

The Boston Globe

Boston area natives cope amid turmoil in Egypt

By Brian MacQuarrie | Globe Staff / January 31, 2011

Family anxieties in the United States have been fueled further by restricted, sporadic communication with Egypt since the protests began Tuesday. Although Timothy Quinn had phone service yesterday, he could not send text messages or access the Internet, which the government of President Hosni Mubarak has shut down to cripple the organizing efforts of the protesters.

Another set of local parents were also worrying about their child in Egypt yesterday. In Concord, the hometown of Audrey Gourlie, a Colby College junior who arrived in Cairo Jan. 21 to begin a semester at the American University, her parents have been watching television coverage almost nonstop on Al Jazeera.

"They could smell the tear gas on the first day" of protests, said Brian Gourlie, her father, who spoke with Audrey by phone yesterday. "The army is stationed outside their dorms. The important thing to know is that she's safe."

Although Audrey had assured her parents that "everything is fine," her father said, she has decided to take advantage of the university's option, beginning today, to leave Egypt.

"We're very pleased and really relieved," said her mother, Virginia Gourlie. "I woke up [yesterday] morning feeling strongly that she needs to move out of there."

Brian Gourlie said the students had "been asked to pack their bags — a carry-on and a small bag — and to label things they leave behind." Although students had been restricted to their dorms during the protests, he said, "they had pizza delivered a couple of days ago."

In addition to evacuation by State Department flights beginning today, private companies already have begun transporting Americans out of Egypt. Dan Richards, chief executive officer of Global Rescue, said the Boston firm is planning to evacuate between 200 and 300 clients by air, water, and ground. One flight with three corporate clients left Cairo yesterday, Richards said.

"The situation on the ground is very fluid. Things are changing rapidly," said Richards, whose evacuation teams include former military special-operations personnel. "There are checkpoints, roadblocks, and groups of armed men that are roaming through Cairo and the suburbs."