

International sanctions increase pressure on Syria

By Keyla Beebe
STAFF WRITER

In March 2011, the people of Syria began peacefully protesting President Bashar Al-Assad's brutal and oppressive rule. Ten months, 5,000 dead civilians and over 14,000 detainees later, the people of Syria are still uprising against Assad's regime.

The protests were met with force by Assad and quickly transformed into a militarized conflict of government forces against armed civilians and army deserters.

Last week saw the first major victory for rebels in the town of Zabadani, where Syrian troops have agreed to a ceasefire, reports the BBC. Located close to Damascus, Zabadani has become a stronghold for the Free Syrian Army, the country's main opposition group.

Many members of FSA have defected from the military, unwilling to shoot their own people, and according to the BBC, it is because such members were able to fight back that the town achieved victory.

Throughout the rest of the country, however, violent attacks and killings are continuing as Assad's regime seeks to bring an end to the resistance movement.

On Jan. 19, the Arab League completed the month-long initial stage of its mission, where observers were sent into Syria to assess the situation, according to NPR.

The mission has been controversial, as the presence of Arab League observers has not tempered the violence.

"In regards to the (Syrian) government, as the situation changes, (the government) changes its stance," said Visiting Assistant Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies Jeremy Rinker. "Right as the Arab League got there, there was an increase in theatrical violence."

After reviewing the observer's reports, the League released a new plan on Jan. 22. The proposal calls for Assad to step down and hand duties to his vice president for two months. The government will then seek to integrate the opposition in a national unity government.

These steps are in preparation for free parliamentary and presidential elections overseen by the Arab League and international countries, reports NPR.

The Syrian government has rejected the plan, saying that it is part of an international conspiracy.

"Since the beginning we have been documenting arbitrary detention, rampant

his previous offers, or that the state ever honored its promises of immunity.

The day after the Arab League completed its mission, thousands of people across Syria attended anti-government protests, calling for the release of political prisoners and denouncing Assad's offer of amnesty.

The BBC reports that while around 4,000 detainees were released this past week, Rami Abdul Rahman, head of U.K.-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, believes that 20,000 people are still being held by the government, not including the number of soldiers accused of deserting.

As the violence in Syria continues, the country is becoming increasingly isolated,

on Jan. 17 to discuss increasing pressure on President Assad.

"Unfortunately, we're continuing to see unacceptable levels of violence inside that country," said Obama to Al Jazeera. "We will continue to consult very closely with Jordan to create the kind of international pressure and environment that encourages the current Syrian regime to step aside."

The U.N. has also voiced its condemnation of the violence.

"Today, I say again to President Assad of Syria: Stop the violence," said U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. "Stop killing your people."

The U.N., U.S. and EU have imposed a number of sanctions in response to the ongoing violence, and the Arab League followed suit, suspending Syria from the regional organization in Nov. 2011.

According to the BBC, the U.S. has been implementing sanctions since 1979, declaring Syria a "state sponsor of terrorism." Sanctions are continuously being increased by the West, as the EU added more than 22 people and eight companies to a list banning travel and freezing their assets.

The sanctions have begun to affect the economy, as Syrians deal with fuel shortages and electricity cuts that can last up to 16 hours, according to NPR.

Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov said that Russia will veto any U.N. Security Council resolutions that impose more sanctions, or authorize the use of force against the Syrian government, reports the BBC.

"I don't think anybody really knows what will happen in the next few months," said Rinker. "But Assad has to give in, which he will, if pressure keeps building."

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U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

torture and death in custody at very high frequency," says Nadim Houry, a senior researcher on Syria at Human Rights Watch. "We know that these have not stopped, despite promises by the Syrian authorities and these various amnesties."

Weeks before the Arab League meeting, Assad issued his fourth offer of amnesty for crimes committed in the uprising since May. According to the BBC, the amnesty would apply to both army deserters and protesters.

The offer is unlikely to have much impact, according to BBC's Jonathan Head, because there is no evidence that people took up

relying on support from Iran, Russia and Lebanese faction Hezbollah to support the Syrian security forces.

Amid deteriorating security in Damascus, the State Department said on Jan. 20 that it "may have no choice" but to close the U.S. Embassy in Syria and remove all American personnel, reports NPR.

While the Obama administration has been calling for Assad to step down, it told NPR that the embassy was important for advancing U.S. policy goals by meeting with opposition figures and serving as a witness to the ongoing violence.

Obama met with Jordan's King Abdullah

Homelessness brought onto the playing field in Indianapolis Super Bowl XLVI

ON SUPER BOWL SUNDAY, INDIANAPOLIS WILL BE OPEN TO FANS; BUT SOME ARE CONCERNED THE HOMELESS WILL NOT BE WELCOMED

By Haejin Song
STAFF WRITER

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the infamous Indian Removal Act to obtain more Native American land for colonists. Thus, he decided to boot the natives out to Oklahoma, brushing away the problem — at least from his sight.

Take a step into the future of Feb. 5, where many will head to Indianapolis to watch the Super Bowl. The cleanup of the city begins months ahead of time — preparing the stadium, increasing security, and beautifying the streets. But what about the issues that cannot be solved with a sweep of the broom?

According to Indiana University's Public Policy Institute, about 1,567 individuals were homeless in the city of Indianapolis in 2011. While some groups work to alleviate this issue as the Super Bowl nears, others remain skeptical of the timing and their motivations.

"Any and all focus should be on helping these members of the community, ... not on making decisions based on trying to give visitors an unrealistic picture of a city," said Robert Malekoff, associate professor

and chair of the sports studies department. "The only acceptable reason to relocate would be if the homeless folks posed some sort of danger to visitors."

Bob Ray, a homeless man staying at the Wheeler Mission in downtown Indianapolis, expressed similar concerns.

"I've heard they're trying to keep people who look homeless from being around where tourists coming from the Super Bowl are," Ray said to WTHR 13 Indianapolis. "They're investing a lot of money in the city and they want it to look all nice and neat."

However, advocates of relocating the homeless in Indianapolis voice different views and suggest this is to benefit the homeless, not solely to spruce up their city.

"The increased police presence and increased social service presence might enhance the opportunities of people living under bridges or in these encampments to come inside," said Mike Hurst, director of the Coalition for Homelessness, to the IndyStar.

"The whole point is, obviously, it's just not healthy for somebody to be out on a corner in the middle of winter," added Michael Bates, deputy chief of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department.

Additionally, pro-relocation of homeless groups insist that there would not be any forced relocation. Rather, it would be a voluntary choice the homeless would make.

As the debate continued to surge, the Indianapolis officials affirmed their ultimate decision last week.

"We'll certainly not be forcing anybody to move," announced Bates in a statement.

While the decision has been made, this issue will continue to spark debate in future major sport events.

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