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IMPACT OF REGIONAL CRISIS ON JORDAN TOURISM SECTOR UPDATE

Developed by
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IMPACT ON JORDAN TOURISM SECTOR UPDATE 21 FEBRUARY, 2011

Foreword

As the impact of regional events have evolved we have continued to receive feedback from a number of the local tour operator community including Mr Mohammad Samih, JITOA Chairman; Mr Eid Nawafleh, JITOA Vice Chairman; Mr Mohannad Malhas, JITOA Secretary General; Mr Michael Nazzal, JHA Chairman; Mr Anwar Atalla, Royal Jordanian Marketing Manager; HE Mumtaz Qaissi, Commissioner PDTRA; Mr Tim Bartlett, Consultant ACED Project – ASEZA. Following is the feedback as received today, 21 February, 2011. The most recent feedback received from Mr Nayef Al Fayez, Managing Director of JTB was on 8 February before his overseas departure on business.

Overview

The impact in regards to cancellations for February has seemed to vary across the sector with projected cancellations received ranging from 30% to 70%. PDTRA for example reports a significant drop in visitor numbers to Petra, the most visited site in Jordan; numbers to date indicate a drop in excess of 30% for February when compared to 2010 figures. Some tour operators report a 70% drop in business for February – some due to cancellations and some because the business never evolved. One large operator for example who normally operates three flights from European airports cancelled all flights in February and the first half of March from one airport and has completely cancelled one of the two regular flights from the other airport for the rest of the season – ie February, March and April.

The common theme for March and April, two of the months that carry the sector throughout the year, is fear. Though the percentage of cancellations received for March and April have not been hugely significant, the resulting impact for the year, due to the fact that March and April are traditionally busier months, could be very significant.

The real fear however, is not in regards to impact due to cancellations that have already taken place but rather, based on the feedback from international tour operators; they are still holding reservations but, they are not confident as they are not getting the bookings from consumers. One major international tour operator for example is asking the Jordanian tour operator for financial contribution to market the tours already booked in an attempt to increase visitors and maintain their bookings, this is a first time occurrence but, one the local tour operator is fearful will continue – international operators have suffered financially due to the need to cancel so many bookings to Egypt in particular. They don't want to cancel more tours but, they are not confident they will go ahead, they are asking for updates on the situation in Jordan regularly.

Though most of the feedback has revolved around this high season, we have also been advised that the L'Oreal conference, planned for 2000 delegates in November has already been cancelled. Last Friday's demonstrations and the media coverage received has, it seems, increased the fear across the sector, all are "waiting to see" what happens this coming Friday. As has been the case for a number of weeks, the media coverage of turmoil throughout the Middle East and the lack of differentiation between countries in the region continues to have a negative impact. One senior industry member said "If I was in Europe I would not come to Jordan right now, if I had paid and could not get a refund then maybe but, I would not book", and this is the biggest fear moving forward.

The only Jordanian destination that seems to have increased numbers, if only slightly, has been Aqaba. This however, is projected to be only short term as the increase was based on diversions from Sharm El Sheikh and evacuees arriving in Aqaba from Egypt until the main crisis recedes. An industry meeting is taking place in Aqaba today and further feedback is expected however, feedback received

earlier today suggests fear that there will be no new bookings as markets stay away from the Middle East and in addition once Egyptian tourism implements recovery plans that the market will be saturated with cheap deals which Jordan cannot compete with. Feedback from the UNWTO suggests same with many cut price deals for travel to Egypt already released in numerous European markets.

A JITOA board meeting is taking place today to assess the situation.

A UNWTO update on the situation is currently being developed and will be received in the coming few days.

The general feeling is there is a great need to address the imbalance of negative coverage on Jordan with positive coverage and messages. This relates to volume of negative coverage on Jordan that is perceived to be highly misrepresentative of the situation, the volume of negative coverage on the region which impacts heavily on Jordan as knowledge of the region is low.

Industry Comments

Below are some ad hoc comments from industry members:

“Still bad unfortunately and last Friday made matters worse.... no new reservations all is on hold”.

“We expect a panic to do something mid March – it will be too late then”“Clients arriving tomorrow called to ask is it safe”.

“There are cancellations and probably less people willing to transit through Jordan”.

“Some cancellations but, no new requests”.

“Every day being asked for assessment”.

“There will be further cancellations”.

“At recent tradeshow in Milan we were constantly asked about the situation”.

“Usually we get lots of emails at this time of year, maybe 200, now 15-20”.

“Cancellations for March so far is 35% and also there are no new bookings”.

“We expect cancellations over the season to be an absolute minimum of 30%.... we’ll be watching to see what happens this Friday.

“All of industry waits for these months to carry them through the year.....”.

On the following pages are examples of recent press coverage on Jordan.

The Washington Post

Jordan protesters attacked by government supporters in Amman

By Joel Greenberg

Friday, February 18, 2011; 3:41 PM

JERUSALEM - Clashes erupted Friday in the Jordanian capital, Amman, when about 300 protesters calling for political reforms were set upon by government supporters armed with metal rods and sticks as police stood by, participants said. At least eight people were reportedly injured.

It was the first time protesters have been attacked during demonstrations in Amman for political and economic change, which have been held for the past several Fridays.

"We were not calling for the downfall of the regime but for an elected government, democratic laws, opening the corruption files and against the peace agreement with [Israel](#)," said Muwafak Mahadeen, a newspaper columnist and activist who was at the protest outside the Al-Husseini mosque in downtown Amman.

"About 150 people, who looked just like the thugs at Tahrir Square, attacked demonstrators with metal rods, sticks, plastic pipes and stones, and the police did not intervene," Mahadeen said in a telephone interview. "That number of people could only have been mobilized by the security forces."

The government supporters had trailed the protesters, shouting slogans in support of King Abdullah II, and when they attacked, the demonstrators scattered and took shelter in surrounding shops, witnesses said. Mahadeen said that his arm was fractured and that his son, a movie producer, was struck on the head.

Information Minister Taher Adwan said the assault took security forces at the scene by surprise.

"The government condemns this incident. The protest was peaceful, and what the assailants did is a violation of civil liberties," he said in a statement. Adwan added that the government would conduct an investigation to discover the identity of the assailants and that it "re-affirmed its commitment to undertake political reforms, particularly of the laws governing civil liberties."

Under pressure from the street protests, Abdullah this month replaced the prime minister, ordered speedy reforms and met with the largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, in an effort to broaden political dialogue.

Greenberg is a special correspondent.

New York Times

Violence Erupts at Jordan Protest

By RANYA KADRI and ISABEL KERSHNER

Published: February 18, 2011

AMMAN, Jordan — A protest turned violent here in the Jordanian capital on Friday as government supporters clashed with demonstrators calling for political change, injuring several, witnesses said.

Antigovernment protests, though rare for [Jordan](#), have become routine on Fridays in the weeks since popular uprisings swept over Tunisia, Egypt and other parts of the region, but this was the first time that one ended in confrontation.

Jordanians expressed surprise over the turn of events, saying that this Friday's antigovernment gathering was actually smaller than previous ones, with only a few hundred participants, as opposed to earlier demonstrations that had attracted several thousand.

The protest started out peacefully outside the King Hussein mosque in downtown Amman, according to participants, with the demonstrators calling for an end to corruption and constitutional monarchy and for the lowering of prices.

"Then," recounted Firas Mahadin, 30, a movie director who took part in the protest, "more than a hundred young thugs surrounded us from in front and behind and started attacking us."

Mr. Mahadin was speaking by telephone from the hospital, where he had gone with a suspected concussion after being hit on the head with a metal club, he said. He said that the attackers were shouting slogans in favor of King [Abdullah II](#) and against [Al Jazeera](#), the Arab satellite station that has been accused by parts of the Middle East establishment of fomenting the recent upheavals and unrest.

Mr. Mahadin and others described the pro-government supporters as young men in civilian clothing armed with metal bars and wooden clubs.

Witnesses said that the police at the scene did not intervene.

A police spokesman, Mohamed Khatib, described the clashes as the result of a "quarrel" that broke out "between a pro-government rally and another demonstration staged in the same location," Agence France-Presse reported.

Most of the rallies for change have been led by the Islamic Action Front, the political arm of the [Muslim Brotherhood](#), joined by leftist groups, students and trade unions.

Another antigovernment protester, Sufian al-Tell, an engineer and a member of the Jordan National Party, said that the Muslim Brotherhood did not participate in this Friday's demonstration.

During previous Friday protests, Mr. Tell said, there were fewer police officers and the atmosphere was relaxed, with the police offering protesters juice and water. This Friday there was a stronger police presence, he said, "and although we asked for help, they walked away."

The demonstrations in Jordan have represented the first serious challenge to the decade-old rule of King Abdullah II, a critical American ally in the region. The king enjoys absolute powers, and appoints the prime minister and the cabinet. But he is contending with the country's worst economic crisis in years.

King Abdullah has [already taken some measures](#) to try to calm the atmosphere. Responding to the protesters' demands, he dismissed the prime minister, Samir Rifai, on Feb. 1 and replaced him with Marouf al-Bakhit, a former general who has served before in the post and is [widely viewed as clean of corruption](#). The royal palace said in a statement that Mr. Bakhit was asked to take "practical, swift and tangible steps" toward comprehensive political change.

A week later, several dozen Jordanian tribesmen, historically core loyalists to the monarchy, issued a rare statement calling for urgent and far-reaching [political reform and an end to corruption](#). They said that without a more open and responsive political system, the country was headed down the path taken by Tunisia and Egypt. The statement, signed by 36 members of tribes, mostly Bedouins, was published on Jordan's most popular news Web site.

Despite the growing undercurrent of unease, there was little sign before Friday's clashes that things could turn violent. Opposition forces had said that they would keep up their symbolic protests but that they did not intend to escalate the situation.

Few consider either the monarchy or the country at imminent risk of serious turmoil, not least because the population is divided between groups with differing grievances and interests. Jordan is a country of six million, more than half of them [Palestinian](#), and 40 percent members of tribes, also known as East Bankers.

Isabel Kershner reported from Jerusalem.

Los Angeles Times

JORDAN: Clashes erupt at pro-democracy rally in Amman [Updated]

February 18, 2011 | 6:26 am



Jordan has had regular peaceful protests in recent days, pressing King Abdullah for political reforms, but a Friday demonstration outside the Hussein mosque in Amman turned unexpectedly violent when a gang of more than 100 pro-government counter-demonstrators rushed in and began beating the protesters with metal and wooden clubs.

An estimated 300 demonstrators fled quickly onto side streets to escape while hundreds of police stood by and did not intervene, according to witnesses. At least eight people were injured.

"The police allowed those thugs to beat us up," said Muafak Mahadine, a leftist columnist who was injured along with his son, a film director, who is hospitalized with a concussion.

He said the protesters included lawyers, doctors, engineers and others who have been pressing the king to revise the constitution to hand over more power from the monarchy to the parliament. "This is a march we go on every Friday. We haven't changed our slogans or what we were saying for the past four weeks. Nothing about getting rid of the regime. We're asking about democratic changes. The 1952 constitution. Fighting corruption. Stop normalization with Israel," Mahadine said.

The attackers were shouting slogans vowing to defend the king with their blood and their souls, he said. "We have no problem with these slogans. This is up to them," he said. "But suddenly they attacked us. They looked just like the thugs we saw in Tahrir in Cairo."

[Updated at 9:26 a.m.: Police said the incident began when government supporters who were conducting their own rally ran into the pro-reform rally and arguments began.

"To the shock of both the marchers and police, the [pro-government] group suddenly charged through the demonstrators and began beating them," the official Petra news agency said.

Taher Adwan, minister of state for media affairs, said the government condemned the attack as a violation of Jordanians' right to demonstrate peacefully. He said the government would investigate the incident to determine who launched the attack "and those behind them."]

-- Kim Murphy in Amman

Photo credit: Amman Net online newspaper

The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan

For the first time in decades, activists openly seek to end the monarchy.

BY JONATHAN SCHANZER

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. military's Joint Chiefs of Staff, traveled to Jordan this month for talks with King Abdullah II, just days after the monarch swore in a new government and promised to implement economic reforms. Admiral Mullen appeared to be in the region to reassure the jittery kingdom that the U.S. has its back.

But if today's volatile Middle East is the new normal, Admiral Mullen's presence may do little to prevent instability in Jordan. Contagious political protests have emboldened the monarchy's existing opponents. For the first time since "Black September," when Palestinians tried to hijack ...

[Jordan: Why It's Not A Domino In The Middle East](#)



At any other time, in any other part of the world, a handful of tribesmen airing their grievances in a passionate letter to the local royals would scarcely get noticed.

But as protesters hit the streets in [country after country](#) in the Middle East, and with Tunisia and Egypt's leaders toppled along the way, a tribal petition sent to the Royal Hashemite Court in Jordan has sparked a controversy--one that pits Jordan's critics against others claiming that the West, and the Western media in particular, are rushing to lump Jordan into a tidy "Arab" grab bag that overlooks how different it is from its neighbors.

In early February, Agence France Press, a leading French news service, published two [reports](#) saying the 36 tribesmen, out of a tribal population of over 2 million, had warned Jordan's royal family that their country "will sooner or later be the target of an uprising similar to the ones in Tunisia and Egypt due to the suppression of freedoms and the looting of public funds."

The royal family shot back with a [statement](#) condemning the AFP's coverage of the tribal warnings as unsubstantiated and defamatory, and threatening to "pursue legal action" against the news service. Many [media outlets](#) pounced [saying](#) the face-off meant that deep-seated unrest was brewing in Jordan, just as it was elsewhere in the region.

Unless, of course, it wasn't.

Some analysts say that the rush to define fast-moving, seismic protests has sometimes trumped accuracy in the coverage of the Middle East.

"This frenzy has caught the West by surprise and has resulted in events being reported without analysis, background or research," said Dr. Safwan M. Masri, Director of the Columbia University Middle East Research Center, in an interview with The Huffington Post.

Story continues below

Jordan is an anomaly of sorts, one of the Middle East's few constitutional monarchies. The royal family wields real executive power but the country has a democratically elected legislative assembly headed by a prime minister that counterbalances the monarchy. Their multi-ethnic population--the country has absorbed many Iraqi and Palestinian refugees in recent decades--is viewed domestically as a source of stability that sets Jordan apart from nearby countries prone to ethnic clashes. The Bedouin tribes, which make up close to 40 percent of the population, have historically been loyal to the monarchy.

Neighbors like Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Iran have all been ruled by autocrats. In Saudi Arabia, the royal family is an overlord, unchecked by an elected government. In that company, Jordan stands out as a model of plurality.

But since January, thousands of protesters have swarmed the streets of Jordanian cities, angry about a stalled economy, fed up with what they describe as rampant government corruption, and demanding that senior political leaders resign.



Barricades can be found on the streets of major cities and there have been allegations from journalists and those within the reform movement that the government has threatened members of the media covering the turmoil.

While the government has not responded directly to these allegations, King Abdullah II recently acknowledged the need to "ensure free speech and create the atmosphere for a professional and independent media that take an unrestricted role" in a letter to the newly appointed prime minister, Marouf Bakhit.

Like Egypt, Jordan is a young, educated country pummeled by the worldwide economic downturn. The Jordanian population has a median age of 22 and a literacy rate of almost 90 percent, but it is saddled with an unemployment rate of over 13 percent.

The AFP article landed in this mix with a force well beyond what it actually said, according to some observers.

Naseem Tarawnah, a 27-year-old journalist and [blogger](#) on civil affairs in Jordan, sees the recent coverage of the letter as "exaggerated."

"Western media has completely focused on this one sentence that went after the Queen's family a bit," Tarawnah said. "The controversy around it is a lot more interesting than the actual statement."



Randa Habib, a well-regarded AFP veteran who has been the Amman bureau chief since 1987, published segments of the tribesmen's statement on February 6th and 9th, calling the document an "unprecedented public criticism of King Abdullah II's wife."

She maintains that the government's reaction to the article was atypical and alarming.

"They are reacting in a way and in a manner that they wouldn't have done in the past. It was a bit of a panic," she said. "In these times of crisis, the foreign media is an easy target."

Habib said the letter was newsworthy because the tribesmen both clearly identified themselves and made pointed attacks against the monarchy.

"The fact that people were ready to identify themselves and make such big accusations against the Queen and the Hashemite court was unseen until now, so it was truly significant," Habib told The Huffington Post.

She denied the Royal Court's assertion that her article provided a platform for the unfounded claims of tribesmen who "do not represent the tens of thousands of people from these proud Jordanian tribes."

"What we added [to the AFP article] are elements to make it understandable for our international audience," she said. "The fact is there were red lines with the monarchy before and those lines were crossed."

Official sources within the Royal Hashemite Court told The Huffington Post Habib's articles were "fabricated and based on gossip."

Habib dismissed the criticism: "I don't think they have a case. The quotes are from the communiqué."

For his part, Tarawnah asserts the letter is "certainly not representative of Jordanian tribes in general."

Habib, and the AFP, are hardly the only media outlets that see the tribal communiqué as newsworthy.

Last week, the [Guardian published reports](#) on the same letter, claiming "The outlook seems even more uncertain now that the tribes have added their voice to the tide of criticism."

A Guardian News & Media spokesperson said: "We have not received any complaints about the article in question."

Yet as protests mount elsewhere in the Middle East, the unrest in Jordan has largely simmered down since King Abdullah II dismissed parliament on February 1st, appointing a new prime minister and installing a new parliament.

The [Guardian](#) references the change in government as a "timid opening" that "seems unlikely to end the unrest."

For all of this, however, analysts familiar with the region maintain Jordan is unlikely to be the next domino to fall in the Middle East.

"If I'm looking for the next place that we're going to see a regime change, it's not Jordan," said Robert Danin, an analyst specializing in the Middle East and Africa with the Council on Foreign Relations.

Others agree.

"The monarchy is a conscious red line. The government takes the flack and criticism from the people, who associate the monarchy with the Jordanian identity. The wrath is directed toward the policy makers and implementers," said Tarawnah, the blogger.



Contrasted with the insulated monarchy of Jordan, neighboring military dictators are more vulnerable to protestors hungry for a regime change and are likely to go to greater lengths, namely restricting freedoms, to keep a hammerlock on power. As a hereditary monarchy, the regime in Jordan has more flexibility to respond to its citizens' demands.

"Leaders don't want to come across as reactive or defensive. Initiating the reform process before the unrest happened was incredibly helpful," Dr. Masri said of Jordan, before adding, "Articulation of these reforms is now the order of the day."

For its part, the Jordanian monarchy has a reform-minded history--at least on paper.

King Abdullah II outlined his vision for sweeping reforms across political, economic, and social issues in [The National Agenda](#), a document he presented in 2005. Since then, the government has enacted a series of economic reforms which have included eliminating fuel and agricultural subsidies, privatizing industry and embarking on a series of tax overhauls.

And before the recent protests, King Abdullah reiterated the need to enact the social and political reforms included in [The National Agenda](#).

"Political, economic, social and administrative reforms are interconnected," he said in a November speech to parliament. "We have emphasized that economic reform should be accompanied with political reform that increases public participation in the decision-making process."

Despite some of the economic initiatives, little reform has actually been carried out in the political and social spheres. Although the king aimed to eliminate structural unemployment and end media censorship, among other things, by 2012, little has been done on a practical level to realize these goals.

Reformers in Jordan are capitalizing on the regional unrest to pressure lawmakers to finally act on these and other measures.

Professor Amaney Jamal, an associate professor of politics at Princeton University said that while King Abdullah II built a reputation on his call for reforms, "the kingdom is seen as regressing in terms of political reforms in recent years. The consensus among experts is that the political situation in Jordan has deteriorated."

Last May, the Jordanian government unveiled a new [election law](#) that maintains a voting system that has been widely criticized since its adoption in 1993 because it's seen as cementing the power of tribal districts loyal to the monarchy and under representing populated cities such as Amman. The new law failed to embrace electoral reforms outlined in the National Agenda, including a strengthening of political parties and proportional representation.

Tarawnah calls this recent version of the Jordanian election law "disastrous" and Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh told The Huffington Post "there is a serious need to revisit the election law."



Judeh said the government's interest in reform isn't prompted by unrest elsewhere and he called recent visits from high-ranking US officials, including Under Secretary of State William Burns and Admiral Mike Mullen, "routine."

"There is no nervousness at all. There is an acknowledgement of the fact that we have economic hardship," Judeh said. "Jordanians have really felt the bite. It didn't come without a social cost."

Last Tuesday, Jordan's interior minister announced that protest marches will no longer need government permission. The move comes just days after the King met with leaders of the Islamic Action Front, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. Previously, the group, which remains officially banned in Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia, has been active in Jordan but remained removed from the political process.

"This shows the different kind of approach, it's an attempt at inclusiveness," the CFR's Danin said. "This an attempt to co-opt [the IAF] into the political system."

According to official sources, the regime is paying close attention to social media outlets to see how they can best respond to the demands of the reform movement.

For their part, Jordanian activists say they're adopting a less confrontational tone than their counterparts in other Arab countries. On Twitter, the evolution of the hashtag used by Jordan's demonstrators, from #AngryJo to [#ReformJo](#), is emblematic of that effort. "The protests in January were called Angry Days in Arabic," Tarawnah said of the change. "The hashtag has changed because we decided we need something a little more constructive and forward thinking."

Tarawnah claims the government's relationship with the media, namely independently owned news websites, has evolved as well.

"This group has had a fairly tense relationship with the government, which had blocked the sites for all state employees," he claimed. "We've seen a reversal of this policy over the last week. The unblocking of these sites has been a huge show of support."

Tarawnah remains "cautiously optimistic" about the days ahead in Jordan. He argues that young Jordanians are not looking to bring down a regime but are nevertheless encouraged by the protests sweeping across the region.

"It's not just ordinary complaining or criticism. Things need to get done because look what's happening next door," he said. "It's not about who's in power but it's about approach. Egypt has changed the rules of the game."

Jordanians demand change

Al Jazeera - English

They may not be demanding regime change, but Jordanians will not be content with mere cosmetic changes.

Lamis Andoni Last Modified: 21 Feb 2011 15:00 GMT



Jordanians are demanding reform, but stopping short of the demands made by others in the region
[GALLO/GETTY]

Jordanians want change: They are not seeking regime change but fundamental changes in the regime.

At the protests that have been taking place across the country every Friday for the past six weeks there is a near consensus that the Hashemite monarchy, which has ruled the country since 1921, must be reformed.

The protesters are not raising slogans against the king, but they are challenging the reach of his powers.

Opposition demands have ranged from changing a flawed electoral law to the disbanding of a questionably elected parliament and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy where the king becomes a head of state with no powers over the executive branch.

Promises of a new era

King Abdullah, who succeeded his father, the late King Hussein, in 1999, has responded by sacking the unpopular government of Samir Rifai and by meeting with major opposition groups. At the meetings, including a first with the influential Muslim Brotherhood, the king promised a new era and expressed his readiness to address the grievances and demands of the people.

According to those who met him, the king appeared to have understood the message sent by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions - that Arab leaders can no longer remain shielded from rising popular anger.

"He took us by surprise. He was intent on listening to our criticism and demands. He also sounded enthusiastic about change," an opposition leader told me, explaining that the king appeared to understand that real reforms were key to sustaining the regime.

Jordanians, partly fearing reprisals by the security services, have tried over the years to limit their criticisms to the government, steering away from directly, or even indirectly, criticising the king. But the current crisis has changed this,

with many Jordanian opposition figures crossing the traditional red line and critiquing the palace itself.

In an open letter to the king, Leith Shbeilat, an independent Islamist, warned that while the country remained loyal to the monarch, systematic changes would be necessary to stop the brewing storm.

Such a warning, couched in more cautious words by some political parties, has not been heard since the 1950s when leftist and pan-Arabist opposition challenged the rule of the Hashemites, who they considered to be too pro-Western.

But Jordan has changed since those times. In 1989, the late King Hussein restored parliamentary life and later lifted martial law which had been in place for three decades, paving the way for the legalisation of political parties and the easing of restrictions on freedom of expression.

King Hussein's reforms followed a limited but serious uprising, triggered by sudden price rises as a result of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) directed suspension of fuel subsidies, which shook the bedrock of Hashemite support in the south of the country.

A new phase of openness and political freedom followed, but the reforms were incomplete and left restrictive laws in place, while allowing the security and intelligence agencies to maintain a firm grip on the country.

Granted, passports are no longer confiscated from activists, but the influence of the security forces remains far-reaching and they are, at times, intrusive.

Loss of confidence

It must be noted that in an attempt to defuse rising resentment over economic policies and the repression of dissent, the palace ensured that the security forces did not attempt to disperse recent protests, despite the existence of a law restricting such gatherings.

However, the violent disruption of a protest in downtown Amman last Friday by unknown persons in civilian clothing has raised concerns that some at the centre of power are resisting calls for reform. The scene was reminiscent of Egypt's 'day of wrath' when government-paid thugs and undercover police officers attacked protesters demanding the resignation of Hosni Mubarak. Armed with sticks, and under the watchful eye of the Jordanian police, the thugs assaulted peaceful protesters, injuring a number of activists.

The government of Marouf Bakhit, the new Jordanian prime minister, has ordered an investigation into the incident. This will be a major credibility test for the new cabinet, which includes a number of respected faces with a track record of support for political and press freedoms.

Many Jordanians appear to be giving the cabinet the chance to carry out reforms, although suspicions remain that the steps promised, including lifting the conditional permit required for public gatherings, will be insufficient to restore the credibility of the government.

Although there is a long history of popular demand for the expansion of political freedoms, the current crisis reflects a real loss of popular confidence in the state. Neo-liberal economic policies, including those that led to price hikes, have angered large segments of the population, who feel that government institutions have for too long been dominated by the interests of a corrupt business elite.

The Israel factor

There is also a strong rejection of the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, which includes stipulations of economic partnership and security coordination.

Hussein Mjali, the new Jordanian justice minister, has already provoked the ire of Israel by calling for the release of a Jordanian soldier who killed Israeli schoolgirls in 1997. Activists have launched campaigns and Facebook pages in support of the justice minister, arguing that Israeli soldiers remain immune to the crimes they commit against the Palestinians.

What is more striking, however, is that Mjali was not dismissed, indicating that the palace is keenly aware of the strong anti-Israeli sentiments felt across all segments of Jordanian society - rich and poor, Jordanian East Bankers and those of Palestinian descent alike.

In fact, Jordanian East Bankers have been more vocal in demanding a review of the agreement with Israel, and a group

of retired army officers has already urged the king to deal with Israel as an enemy of the country.

Popular anger against Israel is a reaction to the failure of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations to produce an independent Palestinian state and a concern that Israeli policies will lead to the establishment of a substitute homeland for the Palestinians in Jordan. At least half of the Jordanian population are of Palestinian origin and many fear that Israel will force Palestinians to move to Jordan, in an attempt to make room for more illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

If anything, concern that the collapse of the regime might allow Israel to exploit the subsequent power vacuum has worked in the palace's favour. But, the threat posed by Israel is also a strong motivator for the opposition, which is seeking reforms that will safeguard the country from its neighbour.

Encouraged by the success of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, Jordanians are determined to maintain the pressure on their ruler to ensure that the regime undertakes radical changes that will allow for power-sharing. Unlike leaders of other Arab countries, the Jordanian king has not been faced with calls for regime change. But, Jordanian anger cannot be placated by a few cosmetic changes. The king may have to cede some executive powers in order to restore confidence in the state. The barometer of discontent is rising and, if the king does not act, worsening economic conditions and political suppression could see peaceful protests turn into a large scale popular movement.

Lamis Andoni is an analyst and commentator on Middle Eastern and Palestinian affairs.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy.

Tuesday February 22, 2011

Jordan's king demands "quick, real" reforms

AMMAN, Feb. 21 (**Xinhua**) -- King Abdullah II of Jordan called on Sunday for "real and quick reforms," pledging not to allow anybody to spread division or harm the country's stability amidst pro-reform protests, state-run Petra news agency reported.

The Jordanian leader pledged to root out corruption and called for a comprehensive dialogue and more involvement of citizens in the decision-making process, Petra said.

"I am waiting for government to come up with recommendations on a mechanism for comprehensive national dialogue to tackle necessary steps to achieve political reforms, at the top of which is studying and updating all legislation governing political and civic work, namely the election law," Abdullah II told a gathering of officials, legislators and judiciary members.

Highlighting the responsibility to combat corruption, Abdullah II said, "If there is any suspicion of corruption, an investigation should start promptly."

The Jordanian leader also ordered economic reforms to improve people's standards of living, ensure justice, and create job opportunities for youth, who he said will endure all difficulties if they are confident that they are moving towards a better future.

In a reference to assaults by gangs of thugs last Friday against peaceful pro-reform demonstrators, Abdullah II said, "The stability, freedom and openness prevailing in Jordan and the tolerance that characterizes this country have regrettably tempted a small group to take advantage of such a climate to try to poison the atmosphere and to harm the country and the people."

"I want to state clearly today that nothing will change Jordan's policy of openness, the culture of pluralism and acceptance of all constructive and frank opinions. These are constants in Jordan and they will not change ... I want to make it clear to everyone that I will not allow, nor will Jordanians allow, anybody to spread division or harm the country's stability and achievements or the unity and cohesion of our people," said Abdullah II.

Editor: Tang Danlu

Hosted News AFP

Eight hurt in Jordan clash: witnesses, medics

(AFP) – 3 days ago

AMMAN — A mob wielding batons waded into an anti-regime protest in Amman on Friday, injuring eight people in the first such violence since protests began in Jordan, witnesses and medics said.

Police blamed the violence on the fact that pro- and anti-government protesters staged rallies near to each other at the same time in the Jordanian capital.

"A quarrel broke out between pro-government rally and another demonstration staged in the same location," said police spokesman Mohamed Khatib, referring to the youth rally.

Hundreds of youth demonstrators took to the streets after Friday Muslim prayers to demand political reforms, an elected government and an end to corruption. Organisers said 400 people joined the rally but police put the number at 300.

Local journalist Moawafak Mahadine said his arm was broken in the fracas and that his son, Firas, age 30, remained hospitalised with a concussion.

"I was hospitalised and so was my son after thugs beat us with batons," he told AFP.

Medical officials confirmed admitting and treating the two.

The official news agency Petra said that thousands of pro-government protesters had at the same time staged a rally during which they chanted, "We are ready to die for you Abu Hussein," in a reference to King Abdullah II.

"There was a row between this rally and a rally calling for reforms, due to their different positions, prompting a police intervention," said the agency, adding that the incident had ended peacefully.

Youth protesters however told AFP that they were dispersing when government supporters wielding batons launched an assault, injuring eight of them.

Information Minister Taher Adwan said a group of people armed with batons had suddenly assaulted the protesters, taking the security forces by surprise.

"The government condemns this incident. The protest was peaceful and what the assailants did is a violation of citizen liberties," he said in a statement.

Adwan added that the government would conduct an investigation to discover the identity of the assailants and "re-affirmed its commitment to undertake political reforms, particularly of the laws governing civil liberties."

The clash marks the first outbreak of political violence in Jordan since the opposition movement began staging regular protests in January.

Issam Khawaja, is secretary general of the leftist opposition party, Hashed, said "hundreds of thugs assaulted demonstrators" and named the eight people wounded.

"We will keep up our action, next Friday will be a day of rage in the whole Kingdom," he said in a press conference.

On Wednesday, about 30 university students demonstrated in front of the royal palace in Amman, calling for constitutional reforms and limits on the powers of King Abdullah II.

About 1,500 people rallied on the same day in the northern city of Irbid to denounce government "corruption" and demand political reforms, participants said.

18 February 2011 **BBC News**

Middle East unrest: Clashes erupt at Jordan protest



Activists were attacked with sticks and stones, witnesses say

Protesters have clashed with government supporters in Jordan, where crowds had gathered to demand political reform.

Eyewitnesses said a small group of government supporters attacked the protesters with sticks and stones in central Amman.

The police moved in to separate the two groups, but activists say eight protesters were hurt in the scuffles.

Protests in Jordan, much smaller-scale than in other parts of the Middle East, have been going on for seven weeks.

The BBC's Dale Gavlak in Amman says it is the seventh Friday in a row that crowds have gathered after Friday prayers to urge economic and political reforms.

The demonstrators comprised mostly young people who were joined by trade unionists and others demanding to be able to elect their prime minister and cabinet officials, and urging economic reforms to help the poor.

Eyewitnesses said about 2,000 protesters turned out, though other reports said the number was about 300.

Economic grievances

Our correspondent says demonstrators took to the streets after prayers at the Hussein Mosque, and chanted: "It's not about bread, but dignity. We prefer death to humiliation."

A group of government supporters rallied behind them shouting: "With our blood and soul we sacrifice our lives to Abu Hussein [King Abdullah]."

The two groups were pressed against each other in a narrow street, and eyewitnesses say a small group of men attacked the activists with sticks and stones before the police restored order.

"A quarrel broke out between pro-government rally and another demonstration staged in the same location," police spokesman Mohamed Khatib told AFP news agency.

One protester, Muhannad Sahafiin, said he would continue to protest until change happens.

"We have to keep the pressure on this government. We are in the streets and we'll stay in the streets until we see all these demands working on the ground," he said.

Opposition groups in Jordan object to economic reforms introduced by Prime Minister Samir Rifai after he took office in November 2009.

The changes led to cuts in subsidies for basic commodities.

Jordan has a population of about six million. The official unemployment rate is 14%, though other estimates put it much higher, especially among the young.

Financial Times

Eight injured in Jordan protests

By Tobias Buck in Jerusalem

Published: February 18 2011 15:52 | Last updated: February 18 2011 15:52

A demonstration calling for political and economic reforms in Jordan was marred by violence on Friday, after a small group of government supporters clashed with anti-government protesters, leaving at least eight people injured.

According to a report by the Associated Press, about 2,000 protesters gathered in Amman for the weekly Friday demonstration, but then came under attack from a 200-strong group of pro-government activists. One anti-government protester told the news agency that the demonstrators were attacked with batons, pipes and stones.

Forbes.com

Clashes in Jordan injure 8 protesters

By DALE GAVLAK , 02.18.11, 07:19 AM EST

AMMAN, Jordan -- Clashes erupted Friday in Jordan's capital between government supporters and opponents at a protest calling for more freedoms and lower food prices, injuring eight.

It was the seventh straight Friday that Jordanians, inspired by uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, took to the streets to demand more say in decision-making.

The Amman protest drew about 2,000 people, including hard-line leftists, Muslim conservatives and students calling for reduced powers for the king and the chance to elect members of the Cabinet.

Students from the growing Jaayin or "I'm Coming" movement chanted "we want constitutional reforms; we want a complete change to policies."

Jordan's king enjoys absolute powers, ruling by decree and he can appoint and dismiss Cabinets and parliament whenever he wants.

About 200 government supporters trailed the protesters, chanting: "Our blood and souls, we sacrifice for you Abu Hussein" - a reference to Jordan's King Abdullah II - before clashing with the opposition march.

"They beat us with batons, pipes and hurled rocks at us," said Tareq Kmeil, a student at the protest. "We tried to defend ourselves, to beat them back."

He said at least eight people were injured. He said the injuries included fractures in the head, arms and legs.

"Police didn't do anything to protect us," he said. "Police forces just stood on the side watching us getting beaten."

Police spokesmen were not immediately available for comment.

Associated Press Writer Jamal Halaby in Amman contributed reporting.

Clashes erupt during demonstration in Jordan

Xinhua, February 19, 2011

China.org.cn

Scuffles erupted Friday between pro- and anti-government demonstrators in the Jordanian capital of Amman.

During a demonstration in downtown Amman following the Friday prayers, a few hundred Jordanians, including leftists, Islamists and youth representatives, took to the streets, demanding more political reforms and lower prices of food items and several commodities.

According to eye witnesses, as the demonstrators marched through the streets, pro-government demonstrators started clashing with them, and people from both sides suffered injuries during the clashes.

Over the past seven weeks, Jordanians have taken to the streets, demanding genuine political and socio-economic reforms.

Jordan's king calls for 'real and quick reform'

By the CNN Wire Staff

February 20, 2011 1:31 p.m. EST



Jordan's King Abdullah II has promised to root out corruption and give lawmakers a bigger role in government.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- "Reform is our unwavering will," Abdullah says
- The Jordanian monarch says he wants greater participation in government
- He also called for economic reforms to produce jobs

(CNN) -- Jordan's King Abdullah II told his new government to enact "real and quick reform" Sunday amid growing protests around the Middle East, promising to root out corruption and give lawmakers a bigger role in government.

"We need hard work, and we need a continuous process of assessment and evaluation to correct errors and failures," Abdullah said after meeting with new government ministers, members of parliament and judges. But he added, "Reform is our unwavering will."

"When I say reform, I want real and quick reform," he said. "Because without genuine reforms, the situation will remain as it was, when many officials wasted opportunities because of reluctance to move forward and fear of change."

Abdullah said efforts to reshape Jordan's government were already under way before the revolts that toppled longtime Arab autocracies in Egypt and Tunisia and have since spread to other countries in the region. But he conceded that some officials had "retreated before people with private agendas who resisted reform to guard their own interests."

"I will not allow that to happen again," he vowed.

Abdullah swore in a new government February 9, with former general Marouf al Bakhit as prime minister and several opposition and media figures among its ranks. The king said Sunday that he wants political reforms that will give elected representatives and the public more influence in decision-making, with governments eventually "formed by parties and on the basis of the clear programs that these parties will present."

"We also want economic reform that improves people's standards of living, ensures justice and creates jobs and opportunities for our youth, who will endure all difficulties if they are confident that they are moving towards a better future," he said.

Like other countries in the region, Jordan's economy has been hit hard by the global economic downturn, and youth unemployment is high. Friday, clashes between pro- and anti-government demonstrators who called for abolishing the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel left several people injured, witnesses reported.

Abdullah said the situation in Jordan is "much brighter than it is depicted by some."

"Thank God, no one in this country has disappeared and not a single drop of blood has been shed for reasons related to politics or opinion, as the situation is in some countries," he said. But he added, "I want to make it clear to everyone that I will not allow, nor will Jordanians allow, anybody to spread division or harm the country's stability and achievements or the unity and cohesion of our people."

Bloomberg

Jordan's King Abdullah Seeks Rapid Change From New Government Amid Protest

By Massoud A. Derhally - Feb 21, 2011 10:55 AM GMT+0200 Mon Feb 21 08:55:33 GMT 2011



Jordan's King Abdullah, seen here, said he wants the new government of Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit to implement political and economic changes without hesitation. Photographer: Adam Jan/AFP/Getty Images

[Jordan's King Abdullah](#) said he wants Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit's government to implement political and economic changes without hesitation.

Past opportunities for change were missed because of "people with private agendas who resisted reform to guard their own interests," the monarch told the heads and members of Jordan's executive, legislative and judicial authorities yesterday, according to a transcript provided by the [Royal Court](#). "I will not allow that to happen again."

King Abdullah swore in Bakhit's government on Feb. 9, replacing the previous administration headed by Samir Rifai. He was responding to protests by Islamic and other opposition groups that have been staged on Fridays since the revolt in [Tunisia](#) that forced President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali into exile on Jan. 14. The unrest has also spread to [Egypt](#), where [Hosni Mubarak](#) stepped down as president after mass protests, and [Libya](#), Yemen, Bahrain and [Algeria](#).

The demonstrators in Jordan, which imports more than 90 percent of its oil and relies on foreign investment and grants to finance its budget, have pointed to rising food prices and a lack of jobs, complaints that echo those of the opposition in Egypt and Tunisia. The protesters are also demanding that more powers be vested in the country's elected [parliament](#).

'Quick Results'

The [Islamic Action Front](#), the largest opposition group in Jordan, declined to join Bakhit's government.

"I want quick results," Abdullah said, reiterating his instructions in the designation letter to the new premier. "When I talk about political reform, I want real reform consistent with the spirit of the age."

The “most important step is to study and develop all laws governing political and civil activities,” as well as the kingdom’s election law, he said. “There should be consensus on this law and on its goals, which must encourage collective political work and the emergence of political parties as well as increasing public participation in decision making.”

Parliamentary elections should be carried out with parties competing on the basis of programs, the king said. “This is essential so we move to a new stage in the administration of the state when governments will be formed by parties and on the basis of the clear programs that these parties will present. To get to that stage, there should be strong and efficient political parties and continuous dialogue.”

Tribal Guidance

Many of Jordan’s 30 to 40 tribes usually reach a consensus on candidates before legislative elections, with voters often following the instructions of their tribal elders rather than choosing on the basis of specific political and economic platforms.

Jordan held its last vote in November. Pro-government and tribal candidates swept the elections, as Islamists who form the largest opposition movement boycotted the vote saying the assembly lacks power, the voting system favors pro- administration candidates and past counts have been fraudulent. The government denied any interference in the election, which was monitored by international observers including the Washington-based [National Democratic Institute](#).

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VOANEWS

Jordan's King Urges 'Real, Quick' Reforms

VOA News February 20, 2011



Photo: REUTERS

Jordan's King Abdullah speaks at Zahran Palace in Amman, February 20, 2011

Jordan's King Abdullah has called for "real" and "quick" political reforms to give the public a greater role in government amid popular discontent.

The king told a group of government officials, judges and lawmakers Sunday he also wants more efforts to battle corruption.

Jordanians have been demonstrating since January for political and economic changes, with street protests that resemble the uprisings spreading through the Arab world.

Protests turned violent in Jordan's capital last week. Witnesses say at least eight people were injured when government supporters attacked demonstrators with batons.

Jordanians are demanding constitutional reforms and limits on King Abdullah's authority.

King Abdullah dismissed his Cabinet earlier this month after thousands of Jordanians took to the streets to protest against rising food and fuel prices.

Some information for this report was provided by AP and AFP.

Unrest in the Middle East and North Africa -- country by country

By **the CNN Wire Staff**

February 22, 2011 -- Updated 0104 GMT (0904 HKT)

CNN) -- Two months ago, a Tunisian fruit vendor lit a match, starting a fire that has spread throughout the Arab world. Muhammad Bouazizi's self-immolation prompted anti-government protests that toppled the regime in Tunisia and then Egypt. The demonstrations have spread across a swath of the Middle East and North Africa. Here are the latest developments, including the roots of the unrest:

Monday's developments:

BAHRAIN

The Bahrain International Circuit said Monday the country will withdraw from hosting this year's Formula One Grand Prix race "so the country can focus on its process of national dialogue."

About 1,000 protesters remained at the Pearl Roundabout, which has become the island nation's equivalent of Egypt's Tahrir Square. Opposition groups are considering a list of demands, which include an independent investigation into the deaths of at least 10 protesters. They also want answers about people unaccounted for since security forces moved in to clear the Pearl Roundabout last week, using tear gas, pellet guns and clubs. On Saturday, joyous Bahrainis retook the Pearl Roundabout after Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa ordered the military to vacate.

Fallout from last week's violent protests continues. A 20-year-old protester in Bahrain, who was shot in the head on Friday, has died, hospital sources said Monday. Ridha Mohammed was advancing toward the Pearl Roundabout with other demonstrators when security forces opened fire.

Roots of unrest:

Protesters initially took to the streets of Manama last week to demand reform and the introduction of a constitutional monarchy. But some are now calling for the removal of the royal family, which has led the Persian Gulf state since the 18th century. Young members of the country's Shiite Muslim majority have staged protests in recent years to complain about discrimination, unemployment and corruption, issues they say the country's Sunni rulers have done little to address. The Bahrain Center for Human Rights said authorities launched a clampdown on dissent in late 2010. It accused the government of torturing some human rights activists.

MOROCCO Five people were found dead Monday, a day after protests were held in cities across Morocco calling for political reform, the nation's interior minister told reporters. The bodies were found in a bank in the northern Moroccan town of Al Hoceima, Interior Minister Taib Cherkaoui said Monday. Thousands demonstrated Sunday in towns across the country, according to Human Rights Watch. Labor unions, youth organizations and human rights groups demonstrated in at least six cities. Police stayed away from the demonstrations, most of which were peaceful, Human Rights Watch reported.

Roots of unrest

Protesters in Morocco are calling for political reform. Government officials say such protests are not unusual and that the protesters' demands are on the agenda of most political parties.

EGYPT

The Egyptian military has set up refugee camps near its border with Libya and two mobile hospitals at the Salloum border crossing to assist Egyptians fleeing the protests in Libya, Egypt's state-run news website EgyNews reported late Monday.

Two Iranian warships will cross the Suez Canal on Tuesday, four days after Egypt's post-Hosni Mubarak government gave the green light to the passage, EgyNews reported Monday.

Also Monday, British Prime Minister David Cameron arrived in Egypt for meetings with that country's military leaders, the prime minister's office said.

Authorities in Egypt have frozen the assets of former President Hosni Mubarak and his family, state-run media reported Monday. Attorney General Abdel Meguid Mahmoud requested the action, according to EgyNews.

Egypt's former interior minister and former minister of tourism have been transferred to criminal court, according to state news agency MENA. Habib al-Aldi and Zuhair Garana will face corruption charges, according to the report.

Protesters in Egypt have issued a reminder to the military that they are watching the reform process. They celebrated the one-week anniversary of Mubarak's ouster Friday in a "Day of Victory" rally at Tahrir Square, epicenter of the protests. Mubarak stepped down February 11 following 18 days of unrest in Egypt. The military has been in charge since Mubarak resigned. Meanwhile, Group of 20 leaders concluded a two-day meeting in Paris on Saturday with pledges to support the new emerging governments of Egypt and Tunisia.

Roots of unrest:

Complaints about police corruption and abuses were among the top grievances of demonstrators who forced Mubarak from office. Demonstrators were also angry about Mubarak's 30-year rule, a lack of free elections and economic issues such as high food prices, low wages and high unemployment.

LIBYA

Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi made a brief television appearance early Tuesday to announce that he was still in charge, denying reports that he had fled the country in the face of a spreading revolt.

Speaking to a state television reporter in front of his Tripoli home, Gadhafi said he wanted to show people "that I am in Tripoli, not in Venezuela. Don't believe those dogs in the media."

But he faced growing opposition at home and abroad. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had an "extensive discussion" with Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi on Monday, the United Nations said. Ban "expressed deep concern at the escalating scale of violence and emphasized that it must stop immediately," according to a statement.

Libya's justice minister, Mustafa Abdul Jalil, resigned to protest the "bloody situation and use of excessive force" against protesters by security forces, the Quryna newspaper in Libya reported Monday. The newspaper has been pro-government but recently has started to cover the protests in detail.

In eastern Libya, much of the army appears to have gone over to anti-government forces, and much of the traffic on the roads was made up of Egyptians leaving the country. CNN correspondent Ben Wedeman, who entered the region Monday, witnessed one ammunition dump ablaze in the desert, apparently set afire by retreating troops.

Ongoing unrest has left at least 233 people dead, according to Human Rights Watch, citing hospital sources. CNN is not able to confirm the figure independently, having not been granted access to report on the ground. The network has been in contact with medics and eyewitnesses in Libya whose accounts corroborate closely with Human Rights Watch.

Roots of unrest:

Protests in Libya began in January when demonstrators, fed up with delays, broke into a housing project the government was building and occupied it. Gadhafi's government, which has ruled since a 1969 coup, responded with a \$24 billion fund for housing and development. A month later, more demonstrations were sparked when police detained relatives of those killed in an alleged 1996 massacre at the Abu Salim prison, according to Human Rights Watch. High unemployment has also fueled the protests as have anti-Gadhafi groups.

YEMEN

Anti-government protests appeared to be gaining ground Monday with news that Houthi rebels, who have been battling the government for years, were staging protests and may come to Sanaa, the capital, to join Yemenis in demonstrations.

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh rejected demands Monday that he step aside, comparing the anti-government protests to a virus sweeping through the region. "This is a virus and is not part of our heritage or the culture of the Yemeni people," he told reporters.

Between 3,000 to 3,500 anti-government protesters demonstrated peacefully in Sanaa for the 11th consecutive day Monday. A day earlier, protesters chanted, "First Mubarak, now Ali," referring to the recently ousted Egyptian ruler and Saleh. Seven people have been killed in clashes in Aden, hospital and government officials said. A human rights organization put the number of dead as high as 12.

Roots of unrest:

Protesters have called for the ouster of Saleh, who has ruled Yemen since 1978. The country has been wracked by a Shiite Muslim uprising, a U.S.-aided crackdown on al Qaeda operatives and a looming shortage of water. High unemployment fuels much of the anger among a growing young population steeped in poverty. The protesters also cite government corruption and a lack of political freedom.

Here's a look at some key recent events related to unrest in the Middle East and North Africa:

UNITED NATIONS

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has been in "continuous contact" with regional leaders in northern Africa and the Middle East, his office said late Sunday. Ban has been deeply concerned by escalating violence and bloodshed during pro-reform demonstrations, the office said, adding: "This is the time for broad-based dialogue and for genuine social and political reform."

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ALGERIA

Protesters have demanded government reform, prompting authorities to say they will soon lift a state of emergency that was imposed in 1992 to quell a civil war that led to the deaths of more than 150,000. The rule was used to clamp down on Islamist groups, but critics say the insurgency has long since diminished and the law exists only to muzzle government critics.

Roots of unrest:

Protests began in January over escalating food prices, high unemployment and housing issues. They started in Algiers, but spread to other cities as more people joined and demonstrators toppled regimes in Tunisia and later Egypt. Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika announced that he would lift the state of emergency law in what analysts called an attempt to head off a similar revolt.

DJIBOUTI

Thousands of people have marched in protest through Djibouti. On Friday, riot police charged the crowd after the call to evening prayers, shooting canisters of tear gas at the demonstrators, according to Aly Verjee, director of the international election observation mission to Djibouti, who witnessed the event. Djibouti is home to Camp Lemonnier, the only U.S. military base on the African continent.

Roots of unrest:

Protesters have called for President Ismail Omar Guelleh -- whose family has ruled the country since its independence from France in 1977 -- to step down ahead of elections scheduled in April. Guelleh has held the post since 1999 and is seeking a third term. Economic stagnation is also a source of anger among the people.

IRAN

Protesters have been met with force in major Iranian cities. In Tehran, thousands of security officers patrolled Revolution Square, at times striking at throngs of protesters with batons and rushing others on motorcycles. Opposition websites reported that security forces opened fire on protesters in Hafteh Tir Square, killing one person. Several were reported injured and detained. In Isfahan, protesters were met with batons and pepper spray in one square, while another peaceful march took place elsewhere under the watch of security agents.

Roots of unrest:

Opposition to the ruling clerics has simmered since the 2009 election, when hundreds of thousands of people filled Tehran streets to denounce the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as fraudulent.

IRAQ

Demonstrators in Iraq have clashed with Kurdish security forces in Sulaimaniya in northern Iraq. Most of the demonstrators opposed Kurdistan regional president Massoud Barzani and the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party.

Roots of unrest:

Demonstrations in Iraq have usually not targeted the national government. Instead, the protesters are angry over corruption, the quality of basic services, a crumbling infrastructure and high unemployment, particularly on a local level. They want an end to frequent power outages and food shortages.

JORDAN

Protesters in Jordan have called for reforms and for abolishing the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel. On Friday, about 200 people clashed with pro-government demonstrators in Amman. Several people were reported injured. Anti-government protesters who participated in Friday's demonstration included leftists and independent activists demanding political and economic reforms.

Roots of unrest:

Jordan's economy has been hit hard by the global economic downturn and rising commodity prices, and youth unemployment is high, as it is in Egypt. Officials close to the palace have told CNN that King Abdullah II is trying to

turn a regional upheaval into an opportunity for reform. He swore in a new government following anti-government protests. The new government has a mandate for political reform and is headed by a former general, with opposition and media figures among its ranks.

KUWAIT

Protesters in Kuwait have clashed with authorities on at least two occasions. A second straight day of demonstrations occurred on Saturday in Sulaibiya, just north of Kuwait City, according to witnesses and a government official. Hundreds of protesters are demanding greater rights for longtime residents who are not citizens of the country. They also demanded the release of people arrested in demonstrations Friday. The protesters attacked the security forces, who managed to disperse the people and make arrests, he said. The forces used tear gas on the demonstration involving between 200 and 400 protesters.

Roots of unrest:

Protesters are seeking greater rights for longtime residents who are not Kuwaiti citizens, an issue the country has been grappling with for decades. There are believed to be 100,000 noncitizens in the country.

SUDAN

Demonstrators have clashed with authorities on recent occasions in Sudan. Human Rights Watch has said that "authorities used excessive force during largely peaceful protests on January 30 and 31 in Khartoum and other northern cities." Witnesses said that several people were arrested, including 20 who remain missing.

Roots of unrest:

Demonstrators seek an end to the National Congress Party rule and government-imposed price increases, according to Human Rights Watch. It accuses the government of being heavy-handed in its response to demonstrations, and using pipes, sticks and tear gas to disperse protesters.

SYRIA

As protests heated up around the region, the Syrian government pulled back from a plan to withdraw some subsidies that keep the cost of living down in the country. President Bashar al-Assad also gave a rare interview to Western media, telling The Wall Street Journal last month that he planned reforms that would allow local elections and included a new media law and more power for private organizations. A planned "Day of Rage" that was being organized on Facebook against the al-Assad government failed to materialize, The New York Times reported.

Roots of unrest:

Opponents of the al-Assad government allege massive human rights abuses, and an emergency law has been in effect since 1963.

TUNISIA

An uprising in Tunisia prompted autocratic President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to leave the country on January 14 after weeks of demonstrations. Those demonstrations sparked protests around North Africa and the Middle East.

Roots of unrest:

The revolt was triggered when an unemployed college graduate set himself ablaze after police confiscated his fruit cart, cutting off his source of income. Protesters complained about high unemployment, corruption, rising prices and political repression.

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Hundreds of Palestinians rallied for unity in Ramallah, calling on Hamas, Fatah and other Palestinian political factions to heal their rifts amid arguments over elections scheduled for September in the Palestinian territories. "Division generates corruption" was one of several slogans on banners held up by the demonstrators Thursday, who flooded the streets after calls went out on social-networking sites as well as schools and university campuses.

Roots of unrest:

The Palestinian territories have not seen the kind of demonstrations as in many Arab countries, but the Fatah leaders of the Palestinian Authority have been under criticism since Al-Jazeera published secret papers claiming to reveal that Palestinian officials were prepared to make wide-ranging concessions in negotiations with Israel. Negotiations toward a resolution of the decadeslong Israeli-Palestinian conflict have since collapsed. Palestinian protests, largely in support of Egypt and Tunisia, were generally small and poorly attended, and in some cases the Hamas rulers of Gaza and the Palestinian Authority rulers of the West Bank actively tried to stifle protests. The split between Hamas and Fatah hampers internal change in the territories, although calls for political change are growing louder among

Palestinians. Large-scale protests have failed to materialize as many Palestinians believe their problem remains Israel.

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the decadeslong Israeli-Palestinian conflict have since collapsed. Palestinian protests, largely in support of Egypt and Tunisia, were generally small and poorly attended, and in some cases the Hamas rulers of Gaza and the Palestinian Authority rulers of the West Bank actively tried to stifle protests. The split between Hamas and Fatah hampers internal change in the territories, although calls for political change are growing louder among Palestinians. Large-scale protests have failed to materialize as many Palestinians believe their problem remains the Israeli occupation.

Bloomberg

Jordan Government Forms Committee to Probe Attacks on Protesters

By Nayla Razzouk - Feb 20, 2011 8:00 PM GMT+0200 Sun Feb 20 18:00:04 GMT 2011

Jordanian Justice Minister Hussein al-Majali said he has formed a judicial committee to probe assaults that left four protesters injured.

The five-member committee will carry out a “serious” investigation to bring the assailants to justice, al-Majali said in remarks published by the state news agency Petra.

The demonstrators were beaten by assailants wielding sticks during a protest in Amman after they were confronted by pro- government activists chanting slogans in allegiance to [King Abdullah](#), General Security spokesman Mohamad al-Khatib said Feb. 18.

Islamic and other opposition groups in Jordan have held demonstrations every Friday since a revolt in [Tunisia](#) forced President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali into exile on Jan. 14. Pro- democracy protests have spread to [Egypt](#), [Libya](#), Bahrain and Yemen since Ben Ali’s ouster.

Jordan’s King Abdullah dismissed his government and formed a new one earlier this month that was tasked with starting a “genuine political reform process.”

Opposition leaders, including Islamist Leith Shbeilat and political activist Muaffaq Mahaddeen, held a press conference after the attack to denounce the assault, which they said was carried out by “thugs” sponsored by state security forces.

They vowed to demonstrate to mark a “day of rage” on Feb. 25 to draw attention to the assault and pursue demands for political and legislative changes, better [living conditions](#) and anti-corruption measures.

They’re seeking a law that would guarantee more representative elections and a prime minister that is elected instead of being appointed by the king.

Jordan, one of the smallest economies in the Middle East, imports more than 90 percent of its oil and relies on foreign investment and grants to finance its budget and current-account deficit.

Like Egypt, Jordan is an American ally that has signed a peace treaty with [Israel](#) and is one of the biggest Middle Eastern recipients of U.S. aid.

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