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INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE

IPI Middle East Update

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Egypt: Early results from the June 16-17 run-off presidential election indicate that the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party candidate, Mohammed Morsi, is in the lead. The release of official results has been postponed pending review of complaints from the candidates. The power struggle between the Muslim Brotherhood, who held a majority in the parliament, and the military leaders, who dissolved the parliament after a recent Supreme Constitutional Court ruling that invalidated the election of a third of the parliament's members, continues. Former President Hosni Mubarak's health deteriorated in recent weeks, adding to the tensions in the power struggle. In addition, secularists and liberals have again boycotted the Constituent Assembly, claiming bias in favor of the Islamists. The military has asserted its authority, granting itself legislative authority and the right to name a new roster of members for the Constituent Assembly. While the Supreme Council of Armed Forces has long-promised to hand over power to civilian authorities as of June 30, the military leadership has, instead, strengthened its governing power and its ability to determine the future direction of Egypt's political transition.

Iran: Negotiations among the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) and Iran have yet to produce results. The most recent round in Moscow on June 18-19 only produced plans for a meeting among technical experts to be held on July 3 in Istanbul. In addition, the latest talks between the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran on June 8 were also unsuccessful, as Iran did not grant access to a military site south of Teheran that inspectors believe was used in tests related to Iran's nuclear program. The IAEA expressed concern over the Iranian demolition of buildings in specific sites.

Libya: Election of a national assembly to govern the country and write a new constitution -- originally scheduled to take place on June 19 -- was postponed to July 7 for logistical and technical reasons. Concerns have arisen over whether the interim authorities can provide the security needed to conduct a free and fair election. Recent incidents have added to these concerns. The Wafae militia from the city of Tarhuna shut down Tripoli's international Airport on June 4 demanding the release of their commander, Abu Oleija al-Habishi, claiming he had been arrested by security forces. The National Transition Council regained control of the airport with the help of the militia from Misrata. On June 5, a bomb exploded outside the US diplomatic office in Benghazi purportedly in retaliation for the killing of Al Qaeda leader Abu Yahya Al Libi in Pakistan and on June 11, also in Benghazi, a British diplomatic convoy was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade attack.

Palestinian-Israeli Relations= The issue of housing settlements continues to stir political tensions. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered 300 new homes to be built in the Beit El settlement in the West Bank on June 6. The United Nations, the United States, and European Union representatives criticized the decision= questioned its legitimacy, and decried it as undermining peace efforts.

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Syria=Violence increased substantially in recent weeks with the reported killing of hundreds of innocent men, women, and children in Houla, Qubair, and Al Heffa by forces tied to the Assad government. The Free Syrian Army is noticeably better equipped, using antitank rockets to inflict heavier casualties among Syrian security forces. Following attacks on its mission observers, the United Nations suspended the mission, although the monitors remain in Syria on lock down and unable to conduct patrols. The situation is forcing the international community to reconsider its options for implementing the action plan. Bashar al-Assad, under heavy international pressure to comply with the peace plan, appeared unfazed as he gave a speech to the Parliament on June 3 denying any government responsibility for the killing of civilians and describing the situation as an externally-driven crisis. Diplomats are reportedly considering forming an international contact group as called for by Arab League-UN mediator Kofi Annan on June 7. The venue, timing, and participants are currently under discussion.

Trends in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Yemen:

* On June 10, opposition groups in Iraq lacked the necessary 163 votes to pass a no confidence motion to oust Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki after 11 Members of Parliament (MPs) retracted their signatures. Press reports indicated that the Iranian government had influenced the process, exerting pressure on certain Iraqi MPs. Sunni-Shia tensions were also reflected in ongoing violence, including a deadly suicide attack on a Shia religious office on June 4.

* Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Interior Minister Nayef bin Abdulaziz al-Saud died in Geneva on June 16. As expected, Defense Minister Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud was named Deputy Prime Minister and the new heir apparent by royal decree.

* In Tunisia, the new government, led by the Ennahda Party, is being challenged by the entrenched interests of the former Ben Ali government and by Salafist activists. Judges went on strike after the Justice Minister fired 81 judges on suspicion of corruption. Clashes between the police and Salafist protesters have escalated to pre-revolution levels, sparked by an altercation between the police and Salafists in Jencouba following the arrest of four Salafis. As a result, the government imposed a curfew in major cities including Tunis.

* In Yemen, the army successfully ousted the Ansar Sharia fighters (an Al Qaeda affiliated group) from the cities of Zinjibar and Ja'ar in the Abyan province that have been under Al Qaeda control since May 2011. The army is now pursuing al-Qaeda terrorists in other parts of the province. The Security Council is considering sanctions against groups associated with the former regime that continue to undermine the transition. Deposed President Ali Abdullah Saleh's close relatives still hold key positions in the military which is making the democratic transition more difficult.

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<=>*The International Peace Institute (IPI) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank with a staff representing more than 20 nationalities with offices in New York across from the United Nations and in Vienna. IPI promotes the prevention and settlement of conflicts between and within states by strengthening international peace and security institutions. To achieve this purpose, IPI employs a mix of policy research, convening, publishing and outreach. The views expressed here do not necessarily represent those of IPI./p>

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