



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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## 1. IRAQ

- **Iraq's monthly death toll doubles, bloodiest for two years**

BAGHDAD, (Reuters) - The death toll from militant attacks across Iraq doubled in September to 365, the highest toll for more than two years, with most of them killed in bomb attacks, according to government figures released on Monday.

The insurgents have launched one major assault a month since U.S. troops withdrew in December.

The bloodiest day of the last month was Sept. 9, when more than 100 people were killed in bomb and gun attacks across Iraq. The coordinated assaults against mostly Shi'ite Muslim targets were claimed by the Iraqi affiliate of the Sunni Muslim al Qaeda.

Iraq has been racked by sectarian slaughter since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Although it is now far off its peak of 2006-2007, the violence has been increasing since the last American troops left as political tensions among Iraq's main Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish factions have increased.

The latest figures said that 182 civilians, 95 soldiers and 88 policemen had been killed in attacks in September, up from a total of 164 in August. Sixty-four insurgents were killed over the same period.

September's attacks also wounded a further 683 people, of which 453 were civilians, 120 soldiers and 110 police.

Al Qaeda's Iraqi wing, the Islamic State of Iraq, said in June that it planned a resurgence after being weakened in a sustained assault by U.S. troops and other Sunni militant groups in 2007.

Some of the attacks over the past two months have been more brazen than before, with militants showing a willingness to engage Iraqi security forces openly in prolonged gun battles.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31283>

- **Iraqiya advisor: the region is on a verge of disastrous war.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / the Iraqiya coalition advisor, Hani Ashour said : "The territorial zone on the verge of a disastrous war," indicating that "it may ruin the

developments, which the countries got in the region if they do not rise the voice of wise and begin a regional dialogue to rearrange the situations of the region and work to comfort them .

He said in a press statement: "it is clear that the region is divided into two axes, one is supported by the United States and the West and the second backed by Russia and China," noting that "the two axes are practicing arm-twisting policy and heating battlefield in our region, so any collision occurs in the region will destroy the progress, wealth and achievements of the region's states ".

He called on the countries of the region to distance from this international conflict, which wants to make the area as a war zone and its peoples as a fuel for this conflict.

He explained that "the region is witnessing a military exercise and mobilizing weapons and recruiting illegal forces and political conflicts and sectarian and ethnic agendas to ignite a war, which will attract parties on sectarian and ethnic bases," stressing that "no solution unless the rulers in the region realize that the dialogue between

them is the only way to turn off the fire of the war before it occurs ".

He continued, "The major powers are seeking for this war to mortgage the wealth of the region in the future to their big corporations"

He called on the Iraqi government to play a role of nearing instead of falling in the midst of conflict because Iraq will be the biggest losers because of a new war, which had not recovered from the past wars, and Iraq has to distance from the conflict and not be its field or its fuel.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GDKMJF](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GDKMJF)

- **Kurdistani Spokesman: State of Law is not able to form a majority government**

BAGHDAD / NINA / the Kurdish bloc's spokesperson Mo'aid al-Tayyib expressed his surprise of the statements of the State of Law coalition about forming a majority government.



Al-Tayyib, in a statement, told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "The State of Law coalition could not achieve a majority for voting on bills desired in the House of Representatives, the latest was the law of the infrastructure," and wondered: "How can State of Law achieve a majority to form a government when failed, in many cases, to pass desired laws".

He continued that "no-activation the Government of the partnership is very dangerous, so everyone has to work shoulder to shoulder to get out of the current crisis and not to waving in matters that would worsen the political arena more than it is now."

It is mentioned that a number of MPs from state of law hinted, in more than one occasion, to resort to form a majority government in case of prolonging the political crisis.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GDLEJH](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GDLEJH)

- **Hamoudi calls new IHEC to adhere to integrity, flexibility in next elections**

Baghdad, Oct 2 (AIN) –The head of the Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, Humam

Hamoudi, criticized the performance of the former Independent High Electoral Commission, calling the new IHEC to observe the upcoming elections with integrity and flexibility.

A press statement received by AIN on Tuesday, cited "Hamoudi received the United Nations Secretary General's Special Representative for the Political Affairs, George Bustin, to discuss the issues related to the next elections and the disputed areas in addition to the regional updates especially the case in Syria."

"Hamoudi called to form a committee that endorses the important law drafts," the statement added, noting that "Hamoudi criticized the negative role of Qatar and other countries concerning the Syrian

crisis, assuring the Iraqi stance to let the Syrian people have the right of self-determination."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=19826](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19826)

- **Iraq checks Syria-bound Iran plane for arms, finds none (Reuters)**

BAGHDAD, Oct 2 (Reuters) - Iraq said it had started asking Syria-bound Iranian planes to land in Baghdad for inspections on Tuesday, after promising Washington it would carry out random searches to stop arms getting through to Damascus.

Authorities said they had made their first inspection of an Iranian aircraft on Tuesday afternoon and let it fly on to Syria after finding no weapons.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari promised the searches on Sunday in response to U.S. concerns Tehran is shipping arms to its ally Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to help him fight an 18-month-old revolt.

"This afternoon, our specialists and security elements checked an Iranian plane heading to Damascus. They found

nothing violating the ban on transferring weapons to Syria," the head of Iraq's civil aviation authority Nasser Bandar told Reuters.

<http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/iraq-checks-syria-bound-iran-plane-for-arms-finds-none/>

## 2. IRAN

- **Iran to continue nuclear programme**

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says Iran will not retreat from nuclear programme despite currency problems created by sanctions.

Iran will press on with its nuclear programme despite the problems caused by Western sanctions, including a dramatic slide in the value of its currency, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said.

"We are not a people to retreat on the nuclear issue," he told a news conference in Tehran on Tuesday.

"If somebody thinks they can pressure Iran, they are certainly wrong and they must correct their behaviour," he said.

Ahmadinejad's comments came amid an accelerated slide in Iran's currency, which

has now lost more than 80 per cent of its value compared with a year ago, with 17 per cent of its value shed on Monday alone.

The rial slipped another four per cent on Tuesday to close at 36,100 to the dollar, according to exchange tracking websites.

Ahmadinejad said the plunge was part of an economic "war" waged by the West on the Islamic republic and "a psychological war on the exchange market."

Iran, he said, had sufficient foreign currency reserves.

Those reserves were estimated at around \$100bn at the end of last year, thanks to surging oil exports.

'Enormous pressure'

The White House said Tuesday that Iranians blamed their leaders for the rising deprivation caused by US and international sanctions over Tehran's nuclear program.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said the fast-deteriorating economic situation

in Iran, which has also sparked price hikes in basic foods, was a sign the government in Tehran was under "enormous pressure".

"The Iranian people are aware of who is responsible for the circumstances that have befallen the Iranian economy as a result of the regime's intransigence in its refusal to abide by its obligations."

The US Treasury estimates Iran's foreign earnings have been cut by \$5 billion a month under the Western economic measures.

In his media conference, Ahmadinejad backtracked on hints he had made during a visit to New York at the UN General Assembly that Iran could consider direct negotiations with the United States on the nuclear issue.

"Direct negotiation is possible, but needs conditions, and I do not think the conditions are there for talks. Dialogue should be based on fairness and mutual respect," he said.

"I think that this situation cannot last in the relations between Iran and the United States."

Government critics

Hardliners in Iran criticised Ahmadinejad on his return for opening the door to the possibility of talks with the US. That also fuelled criticism that his government has mismanaged the economy.

The chairman of Tehran's chamber of commerce, Yahya Ale-Eshagh, was quoted as saying by the Mehr news agency that "part of this (currency) tumult is due to sanctions."

But he also said "the person who is not able to manage in a time of crisis should not continue working in his post."

Mohammad Bayatian, a member of parliament on an industry and mines commission, said, according to the parliamentary website icana.ir, that "a petition has been prepared to question the president."

He said the petition was "due to the government not paying attention to the

parliament's remarks over its management of the forex market."

The parliament's presiding board was to decide whether to admit the petition. If it goes ahead, it would only be to hear Ahmadinejad speak on the issue, and it would not involve a confidence vote or other serious procedure.

Mehdi Mohammadi, a figure close to Iran's Supreme National Security Council, wrote in a piece for the Vatan Emrouz newspaper on Tuesday: "Is the currency situation in the market due to sanctions? No... The problem is not a lack of (foreign) currency."

He blamed the government, and unidentified "mafias" he said were profiting from the currency volatility.

Mohammadi also said holding talks with the United States was not an option.

"Past experience shows that speaking of negotiations in these conditions only sends a signal of weakness. The enemy only makes concessions and takes you seriously when you're strong," he wrote.

On the prospect of a military conflict breaking out over the nuclear issue, Ahmadinejad reaffirmed that he was "not very concerned" about persistent threats from Israel.

"Iran is not a country to be shaken by, let's say, a few firecrackers," he said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/10/20121035954361427.html>

- **Headlines in major Iranian newspapers**

Tehran, Oct 3, IRNA – The following headlines appeared in major Iranian dailies on Wednesday:

- **\*\* TEHRAN TIMES**

- Iran will overcome economic problems: Ahmadinejad

- **\*\* KAYHAN INTERNATIONAL**

- Ahmadinejad: Enemies can't stop Iran's progress

- **\*\* IRAN DAILY**

- Iran, a peace-loving nation

- **\*\* IRAN**

- President discloses reasons for forex fluctuations

- **\*\* RESALAT**

- Forex fluctuations, psychological war: Ahmadinejad

- **\*\* IRAN-E VARZESHI**

- Persepolis, Saipa draw 0-0

- **\*\* HAMSHAHRİ**

- Iran's satellites' latest achievements

- **\*\* KHORASAN**

- President answers questions about forex fluctuations

- **\*\* KHORSHİD**

- President's special meeting with labor unions

<http://old.irna.ir/News/General/Headlines-in-major-Iranian-newspapers/80352584>

- **Enemy's psywar causing sharp fluctuations in forex market: Ahmadinejad**

TEHRAN, Oct. 2 (MNA) -- President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said that he is confident Iran will successfully overcome the current economic problems.



Ahmadinejad made the remarks during a press conference in Tehran on Tuesday in reply to a question about the country's economic situation and the

administration's plans to curb the rise in prices of basic commodities.

The Iranian president said, "The government is involved in the issue at full strength, but it must be noted that economic and psychological warfare is underway, and other branches (of government) should stand by the administration and help the administration with their support. Pointing a finger of blame at the administration does not help resolve the problem."

"I am confident that the Iranian nation will pass through this period successfully. And I ask everyone to support the decisions of the economy and trade ministries so that we can calm the market," he added.

He also said, "Part of these problems are related to economic warfare and external problems, and a large part of it is (due to) psychological pressure, and everyone should help."

External and internal problems to blame for disarray in forex market

In reply to a question about the reason for fluctuations in the foreign exchange market, Ahmadinejad stated that two contributory factors are involved.

"One factor is from outside, and one factor is from inside. The enemy has stated that it will impose (more) sanctions, and part of the oil purchases from Iran has decreased, and a considerable segment of our foreign currency revenues was generated through oil sales," he explained.

He added, "What is worse than the oil sanction is the sanctions on banking transactions. If oil is sold, the payment cannot be transferred, and a massive and great secret war (against Iran) is actually underway in the world."

The Central Bank of Iran and the relevant organizations are making efforts to "counter this war" and have found a number of avenues, Ahmadinejad said, noting, "This war has led to a decrease in oil sales, but we are making endeavors to make up for this decrease."

Commenting on the internal factor, he stated, "Certain people inside (the

country) have taken practical measures and (launched) psychological and propaganda warfare against the government.”

Asked whether the fluctuation has its roots in the economic problems or the government’s policies, Ahmadinejad said that the government should not be blamed for the country’s economic problems.

“There is no economic cause for sharp fluctuations, and the only reason for it is the psychological warfare,” he noted, adding, “The enemy’s psychological warfare and pressure have intensified, but Iran’s economy can continue its life and make progress.”

He also said, “Based on a report of a security body, 22 people are the kingpins responsible for the recent disarray in the foreign exchange market. And given the fact that it is clear who these people are, security bodies should get involved.”

Ground should be prepared for talks with U.S.

Commenting on his recent statement that he does not dismiss the possibility of talks with the United States, Ahmadinejad said, “Direct negotiations with the United States are possible, but the ground should be prepared.”

In the current circumstances, there is not such a possibility, he said, adding, “In the history of our relations, it is clear which side should revise its attitude.”

And they are mistaken if they think that Iran will come to the negotiating table through the exertion of pressure, he added.

Commenting on Israel’s threats to take military action against Iran, Ahmadinejad said that the Zionist regime is seeking to improve its situation through such psychological warfare measures.

The Iranian president added that the Zionist regime has become a headache for the United States and it is making efforts to control the extremist Zionists.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1710947>

- **‘Iran will halt 20 percent enrichment if West sells fuel to Tehran’**

TEHRAN, Oct. 2 (MNA) – President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Tuesday that Iran had no alternative other than enriching uranium to a purity level of 20 percent after the West refused to sell the needed nuclear fuel to Iran to operate its research nuclear reactors which produce radioisotopes for medical patients.

“They refused Iran’s request. We insisted and again they did not,” Ahmadinejad told a press conference in Tehran.

“We were even ready to give 3.5 percent (enriched) fuel to the West and take 20 percent fuel but again they were not ready to do it therefore we were forced to start” enriching uranium to the degree of 20 percent, Ahmadinejad explained.

He added Iran is still willing to stop enriching uranium to 20 percent if International Atomic Energy Agency members sell the needed fuel to Iran.

“So far nobody has announced readiness to sell 20 percent (enriched) fuel to Iran, but anytime they give us this fuel we will feel no need to produce the costly fuel of 20 percent.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1710953>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Netanyahu accuses Barak of ‘stoking conflict’ with Washington: report**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused his Defense Minister Ehud Barak of “stoking the conflict” between Israel and the United States, an Israeli daily reported on Wednesday.



Netanyahu criticized Barak during a meeting with Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz, blasting the defense minister’s recent trip to the U.S., the Ynet News, the online edition of Israel’s daily Yedioth Ahronoth, reported.

“He traveled to the U.S. to stoke the conflict between us and the Americans in order to come off as the savior – the moderate party that reconciles between the sides,” Netanyahu was quoted as

saying, citing a source who was present at the meeting.

A response came from Barak’s office explaining that it was no secret that during private government meetings, and sometimes in public “Ehud Barak voices stances that differ from those held by most of his fellow cabinet members, including the prime minister.”

However, during his trips to the U.S., “Barak defends the government’s positions and makes efforts to alleviate the tension between the governments and to strengthen their security ties.”

Netanyahu, speaking during a meeting of coalition factions on Tuesday, announced that he will move up the elections if the Knesset fails to pass a “responsible state budget.”

He said that he will make the decision by the beginning of the Knesset’s winter session on Oct. 15.

According to the Ynet News, the elections are expected to be held in February, although a final date has yet to be discussed.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/10/03/241548.html?PHPSESSID=93c2j7bs62omlp1rpur53bvgb0>

- **Syrian state-run TV lashes out at Mashaal**

BETHLEHEM (Ma’an) -- Syrian state TV on Monday lashed out at Hamas chief in exile Khalid Mashaal following remarks he made at a conference for Turkey’s ruling party the Justice and Development Party.

State TV said Mashaal had turned his back to the historic relationship between Hamas and the Syrian regime.

A presenter misread the name of the Egyptian president saying Merci instead of Mursi. She described both Mashaal and Mursi as “a drummers band whom the Turkish president Recep Tayyib Erdogan used to improve his popularity.”

“Mashaal was hosted in Syria as an orphan resistance fighter who was looking for shelter after all doors were closed to him, and his plane was denied access to all airports as if he was a plague and nobody wanted even to shake hands with him.”

The TV editorial added, “Amman, Doha, Cairo and Ankara turned their back to him then because Israel had a veto on him and nobody dared to breach that veto except the Levant.”

The presenter also mocked Mashaal’s remarks in which he expressed sympathy with the Syrian people. “Since you are emotional and romantic towards what you call peoples’ torture, then why haven’t these emotions been opened to Palestinian people?”

“How come you remain silent while the siege on Gaza continues from Egypt’s side after you brothers have taken control? How are you complicit to demolish the tunnels of freedom and life, to quote your own description?”

She added, “The promises you received in exchange for normalization with the occupation and the US administration have weakened your immunity, and the pain is gone.”

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=525419>

- **Abbas: UN to admit Palestine within weeks**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) – President Mahmoud Abbas says he expects the UN General Assembly to vote on a resolution to admit Palestine as a non-member state "in less than a month or a month and a half."

Speaking at his Ramallah office during a ceremony to honor high-achieving students from Jerusalem, Abbas said he expected the vote to be successful.

"We will go back to the UN during this period to get recognition as a state under occupation. We have no problem with that title because it will be a state and not disputed lands.

"This land is ours first and last. It is our occupied land irrespective of settlement expansion here and there. Settlement has been illegal from the beginning to the end and we will not accept it and they have to leave with their settlements and settlers as this land is ours and this Jerusalem is ours."

Palestinian officials say Abbas is unlikely to submit any request to the UN until after US elections in early November. Even

then, there are indications the US will seek to derail the effort.

Washington has warned European countries not to support the PLO's bid for "observer state" and threatened financial sanctions against the Palestinian Authority if the bid succeeds, a US memo seen by The Guardian revealed.

In the memo distributed to European representatives, the US expressed concern that Palestine could access the International Criminal Court if it is accepted as a non-member state in the UN. At the ICC, Palestine could challenge Israel's breaches of international law, including its settlement policy, occupation, blockade of Gaza and annexation of East Jerusalem.

The US staunchly opposed the PLO's 2011 bid for full membership of the UN, which failed to pass the Security Council, where Washington holds veto power. The less-ambitious bid for "observer state" does not need approval from the Security Council and is likely to win the majority needed in the General Assembly.

Meanwhile, in Ramallah, Abbas said he had always campaigned for Jerusalem in international forums.

"Deep inside, I used to feel a resentment because the solution for Jerusalem is difficult, but now I feel that Jerusalem is coming back definitely. I wish some of those clerics who issued fatwa against visiting Jerusalem could listen to these words and could see Jerusalem with their very eyes ... all Muslims and Arabs across the world must visit Jerusalem and support its people to help them stay firm."

Addressing the General Assembly in New York on Thursday, Abbas said Israel was continuing a campaign to alter Jerusalem's character and reduce the Palestinian population.

"Israel," Abbas said at the UN, "has persisted with its settlement campaign, focusing on Jerusalem and its environs. It is a campaign clearly and deliberately aimed at altering the city's historic character and the glorious image of the Holy City etched in the minds of humankind.

"It is a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people via the demolition of their homes and prevention of their construction; the revocation of residency rights; the denial of basic services, especially with regard to construction of schools; the closure of institutions; and the impoverishment of Jerusalem's community via a siege of walls and checkpoints that are choking the city and preventing millions of Palestinians from freely accessing its mosques, churches, schools, hospitals and markets."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=525488>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt Islamist politician under fire for describing TV host as 'hot': report**

Egypt's information minister is facing severe public criticism for describing a female Dubai TV news show host as "hot" during an interview last week, the New York Daily News reported on Tuesday.



"I hope your questions won't be as hot as you," Salah Abdul Maqsud, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Party, told the TV host, thus sparking outrage in a country already rocked by political chaos.

The host, Zeina Yazjy, replied instantly: "my questions are hot, but I am cold." The comments came during the Dubai TV show al-Sharea al-Arabi (The Arab Street), during which they touched on the public opinion towards the Muslim Brotherhood policies, especially on mass media.

Abdul Maqsud is a journalist and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, the political and religious party which is currently in power under newly-elected President Mohammed Mursi.

Hundreds of Egyptians took to Twitter to condemn the Islamist politician's comment, which they described as "inappropriate" and "out of place."

The New York Daily News reported that the remark was even described by some commentators as "hypocritical" because his Islamist-dominated government last month lifted a ban on female news presenters in Egypt wearing a veil.

When asked about the issue during the TV show, Abdul Maqsud said that it is a guaranteed constitutional right for the veiled TV presenters to play equal roles like others.

Under ousted president Hosni Mubarak, female presenters and reporters were not allowed to appear on state TV wearing the headscarf; however some private TV channels allowed their female correspondents to appear on screen in their hijab.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/10/03/241543.html?PHPSESSID=93c2j7bs62omlp1rpur53bvqb0>

- **Maghreb becoming a ‘terrorist’ hub: Tunisia president**

Jihadists pose a “great danger” to the Maghreb region, which is turning into a “terrorist” hub, Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki warned in an interview with Arabic daily Al-Hayat published Tuesday.

“We can say that the center for a group of jihadists -- the so-called terrorist movement -- is moving right now from Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Arab

Maghreb region and there is great danger on our doorstep,” Marzouki said.

“There is a security problem that threatens the whole Maghreb region,” he told the paper in New York, during a visit to the United Nations.

He estimated that there were around 3,000 Islamist militants in his country.

In Tunisia, “the number of active (jihadists) who pose a danger is estimated by the police at around three thousand. They are all known and identified,” Marzouki said.

Islamist radicals angered by a U.S.-made film mocking Islam attacked the US embassy in Tunis and an adjacent American school last month, in a day of violence that left four people dead and dozens wounded.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has since cancelled a planned trip to Tunisia next month, amid reported security concerns.

Tunisian police have been searching for Salafist leaders in connection with the

embassy attack, notably Seif Allah Ibn Hussein, also known as Abu Iyadh, who heads the hardline group Ansar al-Sharia and has managed to escape arrest several times.

"I ask why Abu Iyadh has not been arrested until now," said Marzouki, a veteran human rights activist with Tunisia's center-left CPR party, in an apparent swipe at the government dominated by the CPR's Islamist allies Ennahda.

The ruling Islamist party has been strongly criticized for failing to clamp down on Tunisia's Muslim extremists, who have carried out numerous acts of violence since last year's revolution that ousted former strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Ennahda's veteran leader Rached Ghannouchi said, in an interview with AFP last month, that the extremists were a danger "to public freedom in the country and to its security."

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/10/03/241505.html?PHPSESSID=93c2j7bs62omlp1rpur53bvgb0>

- **Al Qaeda in North Africa making millions kidnapping: U.S.**

BERLIN (Reuters) - Islamist militants are increasingly funding themselves through kidnapping, with al Qaeda's north African wing likely to have brought in tens of millions of dollars in ransoms in the past few years, a senior U.S. Treasury official said.

The United States estimates militant organizations received \$120 million over the past decade, including the ransoms paid to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), said David Cohen, undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence.

Kidnapping for ransom was an "urgent threat", particularly in the Sahel, a belt of land spanning nearly a dozen of the world's poorest nations on the Sahara's southern rim, Cohen told reporters in Berlin on Tuesday.

"It is what has become perhaps the most challenging and fastest growing technique that terrorist organizations, in particular the affiliates of al Qaeda in North Africa and in Yemen, have been using to fund themselves over the last couple of years."

Cohen said the average ransom had gone up consistently over the years and was in the range of \$5 million per payment.

"So, it is a growing and really quite urgent threat, particularly in North Africa, in the Sahel and in Mali in particular, where AQIM has now managed to claim dominion over a large territory."

AQIM emerged out of Algeria's civil conflict and has expanded south into the Sahara, raising its profile in recent years with hit-and-run attacks and kidnappings of westerners.

Militant groups have benefited from lapses in security across the region as countries transition from years of dictatorship to more democratic government.

Cohen, on a week-long trip that includes stops in Britain, France, Germany and Italy, said he was talking with other governments in the hope of developing a unified approach to the kidnapping problem.

While the U.S. government has a policy of not paying ransoms, some European governments do so.

Talks were centered around steps to prevent kidnappings happening in the first place, the handling of hostage situations when they occur, and the tracing of financial flows when ransoms are paid, Cohen said.

Iran and Syria were the other main topics of discussion with his European counterparts, he said

Sanctions against Syria over the past 18 months had taken a "significant bite" out of the government's finances, he said, declining to give figures. "You have a situation where the Syrian government is spending at a greater rate.

"They are spending on security needs, on providing subsidies to their citizens, at the same time that the revenue side of the ledger is being significantly restrained. The natural impact of that is that their reserves are depleting."

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31291>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Official: Hezbollah fighters killed in Syria**

BEIRUT (AP) — A Hezbollah commander and several other fighters from the Lebanese Shiite militant group have been killed in Syria, a senior Lebanese security official and Syrian activists said Tuesday.

Hezbollah, which is backed by both Syria and Iran, is a strong ally of President Bashar Assad's embattled regime and has long been accused by the Syrian opposition of assisting Damascus in its crackdown on the 18-month-old uprising — a claim the group has repeatedly denied.

The security official said Hezbollah commander Ali Hussein Nassif's body was returned to Lebanon through the Masnaa border crossing on Sunday. Speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, he said several other Hezbollah fighters bodies have been brought back to Lebanon in the past few days.

It was not immediately clear how the militants were killed or whether they had been fighting alongside the Syrian army.

Samer al-Homsi, an activist in Syria's central Homs province, which borders Lebanon, said Nassif was killed Saturday when a roadside bomb hit the car he was riding in near the town of Qusair. He said Nassif and several other people were killed in the blast that also damaged the vehicle.

"His job was to coordinate with Syrian security agencies," al-Homsi said via Skype. He added that the rebels detonated the bomb "without knowing" that the target was a Hezbollah official.

"We knew he was a Hezbollah official after it was announced by the group in Lebanon," he said.

Al-Homsi's account could not be independently verified.

Hezbollah's reputation has suffered severely for siding with the Assad regime even after supporting revolts in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Bahrain. Confirmation that the group's members are fighting alongside the regime in the Syrian civil war would likely stoke resentment against the group among many Syrians and Lebanese who fear the conflict would mutate into a

wider regional conflict that would pull in Lebanon because of Hezbollah's involvement.

Lebanon's sectarian tensions have already been worsened by the crisis in Syria, where the overwhelmingly Sunni opposition is struggling to oust a regime dominated by Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Hezbollah's newspaper al-Intiqad said Nassif, who is also known as Abu Abbas, was a Hezbollah commander and was killed "while performing his jihadi duties." It did not say when or where he was killed.

His funeral, which was held Sunday in the eastern town of Budai, near Baalbek in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley, was attended by top Hezbollah officials including the head of the group's judicial council, Sheik Mohammed Yazbek, and the head of the political bureau, Sheik Ibrahim Amin al-Sayed.

On Tuesday, Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV showed the funerals of at least two other Hezbollah members it said were killed while performing their "jihadi duty."

It said one of the group's members, Zein al-Abideen Mustafa, was buried in his hometown of Baalbek, while another Hezbollah member, Hussein Mohammed Hussein Diab, was buried in his hometown of Ghassaniyeh in southern Lebanon. Both funerals were attended by Hezbollah officials and commanders.

The coffins of the dead were draped with Hezbollah's yellow flags and carried by militants in black uniforms and red berets. Hundreds of people marched in the funeral.

Hezbollah spokesman Ibrahim Moussawi confirmed the deaths but said he had no further information on where or how Nassif was killed. He declined further comment.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1>

## 6. SYRIA

### • **Civilians plead with Syrian fighters**

Residents of al-Raqqa, known as "hotel" of the revolution, tell combatants to spare them as rebels plan to take city.

More than 500,000 people are estimated to have fled to the northern city of al-Raqqa over the year-and-a-half long conflict in Syria.

That influx of internally displaced Syrians has doubled al-Raqqa's population.

Now, as opposition fighters say they plan to take the city from the forces of President Bashar al-Assad, civilians are pleading with the fighters to spare them the violence that would ensue.

Al Jazeera's Andrew Simmons reports exclusively from Tal Abyad on the Turkish border, from where the opposition forces are trying to advance.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2012/10/201210215395058626.html>

- **More killings reported as Syrian army steps up operations in Aleppo, Damascus**

Syria's army rained shells on rebel bastions in and around Damascus Tuesday and sent extra troops to second city Aleppo, as a watchdog said the death toll from 18 months of violence now topped 31,000.



As many as 160 people have been killed by the Syrian forces across the country on Tuesday, Al Arabiya reported citing the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The fresh offensive came hours after U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon urged Damascus to show compassion to its people and the U.N.'s Syria envoy prepared to return to the region to try to revive mediation efforts.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Mualllem insisted Monday that a political solution was still possible if the West and Gulf states halted support for the rebels.

The Observatory reported bombardments of the rebel-held Harasta district and the city of Duma, northeast of Damascus as well as a string of other towns outside Damascus.

Activist network the Local Coordination Committees said more than 100 shells fell

on Zabadani. Once a resort destination known for its mild weather and scenic views, it has been devastated by the civil war ravaging Syria.

The official daily al-Baath said Tuesday government forces had “destroyed many weapons caches and seized large quantities of ammunition and equipment... which indicates that the end of security operations throughout Damascus province is approaching.”

On July 18, rebels carried out a massive bombing on a complex in Damascus, killing four security chiefs, including Assad's brother-in-law and the defense minister.

Regime forces have since pushed the rebels to the outskirts of the capital. But they have lost control of several border crossings and are battling to retake Syria's second city of Aleppo, which has been the focal point of the conflict since mid-July.

Several districts of Aleppo were bombed on Tuesday, the Observatory said.

Pro-regime daily al-Watan said on Tuesday that extra troops were being sent to Aleppo.

“New reinforcements have arrived to support the army... and the armed men (rebels) are now fatigued and have begun to flee to their villages and towns in the province of Aleppo and elsewhere,” it said.

Fighting at the weekend rocked the city's centuries-old UNESCO-listed souk and sparked a fire that damaged hundreds of shops.

Fighting also raged on Tuesday in the southern province of Deraa, the Observatory said.

And Turkish troops fired across the Syrian border, killing a member of a Kurdish militia and wounding two others in the first such fatal shooting at the Turkish frontier, the Observatory said.

At least, 31,022 people have been killed since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's rule erupted in March last year, it added.

UN chief Ban, speaking after a meeting with Syria's Muallem at U.N. headquarters in New York, said it was time for Damascus to lower the scale of its offensive against the insurgency.

Muallem meanwhile told the U.N. General Assembly U.N. members should press for an end to the "arming, financing, harboring and training of terrorist groups," he said.

But Arab and Western governments have in turn accused Damascus ally Iran of arming the regime.

The U.N. envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, is due back in the region this week to try to revive talks aimed at ending the bloodshed, officials said.

In Lebanon Hezbollah reported that one of its senior commanders had been buried after having been killed "while performing his jihadist duties."

A Syrian rebel commander in the central province of Homs, who identified himself only as Abu Moayed, told AFP that "the commander and two of his escorts had been killed by a home-made landmine

near Qusayr," a rebel-held, besieged town in the province.

Damascus ally Hezbollah is one of Lebanon's main political parties and the country's most powerful military force.

The U.N. refugee agency said the number of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries has more than tripled since June to over 300,000, and by the end of the year that number is expected to more than double again.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/10/03/241534.html?PHPSESSID=93c2j7bs62omlp1rpur53bvgb0>

- **Election is solution to Syria crisis: Ahmadinejad**

TEHRAN, Oct. 2 (MNA) – President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran has said a national dialogue leading to election is the best way to settle the bloody conflict in Syria.

In an interview with Al Jazeera television broadcast on Tuesday, Ahmadinejad said war was not the way forward.

"There is another way to find a solution, it is national, mutual understanding in order

for there to be elections in the future," the president said.

"Syria's case is very complex and at the same time is a very important one," Ahmadinejad said. "Should I follow those demanding war? I don't think the language of war is a good language.

"There must be a different way to solve problems ... I have opposed war, but those who want things to be settled through dialogue are a minority and perhaps the majority are in favor of going ahead in the context of war."

In a press conference in Tehran on Tuesday President Ahmadinejad echoed the same remarks saying, the conflicting "sides should hold national dialogue but some say they should fight."

He added the Syrian people should enjoy freedom and be involved in the running of their country.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1710921>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

### • **Nine jailed for storming Kuwaiti TV station: lawyer**

KUWAIT (Reuters) - A Kuwaiti court has sentenced nine men to two years in jail apiece for storming a television station ahead of a parliamentary election earlier this year, their lawyer said.

The nine, all members of large Kuwaiti tribes, clashed with police outside the offices of Al Watan television channel in January, ahead of elections in the major Gulf oil producer.

Two more men were fined as part of the ruling, defense lawyer Al-Humaidi al-Subaie said on his Twitter account.

"Unfortunately the court imprisoned the first nine (members) of those who broke into Al Watan (station) for two years and gave a fine of \$200 to the 10th and 11th," he wrote.

Nabeel al-Fadli, a lawmaker seen as supportive of the government, was in the studios at the time and his presence triggered the unrest, local media reported.

People from Kuwaiti tribes tend to support opposition candidates in elections, while the country's urban and merchant class are, typically, more sympathetic to the government which is dominated by the ruling family.

Comment made by MPs which were deemed insulting to certain Kuwaiti tribes have triggered demonstrations in the past. While Kuwaitis protest regularly over political and tribal issues, the majority of demonstrations are peaceful.

Kuwait has been at a political standstill for several months after the its top court effectively dissolved the opposition-dominated parliament, which was elected in February, basing its decision on a technicality.

The previous, more government-tilted assembly that the court reinstated has been unable to convene due to a boycott by MPs. Analysts expect the emir will dissolve parliament soon and call for fresh parliament elections this year or next.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31284>

● **Qatar invites bids to reconstruct Gaza**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- The Qatari government on Tuesday invited tenders for four construction projects, in the first stage of a \$254 million project to rebuild the war-torn Gaza Strip.

Qatar's ambassador to Gaza Muhammad al-Imadi is heading a committee overseeing the work.

Consultants have been invited to submit designs for a city to be named after Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa al-Thani. The \$30-million development will include 1,000 residential units in five-story apartment blocks, schools, stores, clinics, parks and entertainment facilities, the ambassador said in a statement.

Companies were also invited to bid for the repair of three major roads in the enclave. The 35-kilometer coastal highway al-Rashid Street will cost around \$50 million to repair, and \$18 million has been allocated to reconstruct the 10-kilometer al-Karama Street.

The 28-kilometer Salah Addin Street will be repaired first, at a cost of \$60 million,

as the plans and designs are ready, al-  
Imadi said.

In the coming days, consultants will be  
invited to bid for several agricultural  
projects, budgeted at \$12.5 million.

Housing projects worth \$32 million will  
also be announced this week to house  
needy families and to re-home those who  
were evicted for building on public land.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=525462>

*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Sercan DOĞAN**. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

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