and independent nation, Africa’s newest nation of South Sudan is planning to establish diplomatic relations with the Jewish State of Israel. The declaration of independence is expected to occur this coming July, and in anticipation of that day the head of a delegation of South Sudanese, Suleiman Alhariri, invited Deputy Minister of Israel Ayoub Kara to visit his newly established country. The leaders were together at an inauguration in London of a new organization which will be created to help develop the economy and society of Nigeria. Kara and the South Sudanese delegation met together informally but they discussed forging economic and diplomatic ties.

At the conclusion of the playing of Hatikva, the Israeli national anthem the various event’s speakers each praised the State of Israel in their turn, emphasizing the crucial role Israel has played and continues to play in combating terrorism and Islamic radicalism that today threatens the entire free world. All the speakers called on their governments to tighten relations with Israel, supporting Israel’s diplomatic choices, and helping to protect Israel’s citizens.

Ayoub Kara, a druze minister who represented Israel at the inauguration in London, also said a few words about himself and his country:

"I am not a Jew and my loyalty to the State of Israel derives from the faith in its right to exist as the state of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. I do not see myself under a regime or entity other than Israel, which is the sole island of sanity in the Middle East, where democracy exists for all citizens, and where citizens' rights are respected more than in any other place."

"I am fighting on behalf of Israel because I have no other state and I call upon you to support Israel's decision to hold on to its territory and to the unity of Jerusalem," he said, adding that recent events had shown that the partners that Israel is being offered cannot be trusted to hold on to power.

February 24, 2011

According to Oscar Wendel, commentator for ArabianBusiness.com, the question of what to expect from the construction sector of the Egyptian economy is still difficult to predict. Noting that the only truly reliable truth when it comes to predicting direction for economic trends is that when there is political turmoil and uncertainty, the marketplace suffers. Investors do not like to take unnecessary risks during times when almost any prediction about the future is unreliable and speculative.

However if we discount the recent shocking events which have rocked what looked like an otherwise stable Middle East, predictions for excellent growth in the construction sector in Egypt were optimistic. Many investors have been continuing to back their projects, many of which are major developments, literally banking on the continuing growth and prosperity of what looks like to many an uncertain future.

In conclusion, Mr. Wendel explains that since it is always impossible to predict the future of a nation or region’s growth and development, whether during crisis or stability, it is much more productive for investors and businessmen to focus on the things they can control, like their own balance sheets, business models and overall business strategies. Predicting the future should be left to the prophets, while good business decisions are the best guarantee of good economic growth and stability.

February 28, 2011

Bahrain Parliament Blocked by Protesters

As part of a larger plan to disrupt the Bahrain government from functioning and forcing the resignation of Prime Minister Khalifa Al Khalifa, protesters have blocked entrance to the parliament of Bahrain, forcing officials to cancel a meeting of the leader’s hand-picked envoys.

This demonstration is just one of many gatherings at key political locations in the Bahrain capital of Manama. The main goal of these rallies is to increase the pressure on the monarchy after two weeks of unrest including marches and violent clashes in which seven people have been killed.

The latest protest on Monday at the parliament consisted of the forming of a human chain which was successful in preventing the 40-member upper chamber of parliament from meeting. The chamber is made up of people personally appointed by Bahrain’s monarch Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa.

In light of the success of the protests the monarchy is requesting to talk with opposition groups so that the crisis can be resolved soon.

Swatting Moving to Protect Bahrain Government

The elephant of Saudi Arabia appears to have taken action to swat the fly on its back- Bahrain- by sending in an armada of 30 tanks to help strengthen the beleaguered Bahrain government. The Bahrain government has been subjected to two weeks of protests from demonstrators, with no end in sight, demanding the resignation of the government, abdication of the king and democratic constitutional reforms.

Eye witnesses in Saudi Arabia have reported observing 15 tank carriers rolling towards Bahrain, each one carrying two tanks. The Egyptian daily al-Masry al-Youm is reporting this development in today’s edition of their newspaper.

This latest action is in response to the Bahrain government’s decision on Saturday to withdraw their military vehicles out of Pearl Square, the focal point of the recent protests, after clashes between police and demonstrators led to violence and bloodshed there. The opposition demanded the withdrawal of the military presence as a pre-condition to any talks between the sides.

However, the arrival of the Saudi tanks come on the eve of yet another scheduled rally in Pearl Square, scheduled for Tuesday and organized by the Bahraini opposition and the protesters. The United States was informed by the Saudis that they are prepared to intervene if they view it necessary as a way to protect the embattled Bahrain government.

March 2, 2011

South Yemen Not Happy With Unification

Discussions these days in the qat saloons of southern Yemen focus on the discontent people feel with what they see as the failed attempt at unification of what used to be two distinct countries, Yemen and South Yemen. Taking the lead from other protesters across the Middle East, dissenters in southern Yemen have taken to the streets in protest over the past two weeks.

Financial advisor Yassin Makkawi was speaking while he was chewing on the mild stimulant known as qat, a national pastime in Yemen, saying that, "President Ali Abdullah Saleh, like the rest of the Arab tyrants, will go down. It will be a crucial step toward regaining the south's independence."

Twenty four deaths have already been reported as a result of the demonstrations, and most of those deaths have been in the south. Demonstrators are calling for the ouster of President Saleh, who has lead with an iron fist for the past 32 years.

In 1990 a less than stable unity treaty was signed, but within four years civil war erupted between the south and mostly tribal north. The south lost the war, and the people there now fell that there is more corruption, their society has become more conservative religiously, and their incomes have gone down.

"Even the water used to taste better before. Unity has been a disastrous experience in every way. We never imagined that a united Yemen would mean discrimination and domination of our land and resources," Makkawi added.

<http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/03/inside-gadhafis-secret-underground-arsenal/?utm_source=co2hog>

March 6, 2011

Gaddafi’s Hidden Arms Now in Hands of Rebels

For 41 years Colonel Muammar Gaddafi has been secreting away weapons in underground bunkers in the city of Benghazi. But these were not weapons meant for Gaddafi’s regular army, which the eccentric dictator never trusted, but rather for Gaddafi’s Special Forces used mostly to oppress his own people.

Rebels In Control

Now the tables have turned, and the almost antique weapons are in the hands of the rebels. In the last week of February rebels stormed the various military compounds in the city of Benghazi. One of the tank commanders that led the attack, Colonel Mohammed Samir al-Abar described the way he pushed his tank through the outer wall of the compound, allowing rebel soldiers as well as civilians to storm the fortress. With just Molotov cocktails, rocks and swords the rebels overran Gaddafi’s compound; the regular Libyan army being unequipped with weapons to defend Gaddafi properly.

Old Weapons Still Deadly

One reserve soldier who has joined the rebel forces, Adel Mustafa, described the old weapons that the rebels found. “It’s dirty, outdated equipment, but it works. Ninety percent are Russian made, but there’s a Chinese 107 mm multiple rocket launcher behind you. Before the people captured these cannons, the regime was using them against people. Take a look at the size of the ammunition. They were designed to be used against planes, but Gadhafi used them to kill Libyans. When this bullet hits a human being it shatters him.”

Marching on Tripoli

It is not known exactly how much ammunition and weaponry the rebels now control but it seems to be a certainty that the weapons will be used soon, to march on Tripoli to oust Colonel Gaddafi.

“I think there will be massive fighting if we go to Tripoli,” said Salem Abdelhassid El Dressy, a 41-year-old accountant who volunteered on Tuesday. “I hope to god I am wrong, but I am ready to fight. We all want to go to Tripoli to get rid of Gaddafi.”