

RELEASE IN PART 1.4(B),B1,1.4(D)

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>  
Sent: Saturday, January 15, 2011 4:42 PM  
To: H  
Subject: [redacted] on Tunisia

B1  
1.4(B)  
1.4(D)

Latest from jeff.

Classified by DAS, A/GIS, DoS on 09/30/2015 ~ Class: CONFIDENTIAL ~ Reason: 1.4(B), 1.4(D) ~ Declassify on: 01/14/2026

----- Original Message -----

From: Feltman, Jeffrey D  
To: Sullivan, Jacob J; Abedin, Huma  
Sent: Sat Jan 15 16:35:29 2011  
Subject: [redacted] on Tunisia

B1  
1.4(B)  
1.4(D)

I had a fascinating 45-minute call with [redacted] mostly on Tunisia. First, he's delighted S wants to see him, and he welcomes our suggestion for dates.

[redacted] cautioned us against too much triumphalism in talking about what happened. The story isn't over yet. There's a danger ("about 20 percent") that Islamists could take control, a la iran in 1979. While moderate Tunisians wouldn't normally succumb to Islamist pressure, the regime did such a good job of closing down access to the media of secular oppositionists (like my personal friend Nejib Chebbi) that the only figure well known to Tunisians who was always against Ben Ali is the Islamist leader of an-Nahda (a banned Islamist party) Rachid Ghannouchi, resident in London. (Rachid G is no relative of Mohammed Ghannouchi, who is the reformist, technocrat PM.) Rachid Ghannouchi is all over the airwaves, saying he's going back to Tunisia, like Khomani. If the Tunisians feel their grievances aren't being addressed, the Islamists, as the only know alternative, might get momentum.

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The other danger is a military coup and military gov't. This danger rises if the riots continue and/or it appears as though the Islamists might seize power. This would be like Algeria circa 1991. We don't want that either.

[redacted] sees examples already of the army moving in. The army has taken over policing in many areas. This on the one hand is good -- the police were far more tainted by complicity in the Ben Ali security excesses than was the army. [redacted] analyzes that it was the army that forced the interim presidency to shift from PM Ghannouchi to Parliament Speaker Mebazza (going from one constitutional clause to another) to reinforce the fact that Ben Ali was permanently gone and not temporarily indisposed. But while the army is now playing a constructive role, that could quickly change if the violence doesn't stop or the Islamists seem to gain ground.

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As for us, he cautioned us against chest-thumping triumphant statements. To the extent we need to continue to make statements, we should reinforce the need for peaceful assembly and oppose lawless riots and looting. He said we should encourage the Tunisian officials like FM Morjane ("a good guy") to reach out to Tunisia's moderate opposition figures and bring them in. Tunisia needs a national unity cabinet to get through presidential elections.

There's an Arab Economic Summit starting Sunday in Sharm ash-Sheikh. [redacted] Tunisia (along with MEP and Lebanon) will be a topic of conversation. [redacted] keep me informed.

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Just FYI: the secular, moderate opposition folks in Tunisia are personally known to me. When I was posted in Tunisia, I was friends of many of them. I saw them again last spring when I visited Tunisia. So, in coordination with Embassy Tunis, I'm going to call them, so they've been contacted by Washington.  
Jeffrey Feltman