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Mauritania 2010: between individual willpower and institutional inertia

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In 2010, Mauritania confirmed its status as a semi-authoritarian regime. The country is dominated by the military, which acts as a dominant veto-player and makes impossible any alternation in power between elected civilian political actors. The general political atmosphere, however, was probably less oppressive than in other countries, such as Tunisia or Egypt (before the ousting of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak), as the freedom of expression is relatively high and the overall state repression is comparatively low.

General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz consolidated his rule after a contested electoral victory in July 2009. The main opposition parties refused to acknowledge Ould Abdel Aziz's victory in a context in which the 'transitional government', which was supposed to administer the country before the election, had been in place for only 21 days – too short a time to ensure that the presidential election would take place in a neutral environment. Ould Abdel Aziz's civilian predecessor, Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdellahi, whom the General had ousted through a bloodless coup in August of 2008, has retreated from the political scene since then.

In political terms, Ould Abdel Aziz is in control and faced no strong opposition in 2010, at least not from moderate

opposition groups. As in other highly presidentialist political systems in Africa and the Middle East, his party, the *Union pour la République* (UPR, or *Al Itihâd man Ajl al-Jumhûriyya*), controls a large majority of seats in the National Assembly and in the Senate. This echoes a dominant pattern in Mauritania whereby the President is supported by a powerful political machine, his party, which dominates elected assemblies at the national and local levels. Today's UPR is reminiscent of Ould Taya's *Parti Républicain, Démocratique et Social*, PRDS (1991-2005) and Ould Daddah's *Parti du Peuple Mauritanien*, PPM (1960-1978). The UPR, like its predecessors, is a composite coalition of various groups and individuals, often with contradictory interests, all of which however unite behind the head of the state of the moment.

The President attempted to break with past practices by launching vast anti-corruption operations in 2009-2010. The goal was to convey the impression that the clientelistic (or 'neopatrimonial') system that characterized the previous regimes could be eradicated. In so doing, the majority of the population, hitherto excluded from these clientelistic networks, would finally benefit from the country's wealth. For one and a half year, the *Inspecteur Général de l'État* (IGE), the main auditing

agency, launched inspections in dozens of state agencies and state-owned enterprises, which eventually led to the arrests of some of these agencies' chairpersons and CEOs, including those of the National AIDS Agency and of the National Human Rights Commission. Many others were eventually fired, though without formal accusations being made against them, such as, recently, the CEO of the state-owned SOMAGAZ. These operations seemed to indicate a clear change of direction in how the new regime wants to lead the country.

However, the situation may not be as positive as it may seem at first glance. First, the General Inspector, who heads the IGE, is appointed by the President himself, which keeps alive the suspicion of the IGE's submission to the executive power. This could be confirmed by the fact that the last two General Inspectors were high-ranking officials in the President's party, the UPR. Also, local media and political parties have argued that many of the chairpersons and CEOs who were either arrested or fired, following accusations of corruption, had direct or indirect ties with opposition parties, thereby suggesting that the investigation could be politically-driven. Some also denounced the fact that none of the state agencies led by men and women close to the ruling circles have been investigated, and even less those that are under the chairmanship of military officers.

The new regime has also sought to distance itself from its predecessors by seeking constructive solutions to a major problem that seriously affects both rural and urban areas, namely access to land. The problem is particularly acute in Nouakchott, but also in other urban centers, where thousands of poor families live in unregulated and underserved shantytowns. One must recall that the capital-city was originally built in 1958, and the planners expected the city to host a few thousand people; today there are up to a million people living in the greater Nouakchott area (though, obviously, numbers are difficult to obtain and are approximate). The shantytowns that have mushroomed in large cities like Nouakchott, without any official delimitation of properties, have been frequent targets of violent and sudden eviction by state officials. In 2010, the Ould Abdel Aziz administration ordered the end of squatter districts in and around Nouakchott (called 'gazra' in local parlance) and has

undertaken to survey all the land illegally occupied. The goal was to provide poor families with official land titles and to guarantee more transparency in land transactions. For instance, about 9000 families in the districts of Arafat and Toujounine, in Nouakchott, were granted new titles. However, Interior Ministry agents who have the power to officialize the distribution, selling, and purchasing of land, mainly the Wali (Governors) and Hakem (prefects), are involved in complex corruption and clientelist schemes which derail the program's objectives. Hence, in Nouakchott, where the value of land has skyrocketed in recent years, media have reported cases where pieces of land were taken away from poor families and sold to wealthy buyers, usually people with political connections. Thousands of poor families, most of whom are from the low-caste *Haratin*, are being ejected from

the 'gazra'. Their land, the value of which is very high around Nouakchott, is then bought by connected people who can buy members of the survey commission. In 2010, in Nouakchott, three governors have succeeded one another in less than a year; the first two have been appointed to other positions because their corrupt actions in land transactions had become too widely known.

Although the regime is not delivering on the promises that were made, it does not face a strong opposition. In effect, opposition forces are divided into small formal and informal groups and networks. First, one of the

main political parties, the *Rassemblement des Forces Démocratiques*, RFD, made a move that helped the president, by defecting from the coalition of opposition parties in September of 2010 and officially recognizing Ould Aziz's election. In doing so, RFD, and its leader, long-time opposition figure Ahmed Ould Daddah, broke with the opposition's main platform, which states that Ould Aziz's victory was the result of unfree and unfair elections in 2009. Ould Daddah, who was already the main opposition figure in the first multi-party election of 1992, was betting on a cooperative strategy with the President, though it has not translated into any tangible results for him or his party yet. The only Islamist party with elected representatives, *Tawasoul (at-Tajma'a al-wataniyya li-l-Islâh wa at-Tanmiyya)*, has also swayed back and forth, at times positioning itself clearly as an opposition party, at other times making moves towards the regime.

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Informal groupings and networks, however, constitute significant sources of political support and opposition, probably more so than official political parties. Within the *Bidhân* community (often called the 'Moors' in French or English), clan and tribal affiliations, though much more fluid and fluctuating than is often admitted, are important cards used by political actors to mobilize political support and to obtain financial support from the state, or to oppose the regime, at least some of the regime's policies. Informal networks with some ideological foundations can also act as opposition or supporting forces for the regime, be they Islamists (largely defined) or pan-Arabists (such as the 'Nasserists' and 'Baathists'). Finally, factions within the military form perhaps the most important type of political organizations which the head of state has to look after. In effect, the numerous coup d'états the country has witnessed, making it the only mechanism of leadership change, have all been organized by the head of state's closest collaborators. General Ould Abdel Aziz, who was in command of the presidential guards when he organized the coup against Ould Taya, and who was the personal military chief of staff of President Ould Cheikh Abdellahi when he ousted him, knows very well where the threat is most likely to originate from. No major factional dissension in the military was noticeable in 2010, but it does nonetheless

constitute a major threat that needs to be reckoned with. Another – and most radical – form of opposition is the transnational armed group *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*, or AQIM. AQIM does not have a clear political agenda, and clearly does not constitute a political alternative for a majority of Mauritians. However, its nuisance capacity seemed to be on the high in 2010. In effect, various cells of AQIM have made themselves heard in Mauritania last year. In July 2010, Mauritanian troops, most probably with French support, carried out two attacks against AQIM camps, which were based on Malian soil. Another similar operation occurred again in September, also on Malian territory. The Mauritanian army suffered some casualties during these attacks. Meanwhile, an alleged AQIM kamikaze tried, but in spite of killing one guard failed to attack a military compound in Nema, Eastern Mauritania, in August. This was the second suicidal attack in a year, the previous one being in

front of the French Embassy in Nouakchott. In both cases, the suicidal bombers missed their targets. Interestingly, the two kamikazes were *Haratin* and thus belonged to the largest community in Mauritania, defined as the former servants of the 'White' Moors. Some have suggested that the social hierarchy among Moors had been reproduced within this radical group, with the Haratin doing the worst jobs. Then, in early 2011, security forces intercepted and destroyed AQIM vehicles which aimed at launching suicidal attacks in Nouakchott. One of the vehicles was in fact intercepted in Nouakchott, in what was probably the most dangerous attack ever attempted in the capital-city (or at least, the most obvious one, since it cannot be ruled out that other attempts were made before but are unheard of). Whether the threat emanating from radical armed groups is seen as a plight or an opportunity for the Mauritanian military is another question, however.

The latter should not be automatically excluded, as the level of international financial, training, and diplomatic support the 'AQIM threat' generates is substantial for the government.

It is also noteworthy that in addition to its military actions against AQIM activists the government has used its legal branch to combat radicalism, principally through the new *Anti-Terrorism Law*. It is under this Law that three Mauritanian AQIM activists were sentenced to death in May 2010 (but not executed), followed by another group of three men in March 2011. Interestingly, the Mauritanian judiciary has demonstrated a certain degree of autonomy from the executive power when it rejected ten articles of the Law in March 2010. The government was forced to write a second draft, which was accepted only in July 2010. Overall, the new Law extends the range of illegal activities deemed connected to terrorism, including acts previously not considered to be terrorism-related such as money laundering and computer infractions. Other measures to counter the influence of radicalism included the production of incentives, the nature of which remains unclear, directed at young combatants. This policy became visible when approximately thirty youngsters 'defected' from AQIM camps and turned themselves in to the Mauritanian army in November 2010. The government also initiated in 2010 a series of 'dialogue' meetings with alleged radical Islamist prisoners, during which government

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officials and imams attempted to convince Islamist prisoners that their interpretation of Islam was wrong. Whether these meetings yielded expected results is far from clear at this point. In addition, the government hired about 500 imams to preach 'moderate' Islam in the country's mosques. To what extent this will actually produce tangible outcomes remains to be seen; as long as the state and its servants suffer from legitimacy problems, 'official' imams may not be seen as credible figures.

Ever since the birth of this Islamic Republic, ethno-racial identities have constituted important ingredients in many political struggles. Most critical were the debates concerning the status of *Haratin*, the former servants of the 'White Moors' (*Bidhân*), as well as the status of the four ethnic minorities, the *Haalpulaaren*, *Sooninko*, *Wolof* and *Bamana*. As regards the former, the *Haratin*, local activists have increased the pressure on the government in 2010. Their main demands were two-fold: first, they called for a substantial improvement of *Haratin's* socio-economic conditions. Undoubtedly, this community is the largest in the country but is most probably also the poorest. Though a small stratum of *Haratin* has made it to the upper echelons of the state apparatus, most live in extremely difficult conditions in both rural and urban areas. The government has responded with a few programs, often financed by foreign development agencies, which aim at providing specific support for *Haratin* families. Second, *Haratin* activist groups demand that the 2007 anti-slavery law be actively enforced. In effect, it must be remembered that slavery was abolished in 1980, and 27 years later, a law was put in place to criminalize activities related to slavery. However, nobody has ever been prosecuted under this law. NGOs and activists argue that this is the case because police forces and agents of the Ministry

of justice in the field are always working favorably with 'owner' families. There is thus a gap between the law itself and its actual implementation. Activists of one of these organizations, IRA (Abolitionist Resurgence Initiative, in English), were arrested in December of 2010, allegedly on the basis of disorderly conduct in a police station; that day, IRA members went to a police

station in Arafat (a populous neighborhood of Nouakchott) to launch formal accusations against a family they accused of enslaving two young girls. Three IRA activists, including the organization's leader, were arrested and jailed for three months until a presidential pardon freed them.

As for 'Black Africans' (*Haalpulaaren*, *Sooninko*, *Wolof* and *Bamana*), their situation continues to be ambiguous. In 2010, a number of refugees, among the (approximately) 80.000 who had been expelled by Mauritanian security forces in 1989, have returned to Mauritania, under the supervision of the *National Agency for the Support and Reintegration of Refugees* (ANAIR), which was created in January 2008. Each group of returning refugees was welcomed by an official ceremony in the Mauritanian towns of the Senegal River Valley. The Prime Minister voiced also encouraging words when, in a speech to the National Assembly in 2010, he admitted that the existence of inequalities had its roots in the country's recent past, and when he talked about the need to adopt 'affirmative action,' an expression rarely heard in this country. Even the President

admitted (to the magazine *Jeune Afrique*, in August 2010) the existence of past discriminations against Black Africans over the past twenty years – a confession that has never been heard from a Mauritanian head of state. On the one hand, these state-sponsored repatriation operations and the President and Prime Minister's speeches are welcomed, conveying the impression that the terrible human rights violations of the 1980s and 1990s are finally being addressed by the state, albeit only some twenty years later.

At the economic front, Mauritania, like its Sub-Saharan and North African neighbors, has felt the contradictory effects of the global economic recovery. On the positive side, this economic recovery translated into rising prices of natural resources. This could benefit Mauritania's oil and mining sectors, of which the latter is particularly dynamic. In fact, uranium, gold and iron ore attracted growing investments in 2010, with Canadian, Australian, and French companies particularly interested in these sectors.



On the other hand, many problems remain: first, most of the returning refugees' main problems remain unaddressed, such as the very sensitive issue of if and how they would ever recover the land, fields, homes and jobs they have left behind when they were expelled from the country. More generally, the full inclusion of 'Black Africans' into the country's political and social configuration remains problematic. Two examples can illustrate this problem. First, in March and April 2010, the politics of language dominated the headlines again. In Mauritania, Arabic is the only official language, the Black African languages are considered 'national languages'. French has no official status, but for historical reasons has become a *lingua franca* in the administration. In March 2010, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Culture made comments regarding the predominance of Arabic which infuriated many, and Black African students clashed violently with security forces and with Arabic-speaking students. Second, the lists of appointments to key ministries that were published in 2010, especially in the Ministries of Justice, Interior, and Defense, raised some major questions when it became clear that Black Africans were largely under-represented. The level of ethnic tensions has certainly lowered significantly in the last ten years. However, a number of unresolved issues make the country vulnerable and prone to the outburst of political crises.

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For the time being, it remains to be seen how the regime changes in North Africa and the Middle East will impact on Mauritania's political scene. A few clashes between youngsters and security forces occurred in early 2011, but by no means was this comparable to the level of public antagonism witnessed in Tunisia and Egypt, or even in Yemen, Morocco and Algeria for that matter.

consequences related to this economic recovery. The prices of food and fuel have also risen significantly in a country that is a net importer of both commodities. And, as it happened in North Africa and the Middle East, poor households have been the first victims of rising inflation. In 2010, inflation is indeed on the rise, reaching 7% in the summer of 2010, as the national currency, the Mauritanian *Ouguiya* (MRO), depreciated at the same time. The fact that the economy is heavily dependent on the export of raw materials puts Mauritania in a very vulnerable position. In political terms, the government

has yet to use the profits generated from the export of natural resources as a leverage to diversify its economy. Given the difficulty in reforming the clientelistic and rentier aspect of the economy and thus a system which benefits the high-ranking state elite, such a radical change of direction is difficult to imagine.

For the time being, it remains to be seen how the regime changes in North Africa and the Middle East will impact on Mauritania's political scene. A few clashes between youngsters and security forces occurred in early 2011, but by no means was this comparable to the level of public antagonism witnessed in Tunisia and Egypt, or even in Yemen, Morocco and Algeria for that matter. It is true, however, that the country has never really experienced any form of widespread collective action; internal lines of division (along racial, tribal and caste lines) could act as major obstacles to sustained public protests. This being said, who could have predicted that countries, such as Tunisia and Egypt, considered by many political scientists as models of stable "police states", would witness the rapid departure of their leaders? However, a leader is not a system, and whether a system can be changed with or without individual leader remains to be seen.

Timeline of Events

Algeria

1 March 2011 (Geneva):

On the sidelines of the UN Human Rights Council, Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci met with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi and discussed the latest regional and international developments.

1 March 2011 (Geneva):

Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci said Algeria wants priority to be given to ending the bloodshed in Libya.

6 March 2011 (Algiers):

Chinese Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhai Jun met with Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Zhai Jun mentioned that the international and regional situations are undergoing profound changes, adding that China is willing to strengthen political exchanges with Algeria, deepen and expand mutually beneficial cooperation, enhance coordination and cooperation in international and regional issues, so as to protect the common interests of developing countries.

6 March 2011 (Algiers):

Communication Minister Nacer Mehal remarked that Algeria was close to initiating measures to amend what he said were virtually non-existent channels of information dissemination between the government and the wider population. The move is destined to organize "institutional communication and to reflect on instruments that allow to improve relations between the state and the citizens".

7 March 2011 (Lisbon):

Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci met with Portuguese Foreign Minister Luís Amado. Medelci said that social tensions in Algeria are taken care of and that freedom of expression exists in the country.

7 March 2011 (Valetta):

Malta's Foreign Minister Tonio Borg met with Minister Delegate for Maghreb and African

Affairs Abdelkader Messahel to discuss bilateral ties.

10 March 2011 (Algiers):

Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci rejected the proposition made by his Libyan counterpart Moussa Koussa of an Algerian individual initiative at the United Nations Security Council to help lift international sanctions on Libya.

19 March 2011 (Algiers):

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika promised a "new page in the path of comprehensive reforms", including political reforms.

22 March 2011 (Algiers):

Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov within the framework of political consultations between the two countries. Both are bound by a Declaration of Strategic Partnership signed in Moscow in April 2001.

22 March 2011 (Algiers):

Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci said about the airstrikes in Libya: "we judge this intervention to be disproportionate in relation to the objective set out by the United Nations Security Council resolution. [We demand] an immediate cessation of hostilities and foreign intervention".

24 March 2011 (Algiers):

In a press statement, Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci said that the crisis in Libya will have reflections on Algeria's capabilities to conduct counter-terrorism efforts.

26 March 2011 (Addis Ababa):

Minister Delegate for Maghreb and African Affairs Abdelkader Messahel said that Algeria wants "greater dialogue" between the AU and Arab League on the Libyan crisis. Messahel also stressed that the implementation of Resolution 1973 should be the sole responsibility of the UN and not a sub-regional organization.

26 March 2011 (Algiers):

Interior Minister Dahou Ould Kablia met with dignitaries and tribal sheikhs of the southern provinces and said that the border with Libya

has become a threat to Algeria's security. The Minister called on local officials to aid authorities in preventing the infiltration of people with weapons from Libya. Ould Kablia added that the desert tribes would assist national authorities in defending the country.

29 March 2011 (Djanet):

Amid growing concerns about al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb efforts to acquire weapons from Libya, the Algerian army launched a large-scale surveillance and security operation along the common border.

30 March 2011 (Algiers):

Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia denied that the country was in a political crisis as a consequence of the unrest in the Arab world. He acknowledged however that public anger over unemployment and a lack of housing exists. Ouyahia rejected all comparisons between Algeria and other Arab countries.

Libya

1 March 2011 (Geneva):

The United Nations General Assembly suspended Libya's membership in the UN Human Rights Council.

3 March 2011 (The Hague):

Luis Moreno-Ocampo, chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, said that Muammar Gaddafi and his key aides will be investigated for possible crimes against humanity.

3 March 2011 (Tripoli):

Muammar Gaddafi accepted Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez's offer to mediate in Libya's political crisis. The Venezuelan initiative was dismissed by the US, France and the Libyan opposition.

3 March 2011 (Washington):

US President Barack Obama called on Muammar Gaddafi "to step down from power and leave", stressing that Gaddafi "has lost the legitimacy to lead". Obama said that he is keeping open all options for dealing with the



Libyan crisis, including the enforcement of a no-fly zone. Obama, however, stressed that the final decision on any military action against Gaddafi's regime would be taken only after consultations with the international community.

4 March 2011 (Caracas):

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla said that ALBA – the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – supports the initiative of peace and unity by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez to create an international humanitarian commission for peace and the integrity of Libya.

4 March 2011 (London):

Sir Howard Davis, a Nobel prize-winning British scientist, has resigned from the charity run by Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam. Davis added that the charity gave a £1.5m donation to the London School of Economics, and disclosed that the funding was awarded without the approval of board members.

4 March 2011 (London):

The UK extended a freeze on assets to a further 20 members of Muammar Gaddafi's entourage and impounded around £100 million.

6 March 2011 (Tripoli):

Muammar Gaddafi said that he wanted the United Nations or the African Union to probe into the escalating unrest in Libya, pledging to provide free access to investigators.

6 March 2011 (Cairo):

In his first overseas visit, newly appointed French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé visited Egypt to discuss the political processes in Egypt and across the Arab world and stated that Muammar Gaddafi and the Libyan regime have become "discredited and should leave".

6 March 2011 (New York):

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appealed to Foreign Minister Moussa Koussa to protect human rights and to comply with the Security Council resolution to put an end to the unabated violence in Libya. Koussa agreed to the immediate dispatch of a humanitarian assessment team to Tripoli.

6 March 2011 (New York):

Former Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdelilah Al Khatib was appointed by the United Nations as special envoy to Libya.

6 March 2011 (Cairo):

Abdel Moneim al-Honi, Libya's Arab League (AL) representative, resigned and sent a note to AL Secretary-General Amr Moussa demanding Gaddafi's expulsion from the League.

7 March 2011 (Brussels):

The EU sent a fact-finding mission to Tripoli. The mission is led by Agostino Miozzo, the Managing Director for Crisis Response in the European External Action Service.

7 March 2011 (Brussels):

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen warned that attacks against civilians in Libya may amount to "crimes against humanity", adding that NATO "strongly condemns" the use of force against the Libyan people.

7 March 2011 (London):

UK Foreign Secretary William Hague says that more diplomats may be sent to Libya despite an SAS-escorted team being captured by anti-Gaddafi rebels. The diplomatic team, including six SAS soldiers, was freed two days after being detained in eastern Libya.

8 March 2011 (New York):

The UN Security Council appointed Portugal as chair of the Libya Sanctions Committee.

8 March 2011 (Cairo):

Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa called on Muammar Gaddafi to immediately engage in reconciliation with his people if he wishes to stay in office, while at the same time asserting that Libyans are unlikely to accept reconciliation. Moussa added that prior to any international intervention to hold those who have committed violence in Libya accountable, the situation in eastern Libya must first be verified.

9 March 2011 (Brussels):

NATO Defense Ministers gathered to discuss options in the context of the Libyan crisis.

9 March 2011 (Lisbon):

Portuguese Foreign Minister Luís Amado met with an envoy from the Libyan regime, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed Taher Siyala. According to the Portuguese newspaper *Público*, the emissary of the Libyan leader told Amado that Tripoli would accept the initiation of "a negotiations process for a transition".

10 March 2011 (Paris-London):

France recognized the rebel council organized in Benghazi as the legitimate government of Libya. President Nicolas Sarkozy called on his European counterparts to do the same. UK Prime Minister David Cameron urged that violence must stop immediately. In the meantime, London and Paris are trying to build support for a UN resolution to authorize a no-fly zone in Libya.

10 March 2011 (Moscow):

Russia has decided to impose sanctions against Libya in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1970.

10 March 2011 (Riyadh):

Foreign Ministers from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) deemed Muammar Gaddafi's regime as illegitimate and called on the Arab League to take measures to stop the bloodshed in Libya and to initiate contacts with the Interim National Council.

11 March 2011 (Brussels):

European Union leaders agreed to "examine all necessary options" to protect civilians in Libya and called on Muammar Gaddafi to step down. The legal basis for action sought by EU states was the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1970. The EU also reiterated that any action would require approval from the Arab League, and that the rebel council organized in Benghazi is a "legitimate interlocutor".

11 March 2011 (New York):

Catherine Bragg, the UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said that the UN is having difficulties obtaining information about the humanitarian impact of the fighting, and medical needs are believed to be a major concern.

11 March 2011 (Addis Ababa):

The African Union rejected a military intervention in Libya to stop the crackdown on opponents of Muammar Gaddafi's regime.

12 March 2011 (Cairo):

Oman's Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah announced the Arab League's endorsement to the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya and the recognition of the rebel movement as the country's legitimate government.

**12 March 2011 (Washington):**

US President Barack Obama said that Muammar Gaddafi had to step down immediately and that the US would appoint a representative to the rebel council. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said that the US military would have no trouble enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya if President Obama decided such a measure.

14 March 2011 (New York-Tripoli):

The UN Security Council met in a closed-door session to receive an update on the latest developments in Libya. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Envoy for Libya, former Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdelilah Al Khatib, arrived in Tripoli, and met with Foreign Minister Moussa Koussa reiterating calls by Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council for an immediate end to the violence.

14 March 2011 (Paris):

After attending the G8 meeting, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met Libyan opposition leader Mahmoud Jibril.

15 March 2011 (London):

UK Foreign Secretary William Hague said that the UK is at the "forefront" of attempts to isolate Muammar Gaddafi and ensure that members of his regime are held to account for human rights abuses.

17 March 2011 (New York):

The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973 which imposes a no-fly zone over Libya. Muammar Gaddafi responded by characterizing the Resolution an expression of "blatant colonialism".

17 March 2011 (Berlin):

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle substantiated Germany's rejection of a no-fly zone over Libya by saying that it was tantamount to a military intervention, and by adding that no Bundeswehr soldiers would take part in such action.

18 March 2011 (Rome):

Italian Defense Minister Ignazio La Russa said that there will be no limits to the use of Italian bases, as called for in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973.

19 March 2011 (Paris):

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, French

President Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, UK Prime Minister David Cameron, Moroccan Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri and some Arab leaders met to discuss the next steps in Libya.

19 March 2011 (Brasília):

US President Barack Obama warned Muammar Gaddafi that the international community would act with urgency to shield Libyan rebels from his aggression unless all violence stopped.

19 March (Libya):

The first round of airstrikes against Libyan military forces began. Despite initially supporting them, Russia regretted the military intervention according to Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich. Lukashevich also said that the military actions against Libya were based on a "hastily passed" UN Security Council resolution. Expressing regret about the attacks, the Chinese Foreign Ministry expressed its hope that the conflict would not escalate and lead to greater loss of civilian life. Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa deplored the broad scope of the bombing campaign in Libya and said that he would call a league meeting to reconsider Arab approval of the Western military intervention.

20 March 2011 (Washington):

Defense Secretary Robert Gates said that the US military campaign against Muammar Gaddafi should be limited to the terms of the United Nations Resolution 1973 and not broadened with a view to target the Libyan leader.

20 March 2011 (Doha):

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani announced that his country will participate in military action over Libya with the aim of "ending bloodshed".

21 March 2011 (Abu Dhabi):

Abdel Rahman bin Hamad Al Attiyah, the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, defended military action in Libya by the US and its allies, saying that it does not constitute an intervention.

23 March 2011 (Brussels):

NATO announced that Turkey had offered a submarine and five warships to be part of the alliance's mission off Libya's coast to enforce a UN arms embargo.

24 March 2011 (Brussels):

NATO agreed to take command of the UN-mandated no-fly mission. NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said that the alliance envisages a 90-day operation, but that it could also be longer or shorter than that. Canadian Lieutenant General Charles Bouchard was appointed to lead the alliance's operations.

24 March 2011 (Washington):

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that forces loyal to Muammar Gaddafi have been pushed back but remain a threat to the Libyan people.

24 March 2011 (Tripoli):

According to US and European officials and a businessman close to the Libyan leadership quoted by Reuters, members of Muammar Gaddafi's entourage sent messages to seek a cease-fire or safe passage from Libya.

25 March 2011 (Tripoli):

Qatar became the first Arab League member state to take part in the campaign. Two Qatari fighter jets joined French planes in enforcing the no-fly zone over Libya.

26 March 2011 (London):

UK Justice Secretary Ken Clarke said that Britain has a real interest in preventing Muammar Gaddafi from staying in power and seeking revenge.

28 March 2011 (Doha):

Qatar became the first Arab country to recognize Libya's National Transitional Council, a rebel body, as the country's legitimate government.

29 March 2011 (London):

44 Foreign Ministers, representatives of the Arab League, Islamic Conference, European Union, NATO, and Libyan rebels attended a conference on Libya. The African Union and Saudi Arabia were absent. The meeting was not able to solve frictions regarding the intervention in Libya.

30 March 2011 (Tripoli-New York):

Muammar Gaddafi selected former Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann to represent the regime at the UN.

31 March 2011 (London):

British Prime Minister David Cameron met with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Cameron said that no decision has been made on

arming rebels who have been fighting Gaddafi. Erdogan said that "with regard to arming the rebels, we don't view such a decision. This could only create an environment which would be conducive to terrorism, and that would in itself be dangerous. The fact NATO is now involved is a step that is taken to overcome or solve the problems and that is why we look favorably upon the involvement of NATO".

30-31 March 2011 (Tripoli-UK):

Foreign Minister Moussa Koussa defected and asked for asylum in the United Kingdom. Moussa had been loyal to Muammar Gaddafi for the last 30 years. UK Foreign Secretary William Hague said Koussa's defection showed that the Gaddafi regime was breaking up.

31 March 2011 (Libya):

NATO officially took command of military operations in Libya.

31 March 2011 (Beijing):

China reiterated the urgent need for a cease-fire and a rapid solution to the Libya crisis through peaceful means.

Mauritania

4 March 2011 (Nouakchott):

President of Chad, Idriss Deby, his South African counterpart Jacob Zuma, along with Presidents Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz of Mauritania, Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso and Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania, attended a meeting of the African Union High Level Panel on Côte d'Ivoire.

18 March 2011 (Nouakchott):

The "February 25th Youth Coordination Group" held a protest that gathered hundreds of young people demanding political reforms.

19 March 2011 (Nouakchott):

African leaders selected by the African Union (AU) to an ad-hoc panel on Libya met to work out a peace roadmap, including an immediate ceasefire. Presidents Jacob Zuma of South Africa, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz of Mauritania, Amadou Toumani Touré of Mali, Denis Sassou Nguesso of Congo and AU Commission Chairperson Jean Ping attended the meeting. At the end of the meeting a statement was issued in which the foreign military intervention in Libya was rejected.

Morocco

2 March 2011 (Rabat):

The Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry, Youssef Amrani, met with the member of the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Luca Volontè.

3 March 2011 (Rabat):

King Mohammed VI set up a new body to defend human rights, thereby replacing an existing organization which had a purely consultative role. The creation of the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) puts an end to the functions of the Consultative Human Rights Council (CCDH) established in 1990 by King Mohammed VI's father.

3 March 2011 (Rabat):

The Foreign Ministry's Secretary of State Latifa Akharchab met with Belorussian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Aleinik and signed a cooperation protocol.

4 March 2011 (Rabat):

The Foreign Ministry's Secretary of State Latifa Akharchab met with a delegation from the "Maghreb Group" from the German Bundestag, led by Gunter Gloser.

7 March 2011 (Valletta):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met with his counterpart from Malta, Tonio Borg, and signed an agreement that aims at strengthening bilateral political consultations.

7 March 2011 (Rabat):

The Foreign Ministry's Secretary of State Latifa Akharchab met with her Italian counterpart Stefania Craxi.

7-9 March 2011 (Valetta):

Representatives of the parties to the Western Sahara dispute, Morocco and the Polisario Front, wrapped up another round of talks, during which both sides continued to reject each other's proposal as the sole basis for future negotiations. Delegations from neighboring states Algeria and Mauritania, also attended the sixth round of informal meetings on Western Sahara at the invitation of United Nations envoy Christopher Ross.

9 March 2011 (Rabat):

King Mohammed VI pledged to create a committee to review the constitution until June and hold a referendum on the changes shortly thereafter. The monarch also promised to allow religious freedom and more transparent justice.

10 March 2011 (London):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met UK Foreign Secretary William Hague to discuss bilateral ties. While speaking at Chatham House, Fihri said that reforms announced by King Mohammed VI represented a historic step that would give all of his people the chance "to live in dignity".

12 March 2011 (Rabat):

Morocco and the European Union signed a €55 million agreement to finance a program targeting remote regions. The agreement was signed by Moroccan Economy and Finance Minister Salaheddine Mezouar, the head of the EU delegation in Rabat ambassador Eneko Landaburu, and director general of local governments Allal Sekrouhi.

14 March 2011 (Rabat):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met with the President of Slovenian Parliament Pavel Gantar to discuss the strengthening of bilateral ties.

15 March 2011 (Rabat):

The Foreign Ministry's Secretary of State Latifa Akharchab met with the Director of the UN's Division of Statistics Paul Cheung to discuss Moroccan cooperation with that body. Akharchab expressed regret that the UNDP in its Human Development Report omitted Morocco's relevant efforts.

23 March 2011 (New York):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to discuss the latest events in North Africa.

23 March 2011 (Washington):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In a joint press conference Fihri highlighted the importance of finding a solution for Western Sahara. Speaking at the Brookings Institution, Taib Fassi Fihri warned that al-Qaeda could take advantage of the upheaval in the Middle East and called on the US and EU to work with Arab states to prevent that from happening.

**24 March 2011 (New York):**

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to discuss the latest events in the Maghreb.

25 March 2011 (Rabat):

Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry Youssef Amrani met with a delegation from the Chilean Parliament, led by Jorge Tarud.

28 March 2011 (Paris):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met with his French counterpart Alain Juppé, who described Morocco's autonomy plan as "a serious and credible negotiation basis for achieving a lasting settlement of the Sahara issue".

28 March 2011 (Rabat):

The new consultative committee began to receive proposals from political parties and trade unions as part of the national constitutional reform process. The body, headed by the King's advisor Mohamed Moatassim, was established in parallel with an advisory committee.

28 March 2011 (Rabat):

The Foreign Ministry's Secretary of State Latifa Akharbach met with Qatari Minister of State and International Cooperation Khalid Bin Mohammed Al-Attiyah to discuss bilateral ties.

29 March 2011 (Addis Ababa):

The Foreign Ministry's Secretary of State Mohamed Ouzzine led the Moroccan delegation to the 4th Joint Conference of African Ministries of Finance.

30 March 2011 (Rabat):

Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry Youssef Amrani met with the President of the Delegation of the Council of Europe Philippe Boillat, who is also the Director for Human Rights and Legal Affairs of that same institution, to discuss bilateral ties.

31 March 2011 (Rabat):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met his counterpart from Equatorial-Guinea Pastor Micha Ondó Bile for the 5th session of their bilateral mixed commission.

Tunisia

1 March 2011 (Tunis):

Tunisia's interim government legalized the Islamist movement Ennahda.

2 March 2011 (Tunis):

According to Human Rights activists, Tunisia freed the last of its political prisoners under an amnesty granted after the fall of president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

3 March 2011 (Luxembourg):

The European Investment Bank (EIB) announced that it will extend more than €600 million in additional loans.

3 March 2011 (Tunis):

Interim President Fouad Mebazaa said that members of the new "national constituent assembly" would be chosen in a nationwide vote on July 24th.

4 March 2011 (Tunis):

In his first public appearance, recently appointed Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi accused toppled president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of "high treason". Sebsi added that a new government would be appointed within two days with the purpose of restoring order and boosting the country's economy.

4 March 2011 (Tunis):

The Interior Ministry stated that 12 political parties received official approval since the fall of Ben Ali, bringing the number in the country to 21. Nine had been tolerated before.

7 March 2011 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi announced a new government. The Defense, Interior, Justice and Foreign Affairs Ministers kept their positions. The 22-Minister cabinet is the third to be formed since the fall of former President Ben Ali.

7 March 2011 (Tunis):

The Interior Ministry announced that the State Security Department in charge of the secret police was being disbanded as a sign of the new administration's policy to show due respect to "civic freedoms and rights".

8 March 2011 (Tunis):

The Islamist movement Ennahda announced its support for the country's ban on polygamy but

urged the government to lift the ban on wearing headscarves in schools and universities.

9 March 2011 (Tunis):

A Tunisian court ordered the former ruling party, Rally for Constitutional Democracy, to be dissolved.

10 March 2011 (Tunis):

An arrest warrant was issued for former Interior Minister Rafik Belhaj Kacem on charges of murder. Kacem has been in police custody since February.

10 March 2011 (Tunis):

Speaking on behalf of the Islamist party Hizb At-Tahrir, Ridha Belhaj said that the party wants to install "by political means" a regime based on the Sharia, or Islamic law.

12 March 2011 (Tunis):

Tunisian authorities placed in detention Ben Ali's main political adviser, Abdelaziz bin Dhia, and Abdelwahhab Abdalla, another top aide who was in charge of monitoring the media. A third man sent to prison was Abdallah Qallal, former head of the Senate.

15 March 2011 (Algiers):

Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi met with Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia and Minister Delegate for Maghreb and African Affairs Abdelkader Messahel. Algeria gave US\$100 million in aid to help develop democracy in Tunisia.

16 March 2011 (Rabat):

Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi met with Moroccan King Mohammed VI and with Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi. Sebsi talked about Tunisia's future, Western Sahara and the importance of the Arab Maghreb Union's revival.

17 March 2011 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi met with the President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek. The meeting's agenda focused on fostering the democratic transition in Tunisia and responding to the humanitarian catastrophe in neighboring Libya and at the Tunisian border.

17 March 2011 (Tunis):

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was received by Interim President Fouad Mebazaa and also met with Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi and Foreign Minister Mouldi Kefi. Clinton



announced US\$20 million in aid, stating that the US is “a partner in the important work that lies ahead as they embark on a transition to a genuine democracy”. Clinton added that “we have an enormous stake in ensuring that Egypt and Tunisia provide models for the kind of democracy that we want to see”. Clinton also announced that Tunisia is now eligible to be considered for a Millennium Challenge Account grant.

21 March 2011 (Tunis):

Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kefi received a delegation of the European Commission for “Democracy through Law”, led by Gianni Buquicchio.

21-22 March 2011 (Tunis):

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with Interim President Fouad Mebazaa, Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi and Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kefi.

22 March 2011 (Tunis):

Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kefi conferred with Axel Poniatowski, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission in the French National Assembly.

25 March 2011 (Tunis):

Italy’s Foreign Minister Franco Frattini and Interior Minister Roberto Maroni met with Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi, Interior Minister Farhat Rashi and Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kefi to determine ways to stop the flow of clandestine immigrants to Italy. Frattini pledged financial aid to Tunisia.

25 March 2011 (Tunis):

Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kefi received a German delegation led by chairman of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Hans-Gert Pottering.

25 March 2011 (Tunis):

Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kefi received Danish Minister for Development Cooperation and Minister for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration Søren Pind.

26 March 2011 (Tunis):

The Higher Political Reform Commission will nearly double in size to address complaints that it is not fully representative, the body’s chairman Yadh Ben Achour said. The Commission will grow from around 70 to 130 members.

27 March 2011 (Tunis):

Holding his first public meeting since returning from exile, Moncef Marzouki called for vigilance against the dangers that threatened his country’s revolution. Marzouki told activists from his Congress for the Republic Party (PCR) that “the enemies of the revolution should stop swimming against the current”.

28 March 2011 (Tunis):

Based on the suggestion of Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi, interim President Fouad Mebazaa fired without additional information Interior Minister Farhat Rajhi, who had been appointed on January 27th. Habib Sid is the new Interior Minister.

30 March 2011 (Tunis):

In a televised interview, Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi said that the priority in post-unrest Tunisia is restoring security, and that no sit-ins or strikes will be acceptable, even if legitimate. Some 6.000 detainees who escaped from jail during the unrest were still at large, Sebsi said, adding that the state of the country’s economy was catastrophic. Sebsi also pledged to increase the budget allocated to regional development and to promote employment among university graduates.

30 March 2011 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi announced a freeze on assets belonging to Muammar Gaddafi.

31 March 2011 (Rome-Tunis):

Prime Minister Béji Caid Sebsi spoke to his Italian counterpart Silvio Berlusconi by telephone. Berlusconi complained that Tunisia was not keeping its pledge to curb the flow of immigrants and announced that he would visit Tunisia on the 4th of April.

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