

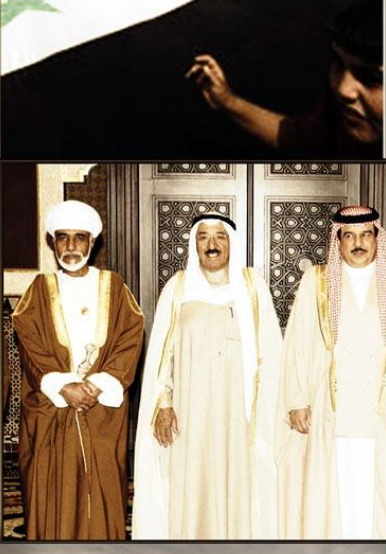
ORSAM
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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1. IRAQ

- **Removing Hashemi from Iraqi Presidency website a technical mistake**

Removing the field of Vice President Tarek Al Hashemi from Iraqi presidency website, is a technical mistake, a source from Iraqi presidency media directorate assured, on Wednesday, noting that the new website is still under completion.

“Removing Hashemi’s field from the new presidency website is nothing but a technical mistake that will be fixed in the few coming days,” the source told Alsumarianews.

“The new website is linked to the international network to enhance communication with the media,” the source revealed on condition of anonymity.

Iraqi presidency had adjusted its website, on Wednesday, and removed the name of Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi who is accused of terrorism.

New Iraqi presidency website design included special fields for Iraqi President

Jalal Talabani’s office, Vice-President Khudair Al Khuzai’s office and presidential office, while it excluded Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi’s office field that existed in the last design.

Iraqi Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi had left the country without President Talabani’s prior approval, President Talabani’s office assured, on April 5, considering Hashemi’s statements abroad as different from Talabani’s vision and damaging to Baghdad Arab Summit major achievements.

Supreme Criminal Tribunal adjourned Tuesday’s hearing in Hashemi’s trial in absentia along with his bodyguards to May 20 after the hearing of 4 testimonies. This session was postponed from May 3 to 10 then to 15 following the defense challenge about the transfer Hashemi case to federal court.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/news/56904/re-moving-hashemi-from-iraqi-presidency-website-a-t/en>

- **Kurdish official, British diplomat discuss Iraq’s political situation**



Baghdad (NINA) – Deputy Prime Minister of Kurdistan region, Imad Ahmed, discussed with Kress Power, the British Consular General in Kurdistan region, the political situation in Iraq and the necessity to deal with the problems through dialogue in light of the Constitution and the Iraqis' supreme interests.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) web site reported on Wednesday, May 16, that Ahmed met with Power stressing the strong political relations between Kurdistan region and Britain and the importance of mutual economic and investment cooperation, pointing out that in the last two years, British investments have greatly increased.

He pointed out to cooperation in the field of education, stating that many Kurdish students are being covered by the program of studying in British educational institutions, in addition that many British

universities are interested in to invest in educational invest in educational projects in Kurdistan region

Ahmed expressed the region's government readiness to facilitate and support such projects.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=FLHKDD

- **FM expresses Iraq's protest to Turkey's Ambassador over activities of his country's consulars in Basra, Mosul**

Baghdad (NINA) – Head of Neighboring Countries' Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, Walid Hameed Shiltagh, conveyed to Turkey's Ambassador to Iraq, Younis Demirar, Iraqi government's protest over some activities by Turkey's general consulars in Basra and Mosul that do not coincide with their official duties, according to Vienna Agreement of 1963 on Consulates' Relations.

A statement issued on Wednesday, May 16, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Shiltagh summoned on Tuesday, the Turkish Ambassador, reviewing the relations between the two countries and

Iraq's keenness to develop the in the interest of both countries' people.

For his part, Ambassador Demirar expressed his country's keenness to develop its relations with Iraq, affirming that his country has no intentions or agenda of harming mutual relations or affect the strategic relations between them.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=FLHJMK

- **Call to hold next Cabinet session in Diala**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya bloc MP Raad al-Dahlaki called today the net Cabinet session to be held in Diala to have a clear picture of the agonies of the people.

He told Aswat al-Iraq, as a parliament MP from the province, that the central government should acquaint itself with the economic and security situation in the province.

The last Cabinet meeting was held in Kirkuk, where it was stressed that the

province is a "place for social and peaceful co-existence".

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28ofupcu554wh3so450cyjxk45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=148586&l=1

- **National Alliance supports Maliki's govt. and NC, MP**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: National Alliance MP Ali al-Shalah disclosed that the National Alliance supported Premier Nouri al-Maliki's government and called all components to concentrate to hold the National Conference.

Shalah told Aswat al-Iraq that the meeting was a routine one to discuss the political situation, but stressed support to Maliki's government.

He called on all parties to abide by the constitution and respect of the agreements to make the National Council a success, taking into consideration the President Jalal Talabani's initiative is the main one.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28ofupcu554wh3so450cyjxk45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=148585&l=1

- **Kurdistan high delegation heads to Turkey**

A high KRG delegation headed by Nechirvan Barzani visited Turkey today

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A Kurdish high delegation headed by Nechirvan KRG premier officially visited Turkey Wednesday at the framework of further developing the relations.

The visit comes after the premier was officially invited by Turkey to boost the economic partnership and political, educational and cultural cooperation.

Upon his arrival, Nechirvan Barzani met with the senior officials and started the bilateral discussions.

The delegation include Fuad Hussain presidency chief of staff, Ashti Hawrami KRG natural resources minister, Sinan Chalabi trade and industry minister, Falah Mustafa head of KRG foreign relations and Khasraw Gul chair of region's security apparatus.

Kurdistan region has been in good relations with neighboring Turkey for

years and both sides attempt to dissolve the issues through dialog.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/77/kurdistan-region/837-kurdistan-high-delegation-heads-to-turkey>

- **Minister of Foreign Affairs Meets Ambassadors of 5 + 1 group and EU**

Minister of Foreign Affairs Meets Ambassadors of 5 + 1 group and EU

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As part of the preparations for the 5 + 1 group meetings in Baghdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, met at the Ministry's HQ on 16/5/2012 the accredited Ambassadors in Iraq of the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany as well as the EU Representative.

During the meeting, the Minister briefed, to the Ambassadors, the adopted administrative and logistic procedures and arrangements to host the 5 +1 group meeting and the EU with the Islamic Republic of Iran in Baghdad on 23/5/2012 concerning the Iranian nuclear program, in addition to Iraq's readiness to provide all

requirements to guarantee the success of the meeting.



On the other hand, Minister Zebari met on 15/5/2012 the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Danaie Far, and his accompanying delegation and briefed the procedures and arrangements for the meeting to the delegation.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was and still on constant contact with the European and Iranian sides to listen to their notes about the organizing, technical, and protocol aspects of the meeting and respond to them.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/77/iraq/834-minister-of-foreign-affairs-meets-ambassadors-of-5-1-group-and-eu>

- **3 explosive charges go off in Jalawla**



3 explosive charges go off in Jalawla

2 members of the emergency battalion were wounded today , May 16, when 2 explosive charges went off in al- Shuhadaa neighborhood in Jalawla sub- district in Khanaqin district, a security source said in a statement to PUKmedia.

Another explosive charge went off in Yakete quarter , no human losses reported , the source added.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/77/kurdistan-region/833-3-explosive-charges-go-off-in-jalawla>

2. IRAN

- **Iran: Powers' Realistic Approach Will Help Baghdad Talks Move Forward**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Senior Iranian foreign ministry officials said Tehran would reciprocate positive gestures of the world

powers if they maintain the same realistic approach that they pursued in the Istanbul meeting last month.

"In case the atmosphere of realism is continued by the G5+1, the Islamic Republic of Iran will reciprocate it with a positive approach," Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian said in a meeting with South African Foreign Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane in Pretoria.

"Under such conditions one can be hopeful that the Baghdad talks will be a step forward," he added.



Iran and the six world powers resumed negotiations in Istanbul on April 14 after a year of stalled talks and are due to continue their negotiations in Iraq's capital city, Baghdad, on May 23.

Tehran's chief negotiator Saeed Jalili headed the Iranian side, and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton led the delegations of the world powers.

Both Jalili and Ashton voiced satisfaction with the talks.

Iranian officials have expressed the hope that the positive trend of talks between Tehran and the six world powers in Istanbul would continue in Baghdad, and stressed that removal of sanctions should be the least result of the upcoming round of negotiations.

After two rounds of fruitful talks with the six world powers, Jalili said that withdrawing sanctions against Iran should be a focal point in any future talks on cooperation between Iran and the world powers.

"It is of crucial importance that our (future) cooperation will entail reciprocal steps, that is, our nation's trust should be built in the trend of talks and cooperation," Jalili told reporters at a press conference after the second meeting with the representatives of the G5+1 in Istanbul.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9102112345>

- **Deputy FM: No Restriction on Expansion of Iran- South Africa Ties**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian, who is on a bi-nation tour of Africa, voiced Iran's willingness to expand relations with African states.



Speaking at a meeting with South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Maite Nkoana Mahabane, Abdollahian underscored that the Islamic Republic of Iran sees "no restriction on the development of relations with Pretoria in any field".

He further described mutual cooperation on Tourism and easier reciprocal visits by Iranian and South African tourists as an

opportunity for the expansion of the two states' ties.

Abdollahian also voiced Tehran's preparedness to host the 11th meeting of the two countries' joint economic committee.

Also at the meeting, Mashabane stressed that the two countries enjoy ample capacity for improving their bilateral ties.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's administration has striven hard to maximize relations with the African continent.

Iran is also an observing member of the AU and has shown an active presence in previous AU summit meetings.

The country is considered as one of the AU's strategic partners along with India, Japan, China, several South American states and Turkey, while Tehran is also believed to be prioritizing promotion of its economic and political ties with the African states.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9102112343>

- **Iran to Double Power Supplies to Turkey**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's electricity exports to Turkey will witness a remarkable increase by the end of this month after the country increased the capacity of its new power transfer line to the neighboring state.

Iran's Deputy Energy Minister for Electricity and Energy Affairs Abdolhamid Farzam Behboudi said on Tuesday that the capacity of newly-installed 230-kilovolt electricity transfer line in the Northwest of Iran will increase to 400 kilovolts by late May.

He added that the completion and commissioning of new transfer lines will increase Iran's electricity export capacity to Turkey to more than 400 MW per hour from the current figure of 200 MW per hour.

The Iranian ministry of energy said on Thursday that the country has exported a total of 1,347 gigawatts per hour (GW/h) of electricity to the neighboring countries since the beginning of the current Iranian year (March 20) up by 38.57 percent compared with the previous year.

The report noted that the implementation of the Subsidy Reform Plan by Iran has contributed to the reduction of domestic power consumption, paving the way for more electricity exports to the neighboring countries.

The Islamic Republic is currently exporting electricity to Armenia, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Nakhichevan, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Earlier on Monday, Iranian Minister of Energy Majid Namjou said that Iran plans to become a center of power transfer in the region, and voiced Tehran's preparedness to supply electricity to Syria and Lebanon.

"Turning Iran into a center for the transit of electricity in the region is one of the policies of the energy ministry," Namjou told reporters on Monday.

He said that Iran plans to supply electricity to Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as Syria and Lebanon.

"In addition" Namjou stated "we should prepare the country's power

infrastructures to transit electricity from Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Russia which produce nuclear-generated power to the countries which are in need of electricity via Iran."

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9102112337>

- **Iran closely monitoring U.S. allies' moves in Persian Gulf: admiral**

TEHRAN, May 16 (MNA) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Naval Force has said that Iran is keeping a close eye on every move that the allies of the United States make in the Persian Gulf region.

Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi made the remarks during a meeting with Omani Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning Brigadier Rashid bin Saif al Shidi in Tehran on Tuesday.

The developments taking place in the region are to the detriment of the United States, Fadavi stated.

He added, "Countries in the region and the world no longer regard the United States' role as influential. The Americans,

given the non-realization of their goals in Iraq and the mutually agreed plan for the withdrawal, actually fled the country in ignominy. The situation of the United States in Afghanistan will be worse than Iraq, and the U.S. departure from Afghanistan is a certainty. However, before their departure, they have wreaked havoc. And vigilance should be exercised so that other countries will not" experience the same fate as Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The situation should not be provided for the United States' malevolence," he said, adding, "Interaction and cooperation among regional countries is the only factor that can set an appropriate precedent. There are certain countries in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz regions that are making malicious moves against their own interests and (the interests) of Muslims.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is closely and comprehensively monitoring the moves of the countries that are taking steps toward serving the interests of the United States and is keeping a close watch on their military and non-military vessels.

“Iranian naval forces have always emphasized interaction and cooperation with neighboring countries, and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Naval Force and the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Army pay due attention to this matter.

“Thanks to the establishment of the headquarters (of the IRGC Naval Force), the Persian Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz are being monitored from the closest place possible, and, in fact, it can be said that the region is being controlled from the sea.

The region is experiencing a “special” situation, Fadavi stated, adding, “In these circumstances, regional countries should keep a closer eye on the situation, and the establishment and the promotion of cooperation can play a significant role in this regard.”

Commenting on the Strait of Hormuz, he said that the strategically important chokepoint accounts for a high percentage of the world’s seaborne oil shipments.

“Over the last years of the imposed war (1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war), 9 to 10 million barrels of oil passed through this region

(every day), but this figure has (now) reached 20 million barrels. And according to the forecasts made by global authorities, the number of oil barrels passing through the Strait of Hormuz will reach 35 to 40 million. And these statistics show the expanding strategic role of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz in global energy equations,” the IRGC Naval Force commander noted.

The United States has used false pretexts for maintaining a presence in the Persian Gulf region, Fadavi added.

He said, “The Americans have expanded the presence of their forces in the Persian Gulf since the last years of the imposed war under the pretext of maintaining the security of global energy (supplies), but they have never been able to prove their claims.

“In 1986, the Americans deployed more than 80 warships to the Persian Gulf under the pretext of maintaining the security of global energy (supplies), and, in the last year and a half of the war, 300 of their military, commercial, and oil vessels were hit, while in the first six and a half years of the war, 250 vessels were hit, and

this gives the lie to the U.S. claims. The United States is making every effort to serve its interests and achieve its purposes. And the killing of more than one million people in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other regional countries is a clearer indication of this fact.”

During the meeting, the Omani official called for the expansion of ties between Tehran and Muscat.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1604513>

- **IRGC denies claims Qods chief Suleimani met Hezbollah leader**

TEHRAN, May 16 (MNA) – The public relations department of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps issued a statement on Wednesday dismissing reports that IRGC Qods Force Commander Major General Qasem Suleimani had recently held talks with Hezbollah Secretary General Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah to urge him to prevent a possible preemptive attack on Israel and expression of extremist views by Hezbollah members.

Suleimani has also dismissed the news as a “big lie,” which has been fabricated by the Zionists to divert attention.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1604448>

- **No Iranian crude oil without customer: NIOC chief**

TEHRAN, May 16 (MNA) - Iran has rejected claims in a report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) that say the country has stored up to 30 million barrels of unsold crude on oil tankers in the Persian Gulf.

National Iranian Oil Company Director for International Affairs Mohsen Qamsari said Iran is not storing the unsold oil.

“The storage of crude oil does not mean that Iran’s crude oil does not have customer,” Qamsari told the Mehr News Agency.

Qamsari added, “Iran’s has no oil without customer in the Persian Gulf.”

He said that 12 new tankers which were recently purchased by an Iranian tanker company were not for storing crude oil.

“The contract for building these new tankers is related to four years ago,” he explained.

The IEA had said Iran’s oil production remained steady at 3.3 million barrels a day in April, but 15 to 25 percent was not sold and had to be pumped into floating tanker storage.

On Tuesday, Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi also categorically denied reports that Iran has stored 30 million barrels of oil on tankers.

“I personally deny” this report, Qasemi asserted

“We are not facing with reduction of export,” Qasemi told reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting in Khorasan Razavi province.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1604516>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Was Palestinian hunger strike a success?**

Deal that ended Palestinian prisoners' mass hunger strike in Israeli prisons has proved growing success of the Palestinian strategy of non-violent protest.

The deal that ended the Palestinian prisoners' mass hunger strike not only headed off a confrontation with Israel, but also proved the growing success of the Palestinian strategy of non-violent protest.

The agreement, signed just hours before Nakba Day, when Palestinians mourn the "catastrophe" that befell them in the war that accompanied Israel's independence in 1948, provided a happy ending for local, regional and international players.

Not only did the prisoners manage to improve their lot through the deal, but Israel was able to avoid what could have been a potentially serious backlash if any of the prisoners had died, and all sides breathed a sigh of relief.

In a statement welcoming the deal, Middle East Quartet envoy Tony Blair said he had repeatedly pushed Israel "to resolve the crisis expeditiously in order to avoid a tragic outcome which had the

potential to destabilise conditions on the ground."

Gaza's Hamas rulers and the radical Islamic Jihad movement had warned Israel it would face dire consequences if any of the 1,550 prisoners died.

Most of the detainees refused food for four weeks, but two of them, Bilal Diab and Thaer Halahla, both from Islamic Jihad, went 76 days without eating, setting the record for a hunger strike among Palestinian prisoners.

"If anything had happened to Thaer or Bilal, for example, it would have pushed Islamic Jihad to react immediately by firing rockets at Israel from Gaza, which Hamas would not have wanted because it wants to keep the peace there," a Palestinian official said.

In a bid to resolve the standoff, Hamas had last week dispatched a delegation of former prisoners to Cairo to participate in negotiations, which were mediated by Egypt.

The explosive potential of the strike had also worried officials in Ramallah.

"Like Israel, some Palestinian circles were worried that the strike could deteriorate into a new intifada (uprising), which would be run by leaders of the first and second intifadas, but this time from inside Israeli prisons," said political analyst Khalil Shahine.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman Mark Regev said Israel had backed the agreement "in response to a request by President Abbas" in the hope that it would "build confidence between the parties and further peace."

But, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel said it was unacceptable that the prisoners were forced to endanger their own lives in order to secure basic rights.

"We regret that Israel's authorities had for years violated inmates' rights, so they had to risk their lives in their struggle," said Anat Litvin, head of prisoners and detainees at PHR.

But she hailed the detainees for their use of a non-violent campaign to achieve their rights.

"The Palestinian inmates proved that a non-violent and just struggle can bring important achievement and raise international awareness," she said in a statement.

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in Gaza also paid tribute to "the most serious and longest hunger strike in Israeli prisons."

"The agreement was not achieved without struggle and the determination of prisoners who put their lives at risk in one of the highest forms of resistance and peaceful protest," it said.

In a speech on Monday night, ahead of Nakba Day, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas spoke in broad terms of "peaceful popular resistance against occupation, settlement, and the (Israeli West Bank separation) wall, in which foreign activists and Israeli pacifists take part part."

He mentioned the boycott of settlement products as an example.

Senior PLO official Hanan Ashrawi also hailed the prisoners' peaceful protest as a "victory" for the entire Palestinian people.

"They have truly demonstrated that non-violent resistance is an essential tool in our struggle for freedom," she said in a statement on Monday evening.



"Our new heroes are Gandhi, Mandela and Martin Luther King," Palestinian negotiator Nabil Shaath has repeatedly said, alluding to three giants of peaceful popular resistance who have inspired the current Palestinian strategy, which was even publicly approved by Hamas in 2011.

In a report published on Tuesday, Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki noted that "a majority of Palestinians oppose a resort to violence as a means of resisting Israeli occupation."

Even though 61 percent of respondents declared themselves in favour of non-violent resistance, he said, the numbers of those actually taking part in such acts was low.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52282>

- **Abbas to swear in new Fayyad-led cabinet**

Hamas reacts angrily to news of new cabinet, with spokesman Fawzi Barhum warning such move 'stregntens division'.

RAMALLAH (Palestinian Territories) - A reshuffled Palestinian cabinet in the West Bank with seven new faces is to be sworn in on Wednesday, labour minister Ahmad Majdalani said.

"The government will be sworn in at (President Mahmud) Abbas's office at 6:00 pm (1500 GMT)," he said.

The new government has been on the cards since the previous cabinet resigned in February 2011, shortly after the Palestinian leadership announced it would hold legislative and presidential elections "in the coming months."

Abbas had tasked prime minister Salam Fayyad with forming a new government, but the process was put on ice after the surprise April announcement of a reconciliation deal between Abbas's Fatah movement and its Islamist rival Hamas.

The agreement called for the creation of an interim cabinet of independents selected by the two factions which would prepare for elections that were rescheduled to happen by May 2012.

But the deal has largely stalled, leaving the revamped government on hold and elections indefinitely postponed.

According to a source in Fayyad's office, seven new ministers will take up the portfolios covering health, tourism, national economy, justice, agriculture, transportation and telecommunications.

Although the new ministers have been chosen, the source said it was possible there could be changes before the swearing in ceremony.

Majdalani confirmed there would be seven new ministers in what will be the 14th Palestinian cabinet.



He said that the move to replace the old cabinet instead of bringing in the interim cabinet called for by the unity deal was a not a sign that the reconciliation process had collapsed.

"No, we still hope that the reconciliation will happen. But we need to reshuffle the government to deal with the population's everyday life," he said.

But Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, reacted angrily to news of the new cabinet.

"This strengthens the division," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum said.

"This government was built on corruption, and was not the choice of the Palestinian

people and was not approved by the legislative council."

Barhum said the move "shows clearly to all that the Palestinian Authority and Fatah are far from the implementation" of the unity agreement.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52289>

- **Reshuffled Palestinian government in West Bank sworn in, angering Hamas**

A new Palestinian government in the West Bank was sworn in on Wednesday at a ceremony in the West Bank town of Ramallah, in a move that has angered the Hamas government in Gaza.

Ministers, including returning prime minister Salam Fayyad, took the oath of office in the presence of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

The new 24-member cabinet will have 11 new faces and include replacements for two ministers in the outgoing government who were removed for alleged corruption.

Nabil Kassis, a former university president who like Fayyad is a political independent,

will take over as finance minister. He will have to deal with fiscal challenges posed by a steady decline in donor funds and by Israeli trade restrictions.

“This government’s role is to continue what the previous one started,” Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told the cabinet.

The Palestinian Authority, which exercises limited self-rule in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, is relying on foreign aid to cover a 2012 budget projected to reach \$1.3 billion.

Amid the crisis, the Palestinian government has been serving in a caretaker capacity since resigning last February after Abbas signed a unity deal in Doha with Hamas and announced new elections would be held within months.

But the accord with Hamas, which seized Gaza from forces loyal to Abbas’s Fatah movement in a brief civil war in 2007, ran into trouble over the composition of a unity government and is now effectively frozen.

“The legislative and executive system have been paralyzed,” Abbas told a news conference in Ramallah, the West Bank town where the new ministers were sworn in.

He said the incoming government “will be dismissed immediately” if the political partnership with Hamas is consummated.

But the Hamas government in Gaza slammed the decision to form a new cabinet, accusing Abbas’s Palestinian Authority and the Fatah movement he heads of abandoning reconciliation.



“This strengthens the division,” Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum told AFP news agency, saying it “shows clearly that the Palestinian Authority and Fatah are far from implementing” the unity agreement.

The swearing in of the 25-member government comes more than a year after the last cabinet resigned in February 2011.

At the time, the Palestinian leadership had said it would hold legislative and presidential elections “in the coming months,” and Abbas tasked Fayyad with forming a new government.

But the process was put on ice after the surprise announcement in April 2011 of a reconciliation deal between Abbas’s Fatah movement and its Islamist rival, Hamas.

Abbas tasked prime minister Salam Fayyad with forming a new government, but this was put on ice after the surprise announcement in April of a reconciliation agreement between Abbas’s Fatah movement and its Islamist rival Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip.

Since then, the reconciliation agreement, which envisaged the creation of an interim cabinet of independents selected by the two factions that would prepare for elections, has largely stalled, leaving the revamped government on hold.

The agreement called for the creation of an interim cabinet of independents selected by the two factions, which would prepare for elections that were rescheduled to happen by May 2012.

The deal has largely stalled, and Abbas said on Wednesday that the impasse had left his administration paralyzed, spurring him to call for the formation of a new cabinet.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/05/16/214430.html>

- **Nehushtan to ‘Post:’ IAF ready for threats, including Iran**

Outgoing commander of IAF comes out strongly against public discussion regarding strike on Iran; says Israel's air superiority in Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, Sinai threatened by proliferation of surface-to-air missile systems.

The Israel Air Force is prepared for the many missions and threats it faces in the Middle East, including a possible operation against Iran’s nuclear facilities, outgoing OC Air Force Maj.-Gen. Ido Nehushtan has told The Jerusalem Post.

The exclusive interview, which will appear in Friday's Magazine, was conducted with Nehushtan – who has led the IAF for the past four years – just days before he handed over command to Maj.- Gen. Amir Eshel.

Related:

Iran installs more centrifuges pre-Baghdad talks

Barak too keen on Iran attack, says Yacimovich

"I understand the missions that stand before the IAF, and we have done everything we can during this period to create capabilities so we can fulfill these missions," he said in response to a question of whether the air force was capable of dealing with the Iranian threat. "In general, the IAF is prepared for all of these missions."

Nehushtan came out strongly during the interview against the ongoing public discussion regarding a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, saying it lacked "basic facts."

The Israeli media has been flooded with interviews and reports in recent months regarding a possible strike.

IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Benny Gantz, for example, said in a series of interviews published on Independence Day that Israel had prepared a viable military option to attack the Islamic Republic.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak has spoken many times about the need for the right timing for such a strike, while former Mossad chief Meir Dagan and former Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) chief Yuval Diskin have warned of the consequences of such an operation.

"I think that in this specific issue [Iran] we should not talk," Nehushtan said. "I say this with all of the responsibility it entails. I think that a public discourse on this issue is lacking the basic facts needed to hold it and I think that it should not be held in this way."

As an example, he brought Israel's bombing of the Osirak reactor in Iraq in 1981.

“The Iraqi thing was known for years before the reactor was attacked. It was known but it did not turn into a public discussion and that should be the case here as well,” he said.

During the interview, Nehushtan warned that Israel’s air superiority was increasingly undermined by the proliferation of sophisticated surface-to-air missile systems throughout the region – in Syria, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula.

“The IAF needs to be ready to fly in places where there is a threat to its superiority,” he said “This is the case already now and therefore when we approach a front like Lebanon or Gaza we will first look at the intelligence, then study the threats and then think about the best way to carry out our missions.”

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=270311>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Juba: Khartoum stalling UN talks deadline**

UN deadline for Sudan-South Sudan talks on critical issues is likely to pass without action.

KHARTOUM - A UN deadline for Sudan and South Sudan to resume talks on oil and other critical issues looked likely to pass without action on Wednesday, as South Sudan accused Khartoum of stalling.

The South's lead negotiator, Pagun Amum, said late Tuesday that his country is ready to resume the African Union-led talks.

Sudan withdrew from negotiations after South Sudanese troops occupied the north's main oil region of Heglig on April 10, in a conflict that led to widespread fears of all-out war.

Amum said Juba has sent a letter to the AU mediator, former South African president Thabo Mbeki, saying "we have been ready to resume talks and we are waiting."

Sudan has not reciprocated, Amum said.

"I believe it is because the government of Sudan hasn't been keen to return to talks, which is in violation of the UNSC

resolution and the AU roadmap" underlying the UN resolution, he said.

The May 2 United Nations Security Council resolution gave Sudan and South Sudan two weeks -- until May 16 -- to unconditionally resume the talks.

The unanimous resolution sought to avert a "serious threat to international peace and security" caused by the situation along the disputed border between the two countries, after weeks of fighting.

South Sudan's 10-day occupation of Heglig coincided with Sudanese air raids on South Sudanese territory, actions which the UN condemned and called for a ceasefire.

Khartoum's foreign ministry did not respond to AFP's requests for comment about the talks, but it said late Tuesday that Mbeki would likely be in Khartoum this week.

"Mbeki himself is expected in Khartoum tomorrow (Wednesday) or the day after tomorrow to discuss the details of negotiations, like the dates and the

agenda," foreign ministry spokesman Al-Obeid Meruh said.



Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir, an accused war criminal, said last week that Sudan "will not negotiate about any issues" unless security matters are resolved first.

Khartoum accuses South Sudan of backing a major insurgency in South Kordofan state, as well as in Blue Nile, and also of working with Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebels from Darfur.

The South says it does not back the rebels but suspected JEM fighters were seen alongside its troops during the Heglig occupation. JEM denied involvement.

South Sudan accuses the north of backing insurgents in the South as well.

The UN resolution calls on both sides to halt the practice.

Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide allegedly committed in Sudan's Darfur region several years ago.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52283>

- **Algerian women win more parliament seats**

Women take almost third of parliament's seats, but face widespread mistrust towards institution itself.

Better representation than in neighbouring countries

Algeria's legislative election saw women take almost a third of the seats, making the national assembly the most gender-balanced in the region but activists say the battle is far from won.

According to a provisional count, at least 145 of the new, enlarged national assembly's 462 seats will be occupied by

women, up from a representation of only seven percent in the outgoing house.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hailed "the high number of women elected" while UN chief Ban Ki-moon "welcomed the increased representation of women in the new parliament."

The May 10 election saw President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's National Liberation Front recover some of its past hegemony while Islamist parties lost ground, failing to ride the religious wave that followed the region's Arab Spring.

"The Arab Spring may be delayed for the Islamists but its flowers have blossomed for women, they will bring colour to parliament and raise their voices in an assembly which was dominated by men for 50 years," said Samia, an unemployed woman in her fifties, in central Algiers.

"With this considerable proportion of women in parliament, we're closing in on true democratic representation in parliament," said Fatima Mustapha, a university teacher.

Women account for 53 percent of the population, 45 percent of magistrates and now control around 32 percent of the national assembly, statistics which place Algeria ahead of Tunisia and Morocco.

Interior Minister Daho Ould Kablia boasted that the number of women elected last week also put Algeria ahead of the European Union average.

After ten years of activism by women's rights groups, a new law imposed parliamentary quotas of 20 to 50 percent of women, depending on the size of the constituency.

But feminists stress it remains to be seen how effectively the new women MPs, many of them inexperienced, will work together across party lines.

"Women now have to prove that they deserved their seats," said Nadia Ait Zaid, a jurist who runs a centre that campaigned for the quotas and trained some of the women candidates before the election.



She said the two main issues that female lawmakers will have to tackle are a family code that still does not grant full equality to women and a bill criminalising domestic violence.

"They need to create a front that transcends ideologies, a bit like a cross-party parliamentary group," said Ait Zai.

Several male-dominated parties, including the ruling National Liberation Front, had initially resisted the quotas, arguing that some women who were lower than men on election party lists would get bumped up just to meet the imposed requirement.

Several women's rights activists also complained that some party leaders had named their wives and daughters at the bottom of their lists to pay lip service to the new equality rules.

The popular Arabic-language daily Ennahar on Tuesday carried pictures of several newly-elected women lawmakers with this headline: "50 single women in parliament!" -- and a list of the perks they would be granted as MPs.

Even if women succeed in conquering machismo and religious conservatism in parliament, they face another obstacle in the widespread mistrust towards the institution itself.

"Whether it's a man or a woman who gets elected doesn't matter. What's important is that the elections are fair, and they were not fair," said Salima, a young woman wearing a traditional head-to-toe garment.

"A woman who wins thanks to a quota imposed by the law or thanks to fraud is not legitimate. The same goes for men."

Despite qualified endorsements from foreign observers following the vote, many Algerians and observers believe the official turnout figure of 43 percent and each party's score have little correlation with reality.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52281>

- **Libya's Abdelhakim Belhaj quits military to enter politics**

Libyan Islamist who has commanded Tripoli military council since Gathafi's ouster resigns from his post to enter politics.

TRIPOLI- Abdelhakim Belhaj, a Libyan Islamist who has commanded the Tripoli military council since the ouster of Moamer Gathafi's regime, has resigned from his post to enter politics.

"Last night, I presented my resignation," he said.

"It is now time to turn to politics," Belhaj said, adding he would run in upcoming elections for a constituent assembly.

Libya is on track to hold elections for a 200-seat assembly in June.



Belhaj said that his party, Hizb al-Watan, will formally launch next week.

He added that the military council had fulfilled its role and that it was up to state institutions, such as the ministries of defence and interior which have integrated thousands of former rebels, to tackle security.

"It is up to official institutions to take charge of security," he said.

Belhaj is a former commander of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which led an armed insurgency against Gathafi during the 1990s.

He is currently suing the British authorities for their alleged role in his 2004 rendition to Libya, where he was tortured.

Belhaj charges that British intelligence officers interrogated him while he was detained in Abu Slim prison.

As part of a reconciliation deal led by Gathafi's son, Seif al-Islam, Belhaj was released in 2010 along with more than 200 opposition Islamists.

Belhaj shot to fame after the battle for Tripoli in August last year but has kept a low profile in the past few months.

Despite his resignation, the Tripoli military council would not be disbanded, he said.

Libya analyst Peter Cole said Belhaj's decision to enter politics reflects a broader trend.

"It shows that revolutionaries are beginning to see the military councils as a temporary apparatus and want a permanent voice in Libyan politics," he said.

In the absence of institutions, local military councils have been central to security in cities across Libya during and after the 2011 revolt.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52278>

- **Uneasy calm in Libya's Sebha after clashes**

Tensions are still high between communities living in Sbeha, many of whom have their own armed militias more than a month after deadly tribal clashes.

SEBHA, Libya - A tenuous peace has taken hold in Libya's southwestern city of Sebha more than a month after tribal clashes killed at least 70 people, with tensions still high between communities living here, many of whom have their own armed militias, according to local residents.

"You see that place?" Adoum Abaka, a Tubu from Tayuri, a poor neighbourhood of Sebha inhabited mainly by Tubu and Tuareg families, told IRIN, pointing to a nearby building on a hill with gaping holes where the walls used to be. "That is where some of us hid when Tayuri was under attack by the Awlad Sulayman [tribe]. We were fighting with Kalashnikovs. One person was killed there."

The latest clashes erupted in March between the Tubu ethnic group and the

Arab Awlad Sulayman and Awlad Abu Seif tribes. The clashes are said to have begun after a man belonging to the Abu Seif family was killed allegedly by the Tubu. But other narratives suggest the conflict followed a dispute over several million dollars which the ruling Transitional National Council (TNC) was planning to spend in Sebha. The violence went on for six days until the TNC brought in forces from the north to quell it.

The Tubu also clashed with other communities in February at the oasis of Kufra.

TNC forces have brought some semblance of peace to Sebha, but most tribal groups still have their own militias. Wanees Abu Khamada, head of the Special Forces and military governor of southern Libya, told IRIN the military recently banned people from carrying weapons at night. However, no process has yet been established to take back the weapons.

When asked if the army lacked the ability to bring the region under control, he said: "We are still trying. The army is not weak, but it is restricted by law. The militias on

the other hand can just go and attack a place on their own.”

Despite the presence of the military, residents of Sebha are apprehensive. Adam Ahmad of Tayuri said the ceasefire between the two groups was an “obligation”, and many were afraid of what would happen if the army pulled out.

“Fighting has ceased, but we don’t know for how long,” said Al-Zarooq from the local council.

Outside the camp council of Tayuri, an assortment of weapons, including mortars, rockets, artillery and unexploded munitions lie scattered on the ground.

In nearby Al-Hijara, charred remains of abandoned houses and cars stand testimony to the destruction wrought on the neighbourhood. Ali Mohamed Boubacar Julwar, a teacher who fled Sebha for the southern town of al-Qatroun, came back to find his family gone and his house destroyed.

“I found my neighbours outside, no shelter, their property stolen,” he said.

“They said Awlad Sulayman did it, and some Sebha families.”

Identities and allegiances

The Tubu, an indigenous black African tribe, live in southern Libya, along the Tibesti mountain range, and in Chad and Niger. While some Tubu from Chad were encouraged to migrate north to work in the oil industry under former president Muammar Gaddafi, many indigenous to Libya experienced marginalization and exclusion by the same regime and took up arms on the rebel side during the 2011 uprising. Those living in Kufra in the southeast had their identity cards and passports withdrawn under a 2007 policy aimed at deterring more of them from entering Libya and authorities in the area were told to treat them as foreigners.

“The nomadic nature of the Sahara desert tribes and the fact that they have extensions in neighbouring countries were reasons for the previous regime to deny them their rights,” Adam Ahmad, a Tubu leader and head of Tayuri camp council, told IRIN.

During recent clashes, local perceptions of the Tubu as outsiders fuelled the violence, as residents in Sebha unrelated to the initial disputes were urged to take up arms against them.

“The Awlad Sulayman told the people of Sebha that the Tubu want to control the city,” Omar, a resident of Sebha who preferred not to give his full name, told IRIN. “So the people of Sebha, who have always been prejudiced against the Tubu, attacked their areas.”

The discourse over who is truly Libyan and who is an outsider underlies multiple conflicting accounts of the Sebha clashes and larger identity politics in the region.

The city, home to about 210,000 people, has long served as a hub and transit point for migrants entering the southern borders, often illegally, from Niger, Chad and other countries. As increasing numbers of Tubu arrived in Sebha to support their people during the clashes, the conflict escalated, and xenophobic fears of foreigners led to some cases of arbitrary arrests of African migrants from neighbouring countries like Chad.

“Not all the Tubu are Libyan. Libyans are welcome here, but outsiders are not,” said Mohamed Shahhat, a member of the local council in Sebha, from the Awlad Sulayman tribe. “There are rumours around that Tubu have their nation in the south of Libya. We are afraid of a situation similar to what is happening in Mali where the Tuareg are trying to establish their country. The Tubu are not just a tribe, they are a nation.”

While the Awlad Sulayman express fears of a Tubu takeover, the Qaddadfa and Awlad Sulayman are among the most prominent tribes in Sebha. Many of the latter were allied to the Gaddafi regime, while others fought on the rebel side during the uprising. In the four months after Sebha was liberated, residents of Sebha allege that Awlad Sulayman militias took control of the city and that crimes were committed.

Members of the Awlad Sulayman were reluctant to talk to IRIN about their involvement in the conflict or to give interviews with those whose relatives were killed.

Ayoub al-Zarooq said the Awlad Sulayman may have their own ambitions to assume control of the area around Sebha. "Many of the militias are from Awlad Sulayman. The street talk is that they want to control the city and perhaps even the south of Libya," he said.

It is difficult to say who truly holds power here, according to Bill Lawrence, director of the North Africa Project of International Crisis Group (ICG). "Certain districts in and around Sebha are controlled more by one group or another, and certainly Awlad Sulayman have had the upper hand, but I would not say that one or another group truly holds power, especially after the revolution which made things murkier," he said.

Security south of the city

Both the Tubu and the Awlad Sulayman have lived side by side for decades and both inhabit regions that extend beyond Libya's borders. It is in these border regions where migrants and smuggled goods make their way north that the conflict which spread to Sebha is said to have originated. "They say the fight started here in Sebha, but in fact,

trafficking and smuggling routes are in control of these two groups," said Omar. "And each one pays the other. This is where the fight actually began, on the border."

Ahmad Naas Mohamed, a member of the local council from the Abu Seif tribe, denied these claims. "Awlad Sulayman are not controlling the border areas, they are just doing some commerce there," he said. "It is the Tubu who are in control."

Adam Ahmad of Tayuri local council said much of the southern border region is controlled by the Tubu, but that the Awlad Sulayman may also have their own trafficking routes. Al-Zarooq said the borders presented the greatest security challenge to the southern region, and stability in Sebha would largely depend on securing these regions.

"Stability depends in part on dialogue between the communities and the ability of leaders to avert the worst," ICG's Lawrence said. "Eventually, the overall stability of Libya and these regions will depend on issues of legitimacy and governance and service delivery."

The government has said it will investigate the Sebha clashes, but military governor Abu Khamada said it will take time and facts are hard to gather.

Meanwhile, the residents of Al-Hijara are still waiting for justice. Yusuf Said, a young Tubu who said his mother was killed in the local hospital during the conflict, believes the Tubu must be ready to defend themselves again.

“We consider the war is not over,” he said.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52272>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Region edges closer to sectarian war: New clashes erupt in Lebanon**

Clashes between army, residents of two areas of Lebanon's city of Tripoli supporting opposite sides in Syria crisis wound at least four people.

TRIPOLI (Lebanon) - At least four people were wounded on Wednesday in clashes between the army and residents of two areas of Lebanon's city of Tripoli

supporting opposite sides in the crisis in neighbouring Syria, a security official said.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said shooting broke out after soldiers tried to remove barricades in the northern port city's sensitive and mainly Sunni Muslim neighbourhood of Bab al-Tebbaneh.

Residents opened fire on the soldiers, one of whom was wounded, and the troops responded.



The clashes then escalated with residents of Jabal Mohsen, which sits opposite Bab al-Tebbaneh, also opening fire.

There were also reports of sniper fire.

Jabal Mohsen is populated mainly by Alawites loyal to the embattled regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, while

Bab al-Tebbaneh residents support the opposition seeking to oust Assad.

Clashes between residents of the two neighbourhoods earlier this week left nine people dead and some 50 wounded.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52299>

- **Sayed Nasrallah Receives PFLP-GC Head, Delegation**

Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah received on Tuesday the Secretary General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command, Ahmad Jibril, and his deputy Secretary-General Talal Naji, in addition to an accompanying delegation from the front.



The meeting was in the presence of the Head of Hezbollah's Political Council Sayyed Ibrahim Amin al- Sayyed.

The meeting tackled the latest political developments in the region, especially in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, a statement issued by Hezbollah's media relations said indicating that the viewpoints were identical on different issues.

"Both sides underlined the depth and firmness of their relationship, especially in the face of all current developments," said the statement.

http://www5.almanar.com.lb/english/ade_tails.php?fromval=1&cid=23&frid=23&eid=55829

- **Charbel Urges Officials to Assume Responsibilities, Deal with Gunmen in Tripoli**

Lebanon's Interior Minister Marwan Charbel Lebanese Interior Minister Marwan Charbel urged officials on Wednesday to assume its responsibilities and take a cohesive political decision in dealing with the gunmen in Tripoli, the local Naharnet website posted.

"We are ready to discuss the recent incidents with all the parties in Tripoli in order to preserve security in the city,"

Charbel told reporters after chairing a security meeting at the Tripoli Serail.

Salafists destabilize security in Tripoli, northern Lebanon Tension between the two rival neighborhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen came to a head at the weekend and left nine people dead and nearly 50 wounded before the army intervened early on Tuesday to restore calm.

Charbel stressed that the government will “resolve all the disputes,” which have erupted over the weekend in Tripoli.



He called on politicians in Tripoli to unite and resolve the flaws “as soon as possible.”

Concerning the extremist inmates, the minister revealed that the judiciary will issue indictments against some detainees and allow others to be released.

The Salafist activist Shadi al-Mawlawi Sectarian violence has flared on a number of occasions in Tripoli, but the recent escalation was the deadliest and saw hardline Salafists taking part in the fighting after the General Security Department detained Shadi al-Mawlawi on charges of belonging to a terrorist organization.

On al-Qaeda’s presence in Lebanon, Charbel said: “Al-Qaida doesn't exist in Lebanon but there are people who support it. It doesn't have a training base in the country nor does it receive funding.”

Military Tribunal Judge Saqr Saqr had charged on Monday al-Mawlawi and five others with forming an armed terrorist group and undermining the authority of the state, as well as having links to al-Qaeda.

He later issued an arrest warrant against al-Mawlawi.

<http://www5.almanar.com.lb/english/adeails.php?fromval=1&cid=23&frid=23&eid=55929>

- **Several wounded in renewed clashes in Lebanon**

By Al Arabiya with Agencies



Several people were wounded as new clashes erupted on Wednesday between the army and rival neighborhoods in Lebanon's northern city of Tripoli, a security official said.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said shooting erupted after soldiers tried to remove barricades in the sensitive mainly neighborhood of Bab al-Tebbaneh.

The neighborhood sits opposite Jabal Mohsen, a district populated mainly by loyalists to the embattled regime of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad.

Bab al-Tebbaneh residents for their part back the opposition seeking to overturn Assad's regime.

Battles first erupted on Saturday between residents of the rival neighborhoods after security forces arrested Shadi al-Mawlawi, an Islamist, on alleged charges of belonging to a terrorist organization.

Mawlawi's supporters say he was targeted because of his help for Syrian refugees fleeing to Lebanon.

Some 500 of them blocked a main road leading into Tripoli on Monday and said they would leave only after Mawlawi was released.

A total of nine people, including a soldier hit by sniper fire, died in the port city and dozens were wounded in the fighting.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/05/16/214494.html>

6. SYRIA

- **Washington Post: Syrian Terrorists Funded by Persian Gulf Arab States, Assisted by US**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The US daily, Washington Post, reported that the Syrian rebels and terrorist groups battling the President Bashar al-Assad's government have received significantly more and better weapons in recent weeks, a crime paid for by the Persian Gulf Arab states and coordinated by the United States.

The newspaper, quoting opposition activists and US and foreign officials, reported that Obama administration officials emphasized the administration has expanded contacts with opposition military forces to provide the Persian Gulf nations with assessments of rebel credibility and command-and-control infrastructure.

According to the report, material is being stockpiled in Damascus, in Idlib near the Turkish border and in Zabadani on the Lebanese border.

Opposition activists who two months ago said the rebels were running out of ammunition said this week that the flow of weapons - most bought on the black market in neighboring countries or from elements of the Syrian military in the past - has significantly increased after a

decision by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf states to provide millions of dollars in funding each month.

Mulham al-Drobi, a member of the Syrian Brotherhood's executive committee also said the group has opened its own supply channel to the rebels, using resources from wealthy individuals and money from the Persian Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The new supplies reversed months of setbacks for the rebels and terrorist groups that forced them to withdraw from their stronghold in the Baba Amr neighborhood of Homs and many other areas in Idlib and elsewhere.

"Large shipments have got through," another opposition figure said. "Some areas are loaded with weapons."

Recent reports coming from Syria suggested that various enemy plots are underway to spoil Annan's peace mission in Syria to bring the Muslim country back into turmoil and pave the way for an overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's government.

These enemy states lead and back up various terrorist operations, including acts of sabotage and kidnapping, and use soft war tactics, including psychological operations and threats, through the Syrian dissident expatriates and armed groups within the country to deepen turmoil in Syria and bring Annan's peace plan into failure as they want to see an overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's government and the rise to power of a pro-western state.

Meantime, the US has spread rumors about impending blitzkriegs on Syria in a bid to affect the government forces and make Damascus consent to a Saudi and Qatari offer for the establishment of a buffer zone.

Despite a ceasefire that took effect in Syria on April 12 and the presence of UN observers, the country has been the scene of terrorist bomb attacks in recent days.



Annan has offered a six-point peace initiative which has been endorsed and implemented by the Damascus government and nation, but armed rebels supported by certain Arab rulers have repeatedly violated the terms of Annan's plan.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar are blamed for the terrorist blasts in Syria as they have overtly and covertly rendered logistical and financial support for armed rebels and terrorist groups in Syria.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011 with organized attacks by well-armed gangs against Syrian police forces and border guards being reported across the country.

Hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed, when some protest rallies turned into armed clashes.

The government blames outlaws, saboteurs, and armed terrorist groups for the deaths, stressing that the unrest is being orchestrated from abroad.

In October, calm was eventually restored in the Arab state after President Assad started a reform initiative in the country, but Israel, the US and its Arab allies are seeking hard to bring the country into chaos through any possible means. Tel Aviv, Washington and some Arab capitals have been staging various plots in the hope of stirring unrests in Syria once again.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9102112355>

- **Syria rebels getting arms with US help**

Report Washington has stepped up links with Syrian rebels, regional militaries allying with them, playing role in rebels' foreign support network.

WASHINGTON - Syria's rebels have seen an influx of arms including anti-tank weaponry for their fight against President Bashar al-Assad regime, in an effort coordinated with the help of the United States, a report said Wednesday.

Officials in President Barack Obama's administration insist it is not directly

supplying the weapons or providing funding, with Gulf states paying for the new arms, the Washington Post said, citing US and foreign officials.

But Washington has stepped up links with the rebels and regional militaries allying with them, playing a role in the rebels' foreign support network, the report said.

"We are increasing our nonlethal assistance to the Syrian opposition, and we continue to coordinate our efforts with friends and allies in the region and beyond in order to have the biggest impact on what we are collectively doing," a senior State Department official told the Post on condition of anonymity.

The US administration's move to increase contact with the rebels, and boosting information sharing with Gulf states who back them, is a shift in policy that up until now has resisted overt support for the armed groups battling Assad forces, the Post said.



US officials had Tuesday said Washington deplored escalating violence in Syria, after a bomb exploded in front of a UN convoy, and reports surfaced of a new massacre by government forces.

Syria's anti-regime revolt entered its 15th month of relentless violence that has killed more than 12,000 people and growing fears that a UN-backed peace plan will fail.

The United States has vowed to increase pressure on Assad to step down and the issue will be raised at the upcoming NATO meeting in Chicago, with US officials urging Damascus to implement a plan pushed by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan seeking a resolution to the crisis.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52285>

- **FSA: Hezbollah fighters in Syria, carrying out raids**

London/Beirut, Asharq Al-Awsat – As the Syrian military continued to shell various areas of the country yesterday, Free Syrian Army [FSA] sources informed Asharq Al-Awsat that Lebanese kill-squads affiliated to Hezbollah had entered Syrian territory, specifically the al-Qasir region, close to the Lebanese border.

FSA commander of Homs, Colonel Qasim Saad al-Din, revealed that Hezbollah forces raided several villages in Al-Qasir, including Al-Safsafah, Al-Masriyah, Al-Sawadiyah, Mutribah, and Zaytah. He stressed “these forces arrested 37 Syrians, including women, and also erected roadblocks at the entry point of each of these villages.”

The FSA commander asserted that the Hezbollah fighters entered these areas accompanied by Syrian security forces, adding that there were a total of around 200 Hezbollah fighters, divided into 20 separate groups, in the al-Qasir region yesterday. He also claimed that the Hezbollah fighters had illegally entered Syria via Shiite border villages known to be loyal to the Lebanese organization.

Colonel Saad-al-Din asserted that “we have received information from the villages and from the FSA confirming that they identified them [the Hezbollah fighters] from their accents and clothes, whilst they were also accompanied by elements speaking Farsi.”

He added “so far, they have carried out arrests and raided houses...injuring several people.” He also claimed that Hezbollah forces had previously aided and supported al-Assad regime forces in Syria, saying “they were present in more than one area in the Rif Dimashq governorate, as well as the western and southern Homs governorate. They were also present in large numbers in Al-Zabadani.”

For his part, FSA spokesman Colonel Khalid al-Hammoud informed Asharq Al-Awsat that the FSA is in possession of information confirming the presence of Hezbollah elements and fighters in Syria. He stressed that “Hezbollah elements are primarily deployed in the Al-Qasir area and the surrounding villages in the Homs countryside, as well as in Al-Zabadani, Rankus, and Madaya in the Rif Dimashq governorate, as these areas are close to

the Lebanese borders and they allow the Hezbollah elements to easily enter and leave the country.”

He added “there are also Iranian specialists present in the northern areas [of Syria] close to the Turkish borders who have set-up operation rooms...in order to intercept the telephone calls of activists and FSA members.”

Colonel Khalid al-Hammoud claimed that “the Hezbollah elements' role is confined to sniper operations, whilst the Iranian specialists’ tasks include training, communication operations and uncovering activists.”

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=29646>

- **Assad warns against sowing chaos in Syria**

President pours scorn on opposition group and claims reduction in "direct confrontation" since arrival of UN monitors.

A Free Syrian Army officer talking to Al Jazeera denies that his movement carried out recent bombings in Syria

Countries that "sow chaos" in Syria could suffer from it themselves, President Bashar al-Assad has said in an interview shown on Russian television.

Assad is facing an increasingly militarised uprising, which has claimed thousands of lives across the country since it erupted in March last year.

"For the leaders of these countries, it's becoming clear that this is not 'Spring' but chaos, and as I have said, if you sow chaos in Syria you may be infected by it yourself, and they understand this perfectly well," Assad said in the interview, broadcast on Rossiya-24 TV on Wednesday, referring to the so-called Arab Spring that toppled other long-time rulers.

He again denounced the armed opposition as a gang of "criminals" who he said contained religious extremists including members of al-Qaeda.

'Supporting reforms'

Referring to the opposition Free Syrian Army (FSA), Assad said: "It is not an army and it is not free.

"They get money and weapons from abroad from various countries. It is a group of criminals who have for years broken the law and received convictions."

Assad said that many "foreign mercenaries" from Arab countries fighting for the opposition had been killed but others were still alive.

Aid groups say Syria is blocking access to people in need

"They have been captured and we are preparing to show them to the world," he said, without giving further details.

The government says it has implemented a number of political reforms, but opposition groups have rejected the moves as too little, too late, and say that Assad's departure is an unconditional demand.

But he said in the TV interview that the main opposition bloc, the Syrian National Council, does not have "any kind of weight or significance within Syria", and that a majority of the people support the government.

He said Syrians showed in the May 7 parliamentary elections that they support what he called the government's policy of reform.

"The polling stations show the opinion of the people. It is a serious message for everyone both inside the country and also beyond its borders," Assad said.

Syrian officials say voter turnout in the election was 51 per cent, However, only limited results have been released.

Meanwhile, hundreds of UN observers have been deployed in the country to monitor compliance with a ceasefire plan brokered by Kofi Annan, the UN-Arab League envoy.

Assad said that since the observers' arrival, there had been a reduction in "direct confrontation" between the two sides but an increase in "terrorist attacks".

Accusing the West of ignoring opposition violence, he said: "The West only talks about violence, violence on the government side. There is not a word about the terrorists. We are still waiting."

UN observers 'safe'

Assad's televised remarks came as six UN monitors who were caught up in violence in the northern town of Khan Sheikhoun, were handed back to their UN colleagues on Wednesday by opposition fighters.

"We gave the six with their cars to a UN convoy near the entrance of Khan Sheikhoun. They are all safe, in good health and on their way to Damascus," Abu Hassan, a Free Syrian Army commander, said by satellite phone from the site of the handover.

Opposition activists said at least 21 civilians were killed in the town, in Idlib province, on Tuesday after security forces opened fire on a funeral procession while the observers were there.

A spokesman for the UN mission in Syria said three UN vehicles were damaged by an improvised explosive device, but no UN personnel were injured.

A pro-government TV station said unidentified attackers opened fire at the funeral.

The head of the monitoring mission, Major-General Robert Mood, confirmed the monitors were heading back to base.

"They have departed from Khan Sheikhoun and are on their way back. They expressed to me that they have been well treated," he said in Damascus on Wednesday.

He expressed gratitude to the Syrian government for "facilitating co-ordination" for the exit of the observers, and to the people of Khan Sheikhoun for treating them "with respect".

"That kind of violence is obviously the kind of violence we don't want to see," he said. "It is not going to contribute constructively to the aspirations of the Syrian people."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/05/2012516145146401292.html>

- **Israeli defense minister says Assad is 'doomed,' urges more pressure on him**

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said on Wednesday that Syrian president

Bashar al-Assad is "doomed" and called for increased pressure on his regime amid reports that Israel's intelligence no longer sees Assad's continuity as beneficial for the Jewish state.

Barak said Assad's departure would be a "major blow" to Iran as well as Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad, but stressed the importance of Russia's role in finding a way out of the current crisis.

He also warned that only Assad and the elites around him need to go, and not other structures of the Syrian regime including the army.

"I'm quite frustrated for the slowness of its collapse. I believe that he (Assad) is doomed anyhow. I believe that there is a need to raise our voices both for moral reasons and practical ... much more loudly," Barak told CNN.

He said it was important "that every possible step is taken by world community, by NATO, by the United States, by the Russians, Turkey could have a special role in it, to accelerate the whole thing."

“I think that a way should be found .. to change (the regime) in Syria, preferably (using) the Yemenite example, namely to let Assad and his group go out and ... not to dismantle the party, the intelligence, the armed forces.”

Barak statement came a day after Israeli media quoted a European diplomat, close to the talks held by the Israeli military intelligence chief, Maj. Gen. Aviv Kochavi’s in the United States, as saying that the Israeli intelligence community has changed its stance on Syria and now sees the Jewish state as “better off” if Assad’s regime was toppled.

Israel believes Assad’s fate is sealed, and the only question is how long his regime will last before it is eventually toppled, Kochavi said, according to the diplomat.

Two weeks ago, Kochavi was on a secret visit to Washington and the U.N. headquarters in New York, where he discussed Iran’s nuclear program, developments in Syria and Hezbollah’s increasing influence in Lebanon. In Washington, he met with senior White House and State Department officials, as well as senior officials in the Defense

Department Intelligence Agency and the CIA.

Israel, however, fears that Islamists will seize the opportunity, amid the roiling Syrian crisis, and hijack the Syrian government if Assad’s regime was toppled.

The fears likely explain the Israeli defense minister’s desire to safeguard the structure of the regime in Syria if Assad is toppled. Some observers say Israel favors an Egypt-like scenario where the military remained intact after the ruling clique was removed.

The Jewish state, which is closely monitoring events in Syria, dreads the aftermath of a toppled Syrian regime and that it could see the Syrian Golan Heights fall in the hands of terrorist groups like al-Qaeda.

Israel has warned of similar dangerous security vacuum in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

In early May, Israel warned Egypt that it has to control the rising unrest in Sinai if it wants to preserve peace with Israel.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/05/17/214604.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Judiciary Chief Cautions S. Arabia against Dangerous Game of Annexing Bahrain**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani described Saudi Arabia's new plot to annex Bahrain as a dangerous game started by Riyadh and its western supporters.

"The westerners and Arab states have started a dangerous game after they saw that the people of Bahrain do not give up their inalienable rights throughout time," Ayatollah Larijani said at a meeting with high-ranking Iranian judiciary officials.

He urged Riyadh and Manama rulers to "show wisdom" and give up their conspiracies against the people of Bahrain.

Meantime, thousands of the Bahraini people took to the streets in Manama and other cities across the country on Monday

to voice their strong protest at the Saudi plot for annexing Bahrain to its territories.

Protesters chanted slogans against the Al-Khalifa dynasty and renewed their call for the ouster of their country's tyrannical rulers.

Demonstrators also set fire to the US flag to show their anger at Washington's support for the Manama dictators.

The United States has recently resumed supply of arms to the rulers of the tiny country to help them suppress the Shiite majority who are calling for democracy and human rights.



The protest rallies were staged after a key opposition coalition in the Persian Gulf island called on the people to stage nationwide rallies to show their wrath and opposition against the plot.

Opposition forces in Bahrain had warned of the Al-Khalifa-Al-Saud plot for the annexation of Bahrain to Saudi Arabia under the guise of a new security agreement, describing the plot as an "illegal" and "dangerous" move.

On the surface the plan is aimed at developing unity between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia with regard to foreign relations, security, military and economy, but in depth the plan is a last-ditch effort by the two countries' monarchs for preventing the success of Bahrain's revolution.

The Arab Spring uprisings have been a challenge for the Persian Gulf rulers. Saudi Arabia took action to suppress the uprisings in Bahrain after being shocked to see Hosni Mubarak fall in Egypt.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9102112353>

- **Bahrain protests Iran criticism of GCC union plans**

DUBAI: Bahrain has summoned Iran's charge d'affaires to protest at what it called "gross violation of its sovereignty" in a new diplomatic row after Tehran

criticized efforts by Gulf Arab states to forge closer political and military union.

Arab heads of state met in Riyadh on Monday to discuss a call by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah to unite the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to counter Iran's growing influence in the Middle East, but failed to agree on further integration. Talks on the matter are to resume later this year.

An Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said that Bahrain would be better off heeding the calls of its people instead of seeking a union with other Gulf Arab monarchies.

Responding to an Iranian MP's comments reiterating Iranian territorial claims to Bahrain, the official IRNA news agency on Monday quoted Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani as saying: "If Bahrain is supposed to be integrated into another country, it must be Iran and not Saudi Arabia."

Bahrain's Foreign Ministry condemned both comments, saying diplomats presented a protest memorandum to the Iranian charge d'affaires in Manama.

“These statements represent a flagrant interference in the internal affairs of the kingdom, and gross violation of its sovereignty and independence, (and they) constitute completely unacceptable conduct,” the ministry said in a statement carried by Bahrain’s official BNA news agency late on Tuesday.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said the solution to Bahrain’s crisis was to fulfil the legitimate demands of its people, according to IRNA.

He warned that any “foreign intervention or non-normative plans ... will only deepen the wounds in Bahrain.”

Iran earlier riled Bahrain by saying that the Gulf island had historically been part of its territory.

The Gulf Arab state accuses Iran of fomenting the Shiite unrest, something the Islamic Republic denies.

After the meeting on Monday, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal said talks on a possible union of the six GCC members had been postponed to a further summit later this year.

The union proposal calls for economic, political and military coordination and a new decision-making body based in Riyadh, replacing the current GCC Secretariat.

A media adviser to Bahrain’s King Hamad was quoted as saying a new meeting to ratify the union would convene in Riyadh before a scheduled Gulf summit in Manama in December.

“The GCC Union is so close and will materialize soon,” BNA quoted Nabeel Al-Hamer as saying on his Twitter account.

He said that Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have already given their full backing for a GCC union, while Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates had expressed reservations about certain points. Oman was totally “reserved in its stance,” it added.

After the summit, Prince Saud also urged Iran “not to interfere” if an agreement was reached for a union.

Tension between Iran and Gulf Arab states has also run high over Iran's nuclear energy program.

Gulf Arab states are already tied militarily, politically and economically in the Gulf Cooperation Council, formed in 1981 by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to counter Iraqi and Iranian influence.

<http://www.arabnews.com/bahrain-protests-iran-criticism-gcc-union-plans>

- **Empowering women: Kingdom leads the way**

"I believe strongly in the rights of women. My mother is a woman. My sister is a woman. My daughter is a woman. My wife is a woman," said Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah in an interview with Barbara Walters on American television station ABC in October 2005.



Saudi women have taken remarkable steps toward successful achievements thanks to King Abdullah's full support in various areas.

On the occasion of the seventh anniversary of King Abdullah's accession to throne, Saudi activist for children and women's rights and member of the National Society of Human's Rights' executive board, Suhaila Zain Al-Abideen, said: Following the king's decision in September 2011 to allow women to become members of the Shoura Council as well as vote and contest the municipal councils, Saudi women have been given a powerful political right.

"Political participation is one of the most significant rights that Saudi women have gained from our beloved king. Saudi women are more successful than ever because our king believed in us and gave us our rights," she said. "Saudi women

have proven they are qualified to hold leading positions and becoming fully involved in both Shoura and municipal councils helps them gain their social, political and civil rights,” she added.

“Saudi women are now lawyers, engineers, scientists and successful businesswoman and we are asking for more. Now that women do not need permission from their male guardians to apply for a job or start a business, we also ask that we be given other benefits that do not need the authorization of our male guardians like going on a scholarship for female students and going to the Saudi courts, where women need to accompanied by male guardians,” said Al-Abideen.

Naila Attar, businesswoman and founder of the Baladi (My Town) initiative calling for women to be able to vote and participate in the municipal council elections, said all Saudi men should follow their king and make him their role model when it comes to wise leadership and empowering women.

“We are living now in the golden age for Saudi women because we are witnessing a

huge number of successes among us that has never seen before in the Kingdom,” she said.

“We are looking to be part of the political process in the municipal council and our initiative is to help those women gain experience and education to be decision makers. We have sent a report to the minister of municipal affairs demanding to start a female voluntary committee in municipal councils around the Kingdom to make sure women get the proper awareness, rehabilitation and training,” she added.

Columnist at Al-Watan newspaper and professor of linguistics at King Abdulaziz University’s girls’ college Amira Kashgari said she believes King Abdullah empowered Saudi women in so many different areas.

“This is notably the case in the political arena and there are so many other areas where women have been empowered in the Kingdom in the last seven years intellectually, socially, economically and politically,” she said.

“This political empowerment has transformed women’s ideas of themselves and the social balance in Saudi Arabia. To be part of the Shoura Council and to be able to vote and contest for the municipality councils is a major milestone in Saudi women’s lives because it will not only empower women but society as well,” she added.

“When you empower women, you empower the whole society because it reflects on the economic development of the Kingdom. Women’s participation is a must in all areas,” said Kashgari.

<http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/empowering-women-kingdom-leads-way>

- **Latest US measure to boost stability in Yemen: Freezing of financial assets**

Obama signs decree allowing sanctions to be imposed on individuals or entities deemed a threat to Yemen's stability.

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama signed a decree Wednesday allowing sanctions to be imposed on individuals or entities deemed a threat to Yemen's

stability, the White House said Wednesday.



"This executive order will allow the United States to take action against those who seek to undermine Yemen's transition and the Yemeni peoples' clear desire for change," White House spokesman Jay Carney said in a statement.

"The president took this step because he believes that the legitimate aspirations of the Yemeni people, along with the urgent humanitarian and security challenges, cannot be addressed if political progress stalls," he added.

The decree signed by Obama would empower the US Treasury to subject offending individuals and entities to asset freezes while prohibiting Americans from doing business with them.

Yemen, the poorest country in the Arabian peninsula, is the scene of an armed offensive against the Al-Qaeda network which has taken advantage of political instability and a leadership crisis to entrench itself in parts of the country.

Former president Ali Abdallah Saleh, who stepped down at the end of February, had presented himself as a bulwark against Al-Qaeda to garner support from the West, but was accused by critics of encouraging the growth of the terror network.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=52300>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Reopening NATO Logistic Route Sparks Increased Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Pakistan's Former Minister for Tribal Regions General Shah Mahmoud blasted the Islamabad government for giving a green signal for the reopening of the NATO supply route, and said the measure would increase terrorist attacks across the country.

"If the government embarks on reopening NATO's logistic route, a new wave of terrorist moves will be carried out across the country," Shah Mahmoud told FNA in Lahore on Wednesday.

He stressed that religious groups and Taliban would no doubt create problems for the NATO's logistic convoys, and added, "NATO will face tough reactions after reopening the route and opposition groups like Tahrik-i- Taliban Pakistan (TTP) will certainly attack their supplies."

Pakistan is facing growing pressure over reopening key supplies for NATO troops in neighboring Afghanistan.

Earlier, Former Director of Pakistan's Military Intelligence Organization General Hamid Gol had also lashed out at the parliament for giving a green signal for the reopening of the NATO supply route.

"A parliament represents people's views and demands, but after the recent measure of the (Pakistani) parliament and its approval of the plan for reopening NATO's logistic route, it came to be known that the parliament does not respect the

people's demands," Hamid Gol told FNA in April.

Referring to the Pakistani people's displeasure with the decision, he said that the nation showed its opposition to the parliament approval in the massive 'Defending Pakistan Rallies' held nationwide.



Pakistan had closed all supply routes after a cross-border NATO air strike killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in November 2011 and Islamabad is demanding a public apology for the incident for reopening the routes.

The US has so far refused to tender apology, but top American and NATO leaders have now pressed Islamabad to reopen key supply routes. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has warned Pakistan that it may miss a key NATO summit on Afghanistan in Chicago next week if NATO supply routes were not reopened.

NATO on Tuesday invited Pakistan's president to the upcoming Chicago summit on Afghanistan, the strongest sign yet that Islamabad is ready to reopen its western border to US and NATO military supplies heading to the war in the neighboring country.

President Asif Ali Zardari was expected to accept the invitation, a Pakistani official in Washington said.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9102112351>

- **Threats sent to embassies in Pakistan: Police**

Several Western embassies in Islamabad on Wednesday received letters containing suspicious powder and threats to poison NATO soldiers in Afghanistan, Pakistan officials said.



Islamabad police chief Bani Amin told AFP that embassies had received small packets containing black powder, which had been sent for laboratory analysis.

The letters said “poison” would be hidden in NATO supplies should Pakistan decide to lift a nearly six-month blockade on supplies for American and NATO troops fighting the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan.

Senior Pakistani security officials told AFP that the French embassy, and the Australian and British High Commissions had received suspicious packages.

“Embassies have received one sachet each. The problem is that it is in a meager quantity and difficult even to test.

It seems somebody has committed some mischief. We are sending it to a laboratory,” Amin told AFP.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/05/16/214530.html>

**This media summary is prepared by ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Nebahat Tanrıverdi O and 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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