

# College kids flee as protests in Egypt intensify

By O’Ryan Johnson | Tuesday, February 1, 2011



HEADING HOME: An American family arrives at Ataturk Airport in Istanbul, Turkey, from Egypt yesterday, where protests against the government continued.

As opposition groups urged a million Egyptians to take to the streets and demanded President Hosni Mubarak’s ouster, two dozen Middlebury College students flew from Alexandria’s airport last night thanks to a Boston-based security firm, after harrowing days in the increasingly lawless country.

“The good news is that the airports are a safe environment,” Global Rescue CEO Daniel Richards said. “We brought an airlift in from Europe . . . rendezvoused with the air asset, loaded the students on, and they’re on their way home.”

Richards said his teams of former special-operations soldiers in Egypt will remain and are trying to get another 175 Americans out of the country by the end of today.

Michael Geisler, vice president of languages at Middlebury College, said the school has run an Arabic language studies program from Alexandria for the past four years. He said they chose the nation and the city for its safety and political stability.

However, not long after the protests began, he said land line phones went down, then the Internet, and they relied on cell phones to stay in touch with students. Geisler said the college spoke with them every half hour. Within moments of the start of Friday’s protests, which included Egyptian army tanks rolling into Alexandria, the college decided the students were no longer safe. Staff efforts and another security firm couldn’t get the kids out,

so they turned to Global Rescue.

“They had security agents there within three hours of the signing of the contract. I don’t know how they did that, honestly,” a relieved Geisler said.

Yesterday, Egypt’s military pledged not to fire on protesters in a sign that army support for Mubarak may be unraveling on the eve of a major escalation — a push for a million people to take to the streets today to demand the authoritarian leader’s ouster. More than 10,000 people beat drums, played music and chanted slogans in Tahrir Square, the epicenter of a week of protests.

“He only needs a push!” was one of the most frequent chants, and a leaflet circulated by some protesters said it was time for the military to choose between Mubarak and the people. The latest gesture by Mubarak aimed at defusing the crisis fell flat.

The United States roundly rejected his announcement of a new government yesterday that dropped his highly unpopular interior minister, who heads police forces. The crowds in the streets were equally unimpressed.

“It’s almost the same government, as if we are not here, as if we are sheep,” sneered one protester, Khaled Bassyouny. “It has to burn. It has to become ugly. We have to take it to the presidential palace.”