

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, September 9, 2011 5:49 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Egyptian protesters pull down Israel embassy wall (Reuters)

From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Friday, September 09, 2011 05:32 PM
To: NEWS-Egypt; NEWS-Mahogany
Cc: SES-O
Subject: Egyptian protesters pull down Israel embassy wall (Reuters)

CAIRO, Sept 9 (Reuters) - Egyptian activists destroyed a wall around the Israeli embassy and set police cars on fire in Cairo on Friday after thousands demonstrated at Tahrir Square to push for a timetable for reforms and an end to military trials for civilians.

Activists who spearheaded an uprising that ousted President Hosni Mubarak on Feb. 11 have been piling pressure on the ruling military council to fix a date for parliamentary and presidential elections and to get rid of senior officials who served under Mubarak.

Thousands converged on Tahrir Square, the epicentre of the pro-democracy protests that toppled Mubarak, after Friday prayers for what was billed as "Correcting the Path" protests.

Some later marched to the opposite bank of the Nile in Giza. Demonstrators used hammers, large iron bars and police barricades to tear down the wall, erected this month by Egyptian authorities after daily protests over the killing of five Egyptian border guards in Sinai.

Protesters scaled the embassy building, removed the Israeli flag for the second time in less than a month and burned it.

Giza's police chief said that two police vehicles were set alight near the Israeli embassy building during the protests. State television said four police vehicles were set on fire.

"This action shows the state of anger and frustration the young Egyptian revolutionaries feel against Israel especially after the recent Israeli attacks on the Egyptian borders that led to the killing of Egyptian soldiers," Egyptian political analyst Nabil Abdel Fattah told Reuters.

Egyptian police stood aside as activists tore down the concrete wall to the cheers of hundreds of demonstrators.

"It is great that Egyptians say they will do something and actually do it," Egyptian film director and activist Khaled Youssef said, standing among the protesters outside the embassy.

"They said they will demolish the wall and they did ... the military council has to abide by the demands of the Egyptian people," he said.

Israel Radio cut into its Sabbath programming with bulletins about the Cairo demonstrations. Citing Foreign

Ministry sources, it said the ambassador was safely at his official residence and that Israel was in contact with Egypt, the United States and European powers about the incident.

Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said in a statement late on Friday that he had gone to the ministry's situation room in Jerusalem to monitor events at the embassy.

"Police will ... be left unharmed to continue demolishing the wall," one security source said. State television reported that 88 people were hurt during the pushing and shoving or from falling debris.

Tensions between the two countries sparked a series of angry protests that reached a climax last month when a demonstrator scaled the building and removed the Israeli flag.

The five security men died during an Israeli operation against gunmen who had killed eight Israelis. Egypt threatened to withdraw its ambassador from Tel Aviv. Israel has stopped short of apologising, saying it is still investigating how the Egyptian troops were killed.

Protesters also demonstrated outside the Interior Ministry, near Tahrir Square, pelted the building with stones and scrawled graffiti denouncing the head of the ruling military council, Mohamed Hussein Tantawi.

State television said a fire broke out at a building used to store forensic evidence. Firefighters managed to put it out.

TAHRIR PROTESTS

Fridays demonstrations were organised mostly by secular groups which had been pushing for reforms, a new constitution and an end to the trial of civilians before military courts.

Islamists, including the political party set up by the Muslim Brotherhood -- Egypt's best organised political force after the dissolution of Mubarak's National democratic Party -- have distanced themselves from the planned protests.

The country's military rulers have promised to hand back power to a civilian government after elections, which they said would be held before the end of 2011. The council has also facilitated the trial of Mubarak and several of his aides, including former Interior Minister Habib al-Adli, on charges of corruption or conspiring to kill some 850 demonstrators.

But many Egyptians remain sceptical.

"Since January 25 until today, we don't feel there has been any change," said Kamel Ebrahim, a 37-year-old civil servant who was among the thousands in Tahrir Square.

"Thugs and thieves have multiplied and the Field Marshal has done nothing to improve things," he said, referring to Tantawi.

The protests also put pressure on Tantawi, who is due to testify in Mubarak's trial in a closed session on Sunday. The judge has banned all media coverage of the proceedings during the week also. Other senior figures, including former officials under Mubarak, will also testify.

"This is your last chance, either you say the people are in my heart or you leave," a man who identified himself only as a driver said. "Will you be able to say that Mubarak did not give orders to shoot?" he said,

standing beneath a large poster on which Tantawi's face was spliced together with Mubarak's.

Activists said they have no plans to camp in the square.

Protests were also organised in Alexandria, Egypt's second largest city, and in Suez. Witnesses said military police detained three activists during a demonstration in the city.

In Alexandria, thousands of protesters chanted "The trial, the trial or the gang will stay in power."

One of the protesters, Hazem Ahmed, 26, a member of Egypt's Democratic Front party said, "I joined the protest because of the slow pace of the trials and it being not serious."

NewsTickers alert senior Department officials to breaking news. This item appears as it did in its original publication and does not contain analysis or commentary by Department sources.