



## MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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## 1. IRAQ

- **The blamelessness of Sunni and Shiite from the politicians' contentions**

Kadhim Al-Shammari/ I am not a pessimist, but the circumstances surrounding the political process and the cloudy atmosphere and the fighting of those holding the strings of directing it affect the greatest optimists with frustration. I am not disclosing a secret if I said that all events and problems and crises we have do not come to the level of , the issues that the fate of the country will depend upon or hinder its march . These crises are not born normally but they are placed in a strange womb and then wait until the swelling so as the inserter makes a cesarean operation amid a halo of miscarriage and the crowd of media and accusations that accompany the birth and turns to tail elongates through the passing of days.

The differences and rivalries at the beginning of formation of the new state between the Accordance Front and the National Coalition, as the Accordance and its characters represented the Sunni and the National Coalition and its participants represented the Shiites. The differences

were not built upon different views on the state administration and how to deal with the events, but was in the form of accusations directed from each party to the other under the pretext that the Shiites seek marginalization of the Sunnis and Sunnis do not want the Shiites to exercise power and people from each party fuel disputes and accusations until we got to the brink of civil war and I kept the skies of the events of sedition shadowed Iraq and many innocent victim were murdered on identity while those who fueled the affliction remained reserving their positions and their earnings and their privileges, even those who left the position or the parliament kept their chances and voices even higher, directing accusations or threats while being out of Iraq and out the political process. The hope grows in us as we move away from those crazy days, and we dream that Iraq is moving towards stability, harmony and political crises that have occurred or are located will be confined to the corridors of the government or the parliament and they will be resolved no matter how expanded or being long in accordance with the Constitution and its provisions and materials, but the latest crisis between the



Iraqia List (heir of compatibility) and the coalition of law state (the heir of the National Coalition) is almost much evaporate the jots of that hope and it may bring us back to square one if those who manage it insisted to walk approach people who had hostility and were fueling their disagreement name of Sunnis and Shiites and we may find ourselves at the doors of a sectarian war or living in the swamps of sedition and murder on identity again and this is what no jealous one wish for his country. Today with Ramadan on the doorstep we pray to God that everyone return to their consciences and to their Lord, and their humanity and to sit down as brothers solving their differences and disagreements of practice to walk again in the way that Allah pleases, and leads to the construction of Iraq and save the souls of his sons.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/articles/304-7--the-blamelessness-of-sunni-and-shiite-from-the-politicians-contentions-.html>

- **When will the bubble burst?**

by: Judit Neurink \*

„Why don't you buy a house in Kurdistan, in stead of paying such a high rent", people have asked me. A good question, with rents in Erbil as high as 2000 dollars a month for a 3 bedroom apartment and 3000 and more for a villa. Yet buying might mean getting caught up in the bubble of Kurdistan's housing business.

udit niyorinkKurdistan is booming. There is hardly a neighborhood in the main Kurdish towns and cities without building activities going on. Housing, industry, hotels, shopping malls - Kurdistan is building at a speed that is hardly imaginable. Compounds of luxurious apartments are being filled, and I have been told that at the moment some 62.000 units are still in the process of being build in Erbil alone.

At the same time, in the Kurdish capital Erbil the prices of housing have gone up enormously. In a society where an average government wage is around 600 dollars, the rent of apartments and family houses has gone up to between 1800 and 4000 dollars. That is partly because there is a lack of good offices, and (international) companies have taken over many of the family houses. Most of the houses in English Village and Italian Village, two

neighbourhoods originally built for upper class families, have been taken over by companies. With investors and oil industries arriving, there is a lot of request. These companies can pay more than a family, so the rents have gone up to highs that hardly any family will be able to afford any more.

This seems to be a process that repeats itself. A process that starts with the sale of housing before it is built, and the reselling of it before it is even finished. Before anyone can move in, most apartments have been sold twice or three times to new owners. I know of apartments that cost around 100.000 dollars when they were still on paper, and are now doing around 250.000. Most owners are not interested in the property to live in it; they see it as an investment. For that reason, many owners do not even bother to rent the place out, and many apartments remain empty.

Those who do rent their property out, ask high rents. They only need to look at the market, which is dominated by companies, to decide on a slightly lower rent than the one asked in other neighborhoods. This starts the move, as it

did from Italian to English Village, and now to the newer apartments of for instance Royal City.

What happens to the older houses, that are left in this game? That is where the bubble comes in. It might be a profitable game to buy and sell housing, but there is always someone who in the end pays the bill. At the moment that is the latest owner of the house that is no longer sellable, as other, newer buildings are more interesting. He is stuck with a building for which he paid a price that was already far too high. He was the poor guy who did not realise he was at the end of the game - as I am sure there are many like him.

Yet the game continues, and housing prices and rents in Erbil are still on the rise. Who can afford a rent like that, you wonder. And: should the government not interfere, as those who the housing projects were planned for, do not at all profit from them. Which means that there is a huge demand for affordable housing, and that in itself again pushes up the prices.

However in Sulaymaniya, where building is going on on a bit slower rate, the prices

are on the way back down. Here owners still need the rent, it seems, and renters have been clever enough to use the lower rate elsewhere in town to start the descent down to more decent prices. That will probably also be the way out for those who got stuck with unsellable houses in Erbil. Bring down the rent, and many will move back into the slightly older areas.

This makes you wonder when this balloon is going to burst. And who is going to suffer - and who to profit. I'd rather be at the side looking in, than in the middle. So if I buy a house, preferably not in Kurdistan, however much this country has got under my skin.

\* Independent Journalist.  
(AKnews)

- **Separate economic deal with KRG raises concerns over implications**

Turkey's deals for direct oil and natural gas imports from Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), bypassing the Iraqi central government, will put further strain on Turkey's relations with Iraq and hamper Turkish interests in the Middle East irreversibly, political experts say.

Turkey began importing crude oil and natural gas from northern Iraq's autonomous region under an agreement signed between Turkey and the KRG in May, without going through Baghdad. Under the terms of the deal, the KRG will buy refined oil from Turkey. The Iraqi Kurdish administration claims that Iraq has not been supplying sufficient refined oil to meet domestic demand.

The deal has drawn a harsh response from the Iraqi central government. In a statement released on Sunday, government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh deemed Turkey's import of oil from Kurdistan illegal and illegitimate, on the grounds that the oil and gas are the property of all Iraqis and that export revenue should be managed only by the federal government of Iraq.

According to Bessma Momani from the University of Waterloo's Balsillie School of International Affairs in Canada, speaking to Sunday's Zaman: "If Turkey continues to negotiate separately with the Kurdish autonomous government, it has the potential to undermine the authority of the Iraqi central government. Then the Iraqi government will lose authority in the

long term, which is not in the interests of anyone in the region, particularly the Turks.”

Events of the past week have increased tensions between Turkey and the Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki-led Iraqi government, whose relations with Turkey are not a bed of roses. In a government-level warning on Sunday, and a second following two days later, Dabbagh condemned Turkey for violating its airspace and territory, due to repeated strikes Turkey has conducted on suspected terrorist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) militant targets in northern Iraq following clashes on the Iraqi side of the border.

The KRG and Maliki-led government are locked in a long-running dispute over the oil and natural gas resources of northern Iraq. In early 2011, the two sides reached a tentative agreement, under which the Kurds would send oil to Baghdad to be sold. But the exports were halted in April by the Kurds, who claimed that Baghdad was withholding revenue.

Baghdad maintains that the region has no right to sign deals unilaterally and that

exports must go through the state-run pipelines, while Kurds argue that the constitution does in fact give them the right to sign agreements without consulting Baghdad. Canadian and Norwegian private oil companies, as well as America’s Exxon Corporation, are already operating in the KRG.

Necdet Pamir, an energy policy expert and also a World Energy Council Turkish National Committee board member, claims that Kurdish accusations against the central government are designed to clear the way for Iraqi Kurdistan’s unilateral oil trade with foreign countries, without their being obliged to share revenue with the rest of the country. Pamir also criticized the Turkish government for becoming involved in the internal dispute by cutting separate deals with the KRG.

KRG leader Massoud Barzani is a strong supporter of a campaign by coalition partners in the multiethnic and multi-sectarian government to unseat Maliki, due to unresolved economic disputes with the Maliki-led government. Although Maliki’s opponents failed to win the numbers to unseat the prime minister in a

parliamentary vote of no confidence, the push against Maliki is ongoing in Iraqi political circles.

“Northern Iraq is tacitly agreeing with Turkey on such a political situation [in Iraq], and some business circles close to the Turkish government and Barzani are trying to gain commercial benefits out of this situation,” Pamir stated. He claims that Turkey’s position hampers Iraq’s stability by inciting disputes between the central government and the KRG, which would in turn harm Turkey’s long-term security and economic interests in the region.

“The most important thing is to maintain stability. Take the Kirkuk-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline [between Turkey and Iraq] as an example. Before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the pipeline was supplying 35 million tons of crude oil every year, which is its minimum capacity. After the US invasion, its annual performance could rise to 20 million tons at the most. Only Turkey loses out in that situation in terms of transaction revenues,” Pamir said. He also recalled that the terrorist PKK is more easily infiltrating Iraq due to instability.

Due to current tensions with Baghdad, Turkey is likely to suspend talks with the central government for a planned capacity increase of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline, and for supplementary oil transactions from the Basra region in the Shiite south of the country. Energy Minister Taner Yıldız has recently held talks with Iraqi authorities about the possibility of additional transactions from Basra, through a pipeline that would be connected to Kirkuk-Ceyhan. The oil from the Basra region passes from the small al-Faw Port of Iraq through the Strait of Hormuz, but Iranian threats to close down the strait, through which 20 per cent of the world’s oil passes, would push Iraq to seek alternatives for Basra oil.

These projects could also be viewed as an opportunity to improve Turkey’s ties with Baghdad and to decrease Iranian sectarian-based influence in the Shiite south of Iraq.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Maliki have traded accusations several times this year. Erdoğan last month accused Maliki of fanning tensions between Shiite Muslims, Sunni Muslims and Kurds in Iraq through “self-centered”

behavior. Maliki quickly responded that Turkey is becoming a “hostile state” with a sectarian agenda.

“Turkey could not achieve anything by becoming involved in a showdown with the Iraqi government. Turkey should conduct a more active policy in Iraq that also embraces Iraqi Shiites,” Bilgay Duman, a Middle East expert at the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM), said.

<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-287265-separate-economic-deal-with-kg-raises-concerns-over-implications.html>

- **Iraqi Kurds train their Syrian brethren**

Iraq's Shia-led government walks a tightrope on Syria, as regional groups enter the political and military fray.

Salahadin, Iraq – The Kurdish government in the north of Iraq is training Kurdish-Syrian fighters who will be sent back to defend Kurdish territory at home, says Kurdish regional President Massoud Barzani.

In an interview with Al Jazeera at the presidential palace near Erbil on Sunday, Barzani confirmed for the first time the presence of a training camp in the Kurdish region.

The training puts yet another twist on complicated Kurdish relations and highlights major differences between the policy of the Kurdish regional government and Iraq's central government towards neighboring Syria.

“A good number of the young Kurds who fled have been trained. We do not want to interfere directly in the situation but they have been trained,” Barzani told Al Jazeera in his first interview in months. He said they have not yet been sent into Syria but are intended to be deployed there to fill any "security vacuum" as Syrian security forces retreat.

Barzani said the fighting force, made up largely of Syrian Kurds who deserted the army and made their way across the border, would take its orders from a new high committee formed two weeks ago when two major Kurdish opposition groups put aside their differences.

“They have not been sent to Syria. They are still here – if this high committee requires them to go they still could – if not they will wait for the situation to be sorted out because these people are from these areas and they will go back eventually,” he said. “This was aimed at filling the vacuum that will be created.”

'Unified' Kurdish position

Barzani, the most prominent regional Kurdish leader, oversaw an agreement in Erbil between the Syrian armed opposition and the mainstream Kurdish National Council.

“The best and the biggest support that we could provide is to have a united position and in this we were successful,” he said.

He said Syrian forces withdrew from several towns in the largely Kurdish al-Hasekah region which are now controlled by Kurdish fighters.

At Syria’s border crossing with northern Iraq, Iraqi officials said Syrian security forces on Sunday morning retook the border post from gunmen who had seized it.

The Iraqi and Syrian sides of the border post are just metres away. One Iraqi border official told us he had spoken with a lieutenant colonel of the Free Syrian Army who took control of the post along with Kurdish and Arab fighters.

They melted away though when Syrian security forces sent in helicopters to retake the Yarabiya crossing early Monday morning.

Iraq’s Shia-led central government has been treading a very careful line on Syria, warning of the dangers of arming the opposition and saying the Syrian people must decide on their own future.

With violence worsening though and attacks on Iraqis in Syria increasing, the government has called on Iraqis to return home, seen by some as an implicit recognition that they do not expect the Syrian government to last. While thousands have returned to central Iraq, hundreds of Sunni Iraqis who fled sectarian violence say they plan to remain in the safer Kurdish region.

Iraq has closed the gates to Syrian refugees, saying it does not have the resources to take care of them at its remote desert crossings. Humanitarian officials from one of the borders reported that Iraqi authorities on the weekend had handed a Syrian family seeking asylum back to Syrian authorities. One official said it was likely because the family included military-age men.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and aid organisations have appealed for Iraq to open the borders to Syrian civilians trying to escape the fighting.

(Aljazeera.com)

- **Deterioration of Situation in Syria Threatens Entire Region**

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Sixteen months after it began, the conflict in Syria has now transformed into a full-scale war.

The bombing last week in the heart of Damascus, which killed the ministers of defense and the interior along with two senior security officials, has shattered any remaining hope that the U.N. peace plan can be implemented.

Accounts of the situation on the ground speak of increasing violence and its spillover into neighboring countries. Analysts say that the situation has the potential to inflame sectarian tensions in the region.

In Lebanon, violence broke out in Tripoli between Shia and Alawite groups, who support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime, and armed Sunni groups, who largely support the opposition.

In June, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari warned that the Syrian uprising could affect Iraq as well.

"If this conflict is to turn into an all-out sectarian or civil war, Iraq would be affected, Lebanon would be affected, Jordan will not be immune," Zebari said.

He added, "We don't want to see chaos reign, you see, in the region, in the neighborhood, and that's why Iraq should have a say, a role in what is going to occur in Syria. No country can ignore or bypass Iraq in this regard."

Zebari later claimed to have "solid information" that members of al-Qaeda

were operating in Syria. "Our main concern, to be honest with you, is about the spillover — about extremist, terrorist groups taking root in neighboring countries," he said.

The foreign minister noted that the Syrian government failed to clamp down on Sunni Arab insurgents entering Iraq, and that now "their direction is the other way around."

The direction could reverse again, warns Ramzy Mardini, an analyst at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington, D.C. "In the short run, the Syrian insurgency could serve as a magnet for fighters, but may spill over into Iraq after the Assad regime falls," he said. "Baghdad faces the worrisome possibility that emboldened and battle-hardened Sunni insurgents in Syria will target the [Iraqi Prime Minister] Maliki government."

Many also worry that the Syrian crisis has the potential to further entrench the ongoing tension between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal government in Baghdad. The KRG has developed close ties with Turkey, a fierce opponent of the Assad government,

while the Iraqi government is under the heavy influence of Iran, who supports the Shia government in Damascus.

"We have a political crisis; this definitely reflects on the security situation," Zebari said. "And these groups will find ways to operate, to strike in order to widen the gap between the political leaders."

Mardini predicts that "as the crisis in Syria continues, sectarian identities will become more salient in Iraq."

He notes, "The Shia-Sunni divide will harden. This will affect Iraqi politics and make it harder for Sunni and Shia groups to break from their base and cooperate."

According to Mardini, recent attacks in Iraq may reflect a renewed confidence among Sunni extremists due to the situation in Syria. He adds, "How the Iraqis respond to future sectarian attacks as the Syrian crisis continues will be more important than the attacks themselves."

Other analysts, such as David Pollock of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, downplay the impact the Syrian crisis has on the relationship between the KRG and Iraqi government.

“I don't think the KRG will allow Syrian developments to disrupt its already tense relations with Baghdad and Sunni Arabs,” Pollock said. “Rather, the KRG will try to remain on the sidelines of Syria precisely because of the risks of aggravating tensions with other regional parties.”

Pollock noted the caution necessary from the KRG at this time, with strengthened ties with Turkey possible that could just as easily be undermined with increased support of Syrian Kurds.

On Friday, reports from the Kurdish areas of Syria indicated that militia groups of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish National Council (KNC) “liberated” the cities of Amude and Efrin from pro-Assad forces.

Michael Knights, an Iraq and Syria expert with the Washington Institute, thinks the KRG will seek to minimize the blowback from these recent advances in the Kurdish areas of Syria.

“I don't sense that Syrian Kurds play into KRG calculations much at all,” Knights said, noting that the KRG’s interests are

more focused on Turkey than the Kurdish areas of Syria.

“The Syria issue is another point of consensus with Turkey — that Assad must go — but is a strictly secondary concern for the KRG,” he said. “The KRG and Baghdad have enough issues to argue about; Syria is very low on the agenda.”

Still, senior KRG officials are watching the situation in Syria closely. Falah Mustafa Bakir, head of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations, said, “Whatever happens in Syria will have a direct impact on what happens in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, and also on other neighboring countries.”

The Syrian Kurds have wisely hedged their bets throughout the uprising, supporters say, with the PYD and KNC presenting themselves as neutral between a regime that has not granted them their proper civil liberties and a loosely organized opposition with mostly nationalist and Islamist elements.

Bakir noted this hesitancy to support one side or the other without guarantees of rights or potential negotiations over

future autonomy. “Some people want the Kurds to blindly support any effort,” he said. “No. The Kurds have suffered far more to be convinced to join a process without knowing what it has in store for them and their future.”

Bakir went on to say that the KRG has a clear position that is not aligned with what Baghdad would like to see happen in Syria. The KRG, he says, encourages the KNC to reach an understanding with the Syrian National Council to ensure they are on good terms for the future.

Others have criticized Iraq’s response to the Syrian crisis. Nawaf Fares, the recently defected Syrian Ambassador in Baghdad, called Iraq’s stance on Syria “contradictory to the truth,” and stated that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is bowing to pressure from Iran to remain neutral.

But Labid Abawi, Iraq’s deputy foreign minister, emphasized Baghdad’s opposition to Assad. “Our position has been clear — we don’t side with Assad; we side with the people. But at the same time, we want to see a peaceful outcome to this, not a violent outcome or civil war,” he said.

Abawi said that Assad believes he still enjoys the support of his people, which has been a roadblock to progress in the country, and that a peaceful transition of the regime out of power is the best solution.

“If we use Kofi Annan’s plan or any plan to convince or force Bashar al-Assad to relinquish power to a national transitional unity government, then the entire system will not collapse, and we can maintain stability even after the regime,” the deputy minister stated.

He added, “But if civil war continues and Assad and the regime collapses under the pressure of the violence, then the whole system will collapse and there will be chaos — exactly what happened in Iraq.”

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/4988.html>

- **Comments on President Obama’s letter to Prime Minister Maliki (Rudaw )**

Iraq’s federal prime minister Nuri al Maliki claimed on July 19th that U.S. President Barack Obama had sent a letter to him that supported Al Maliki’s opposition to

Exxon Mobil's oil deal with the Kurdistan Region.

As part of his ongoing campaign against the oil rights of the Kurdistan Region, al Maliki had previously written to Obama to request he order Exxon to stop exploring for oil in Kurdistan.

Let us first ignore the misleading headlines associated with the letter from President Obama to Prime Minister Maliki and examine the facts as reported. The letter has not been published anywhere, so all we know is what Prime Minister Maliki's office has said in a written statement, which, according to Reuters, was the following:

“We would like to confirm that the letter was positive and convincing and stresses its respect for the constitution and Iraqi laws, in the same manner as the Iraqi government is seeking.”

Those words “stresses its respect for the Constitution and Iraqi laws” are laudable and we agree with them. Those words do not in any way back the Federal Government's efforts to deprive the Kurdistan Region and the Producing

Governorates from their rights as set out under Articles 112 and 115 of the Constitution; quite the opposite, they offer implicit support for those rights by stressing respect for the Constitution.

As for the letter being “positive and convincing,” that merely suggests that it was couched in diplomatic language. President Obama has most likely explained that under the US political and market-driven economic system, private companies make their own business decisions, beyond the reach of government control, hence the President will not be able to interfere with their decisions.

This would appear to be the most likely message of the letter. But if indeed it says more than that, enabling Baghdad to claim that the US government backs Baghdad against Erbil, supports Baghdad's desire not to share oil revenues, and agrees with Baghdad's desire to impose centralized decision-making on all oil activities in Iraq, then we respectfully invite Prime Minister Maliki's office to publish the full text of the letter for purposes of transparency.

Otherwise, this issue should remain an internal political and constitutional matter for all Iraqis to resolve by themselves, without dragging foreign governments in to the argument.

Finally, actions speak louder than words. The arrival of Chevron as a new investor in Kurdistan on the same day as the partial content of a letter from the US President was released in order to further a certain political agenda in Iraq, only serves to validate the explanations stated above.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/4980.html>

<http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/syrias-kurds-stand-alone-after-rejecting-rebels-and-regime>

- **UNAMI's Erbil Region Head Meets KDP's Foreign Relations Chief**

Khabat Newspaper (No. 4122/July 23)

July 23:- Erbil Region UNAMI Office Head, Sokol Kondi, visited the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) Foreign Relations Office and was received by the

Office Chief [also KDP's Leadership Council], Hemin Hawrami.

At the meeting, the latest political developments in Iraqi and in the region, recent changes in the region, the Kurdish position, the political situation in Syria and Baghdad-Erbil issues were discussed.

Later, Hawrami shed light on KDP's position regarding Iraq's political situation and the relation between Baghdad and Erbil, reiterating support to the Iraqi Constitution and insistence on [Iraqi Premier] Noori Maliki's questioning.

The Kirkuk issue, Article 140, the issue of the Peshmarga and the hydrocarbon law were also discussed at the meeting. (Unofficial translation from Kurdish by Erbil PIO)

(Khabat)

- **Sadrism leader to Asharq Alawsat: We are not a party to reform paper, it does not rise up to our expectations**

Over the past few days, there have been conflicting positions within the National Coalition (NC) on the reform plan prepared by the NC which includes 70

items on everything related to the work of the state and its institutions. While the State of Law Coalition (SoL) led by Prime Minister Nuri Maliki denies a disagreement with the Sadrists on the reform paper, the Sadrist Movement confirms there are deep differences between the two sides. According to information obtained by Asharq Alawsat from sources within the NC, “the differences between the Sadrists and the SoL within the political body of the coalition emerged when the Sadrists insisted to submit their project on specifying the terms of the three presidencies to Parliament, considering that the intent of that is Prime Minister Nuri Maliki and the SoL and not another person or entity”. The sources added that “the SoL MPs in the Reform Committee were not convinced with justifications given by the members of the Sadrist movement for passing the law as long as the term of the President of the Republic is specified for two terms and the parliament presidency is not as important at the operational level as the government, which means that the SoL and Maliki are targeted by the Sadrists.”

(Asharq Alawsat)

- **MP: if the reform paper fails, Iraq will go on a dangerous slope!**

BAGHDAD, July 23 / NINA / MP, for Iraqiya List, Talal Hussein Zobaie saw that, in case of the reform paper submitted by the National Alliance failed to achieve the desired results, the political process in Iraq will go to a dangerous slippery slope, he says.

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "The National Alliance has to come with a comprehensive process of reform including what has been agreed upon, to make the reform paper usefulness process."

Regarding the threat of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to disclose documents indicting some politicians, Zobaie stressed "the Prime Minister should not hide any file, and he has to hold the responsibility not to submit those files to the court."

(NINA)

- **MPs to Al Bayina Al Jadida: We have two choices to resolve crisis: early elections or political reform**

The National Coalition reiterated its commitment to avoid media escalation against the political blocs to pave the way for a dialogue with them. The Coalition also pointed out that its paper on reforming the political process is not an alternative to the papers prepared by other blocs. It reaffirmed its rejection to any initiative calling for foreign interference or using weapons to impose any political system. Leader of the National Coalition Ibrahim Al-Jafari said in a press conference that “The Coalition reiterated its commitment to avoid media escalation against the partners in the political process so as to pave the way for making the dialogue with them a success.” MP of the State of Law Coalition Abbas Al-Bayati said, “The only choice we have in case the political reform project fails is early elections, reproduction of the parliament and redrawing the political map.”

(Al Bayina Al Jadida)

- **Supreme Islamic Council supports limitation of three Presidencies’ term retroactively by two elections rounds**

The Supreme Islamic Council expressed its support for legislating of a law at the Iraqi

COR to limit the term of the three Presidencies by two elections in a retroactive manner. MP of Muatin Bloc which represents the Islamic Council in the COR, Hassoun Fatlawi said in a statement to Khandan that legislating a law that allows the three Presidencies to serve only for two terms in a retroactive manner, paves the way for the establishment of democracy in Iraq and prevents the return of dictatorship to Iraq.

In the same context, Fatlawi revealed in his remarks the presence of an adequate majority at the COR for the approval of the draft law as it is compatible with the Constitution and the Law. He noted to the irreversible and non-negotiable stance of his bloc from this law.

(al-Taakhi)

- **MP Lubna Abdel-Rahim splits from al-Iraqiya**

Shafaq News, July 23 / MP Lubna Abdel-Rahim announced on Monday, its split from al- Iraqiya List and joining “Free al- Iraqiya”. Abdul Rahim said in a press conference attended by "Shafaq News" , that "I announce today my split from al- Iraqiya list and joining Free al- Iraqiya after

that I saw that the (Free) is consistent with my thoughts.”

(Shafaq News)

- **Al-Baidhaa joins al Hall Bloc**

An informed source of Iraqi Baidhaa bloc led by Jamal al Bateikh revealed that the bloc has joined al Hall Block led by Jamal Karboli, noting that the official announcement would be issued in few days. The source who spoke on anonymity said that Baidhaa bloc decided to join al Hall Bloc and form a new political bloc following a joint meeting between the two blocs. The source added that this move would be announced officially within few days.

(Addustour)

- **Gorran calls for conversion of Peshmarga and Asaish to national forces in Kurdistan Region)**

ERBIL, July 23 (AKnews) – The opposition Gorran Movement has called for the conversion of Peshmerga and Asaish forces to national forces in the Kurdistan Region.

Gorran spokesman Shaho Saed said: "The Kurdish state should be the target of a political leadership in the region, but that leadership is seeking to consolidate its authority instead."

Saed added that one of the most important necessary steps to achieve the Kurdish state is to make all institutions and public agencies in the region national.

He said the most prominent of these institutions and organs are Peshmarga and security forces (Asaish).

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/318165/>

- **Angry demonstrators clash with IPs after Diwaniya explosion**

Diwaniya, July 23 (AIN) –Many security elements were injured due to clashes that erupted with angry demonstrators who gathered to protest the deteriorated security situation in Diwaniya after a bomb explosion that took place at a local market in central Diwaniya on Monday morning.

Security source reported to AIN on Monday "A bomb exploded at a local

market in central Diwaniya city which resulted in killing and injuring many civilians,” noting that “Casualties due to the explosion are still unidentified yet.”

“Security forces blocked the explosion site and disabled the phone calls service in anticipation of further explosions,” the source added.

“The security forces also started firing in the air to forbid the citizens from gathering in the explosion site but the angry civilians clashed with the security forces which developed into exchanging fire shooting and burning a police vehicle and damaging governmental buildings,” the source concluded.

(alliraqnews)

- **Iraq considers three towns in Kirkuk as military bases**

Jul 23 2012

Qarahanjir town, one of the towns which is considered a military base

Nine years after the fall of the Baath regime, the Iraqi government still considers three towns in Kirkuk as military bases.

Hasan Torhan, Chairman of the Kirkuk Provincial Council confirmed the news saying Qarahanjir, Shwan, and Yaychi towns are yet to be admitted as formal townships. Although the Kirkuk administration has tried to make them townships, the Iraqi government has still to do so.

The three towns are considered ancient towns of Kirkuk, but were made military bases in 1992 by the Baath regime. After more than nine years since the fall of the Baath regime, the towns are still prevented from basic services due to their legal status as military bases.

The chairman of the KPC also said, “The Iraqi PM promised us to change their status soon, while no decision has been made concerning this issue.”

<http://kirkuknow.com/english/?p=11726>

- **Hamoudi calls on government to reconsider stance over not receiving Syrian refugees**

Baghdad, July 23 (AIN) –The Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, called the

government to re-consider its stance over not receiving the Syrian refugees into Iraq.

A statement by the head of the Committee, Humam Hammoudi, received by AIN, cited "The Committee reminds the government of the Syrian stances in receiving the Iraqis in the last few years."

"The Committee stresses the necessity of hosting the Syrian families especially the women, children and old people," he added.

Iraq has officially announced that it is unable to receive the Syrian refugees due to the lack of services to receive them in the desert lands where no services can be provided for them.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=14838:hamoudi-calls-government-to-re-consider-stance-over-not-receiving-syrian-refugees-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14838:hamoudi-calls-government-to-re-consider-stance-over-not-receiving-syrian-refugees-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Nujaifi: Decision to close our borders before Syrian refugees inhumane, influenced by Iran in support of Al-Assad**

Ninewa Governor Atheel Nujaifi, a leading member of the Iraqiya coalition led by Iyad Allawi, considered that the decision of "the Iraqi government to close borders in the face of Syrian refugees came to support the regime of President Bashar al-Assad", pointing out that "the argument of the Iraqi government in dealing with the Syrian regime is continuing to recognize the regime. Not allowing the Syrian refugees to flee for their lives supports the actions of the Syrian regime". Nujaifi told Asharq Alawsat by telephone from Mosul, the center of Ninewa governorate, yesterday, that "the Iraqi government's decision was influenced by Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah which support the regime of President Bashar al-Assad", calling for "receiving all the refugees, especially as we have prepared to set up camp in the area of Rabia near the Syrian border to receive any number of the Syrian brothers. However, the Iraqi government's decision prevented that."

The Governor of Ninewa, the nearest Iraqi governorate to the Syrian border, expressed his suffering, saying: "We are caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, I am an official in the

Iraqi government and must abide by its decisions but on the other hand, I personally as a politician in the Iraqiya coalition find that the Iraqi government's decision to close borders in the face of the Syrian brothers is wrong and unwise and contrary to human rights. Any human being who finds that his life is threatened has the right to resort to any country and must be protected”, pointing out that “Iraq is a safe country and is able to open refugee camps for the Syrians. It is Iraq’s duty to protect them.” Nujaiifi revealed that “two Syrian military personnel fled from the army and took refuge in Iraqi territory in Ninewa. The border troops of the General Command of the Armed Forces (led by Iraqi prime minister Nuri Maliki) captured and handed them over to the forces of the Syrian regime without our knowledge or the consent of the local government in the governorate. They were executed by the Syrian army.”

(Asharq Alawsat )

- **Salafi Islamists confiscate Iraqis’ passports and kill a family in Jermana.... Baghdad tempts returnees with 4 million IQD**

Orders to detain returning Baathists affiliated with Free Army

Addustour came to know from high ranking security sources that high orders have been issued to arrest the Iraqi Baathists who are returning from Syria, especially after the Intelligence Service had received information confirming the connection of some of them with the so-called Free Army. The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed that the aim of detaining the Baathists is to investigate their connection with the Free Army elements, after receiving information from the Syrian Intelligence System confirming that those Baathists intend to head to the western governorates and confer with the tribal leaders in Anbar to cooperate with the Free Army in two spheres; the first is to cooperate with the Free Army in case of the fall of the Syrian Regime and the second sphere is to agree to harbor the Salafi Islamists and the Free Army elements in case Bashar could defeat the rebellions in Syria. “The Iraqi refugees are targeted now by the Free Army and the Salafi Islamists under the pretext of backing the Syrian Regime.” The source said. “Many Iraqis stranded in Syrian cities

after confiscating their passports by the Salafi Islamists and the Free Army as they pass in areas controlled by the Free Army” the source disclosed.

(Addustour)

- **Source: More than 500 Iraqi families exposed to killings and kidnappings in Syria**

Shafaq News, July 23 / An informed diplomatic source revealed early on Monday, the exposure of more than 500 Iraqi families in Syria to killings and kidnapping, indicating that most Iraqi families prefer to stay in Syria rather than returning to Iraq.

The source, who asked not be named told "Shafaq News", that" many Iraqi families in Syria were exposed to murder and kidnapping in one year, and there are 500 Iraqi families that include a murdered or kidnapped person.”

"Most of the Iraqi families in Syria refuse to return to Iraq and prefer to stay in Syria, despite the dire situation they are experiencing."

"Iraqi families living in Syria are living a real threat that doesn't differ at all from the threat that the Iraqis were suffering from in 2005 and 2006 in Iraq in the days of the sectarian fighting."

The source explained that "despite this threat, many Iraqi families in Syria would prefer not to return to Iraq."

Iraq has allocated dozens of trucks to transport its citizens who wish to return as well as a number of planes to transport them by air, free of charge.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3051-source-more-than-500-iraqi-families-exposed-to-killings-and-kidnappings-in-syria.html>

- **Kurdish Leaders Deny Claims Peshmerga Forces Entering Syria**

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands –Syrian opposition leaders accused the Kurdish parties of receiving support from the Peshmerga forces of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in an attempt to take over the Kurdish areas in Syria.

Kamal al-Labwani, member of the Syrian National Council [SNC], told Alarabiya

news network that the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) is supporting the Kurdish parties in Syria “by sending some armed forces from Peshmerga to help Syrian Kurds to take control of the Kurdish areas in Syria”.

“We have information that a number of Peshmerga members entered the Kurdish areas in Syria and they are fighting now side by side with other Kurdish armed groups,” al-Labwani added.

But Kurdish politicians and activists in Syria denied the claims of the Arab opposition, and considered it propaganda aiming to create division within the revolutionary forces.

Yilmaz Saeed, a Kurdish activist and member of the Tevgera Ciwanên Kurd [Kurdish Youth Movement] in Syria, told Rudaw on Sunday that the claims of the Arab opposition are baseless.

“The Kurdish forces that recently entered from Iraqi Kurdistan into the Kurdish areas of Syria are Syrian Kurdish soldiers who defected from the Syrian army and resorted to Iraqi Kurdistan where they received military training and got organized, and now they are back to

participate in the liberation of their own cities and villages from the armed forces of Assad regime,” Saeed said in an interview with Rudaw.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/news/syria/4990.html>

- **Kurdish MP belittles Obama's letter to Maliki**

KIRKUK, July 22/ Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish Alliance MP minimized the importance of the letter sent by US president Barack Obama on Exxon Mobil Oil Company in Kurdistan and disputed areas, calling for a solution to the issue according to the Iraqi constitution.

MP Khalid Shwani told Aswat al-Iraq that the contents of Obama's letter suggested solving the question according to the Iraqi constitution and laws.

He added "we pointed many times that Kurdistan contracts are done according to Iraqi constitution, which grants the Kurdish government the right to sign its contracts in un-discovered oil fields".

Premier Nouri al-Maliki's office disclosed last Thursday that Obama's letter was

"positive" on the functions of Exxon Mobil company in Kurdistan and disputed areas.

The statement called the US company to abide by its pledges and the recommendations made by the Iraqi government, in addition to the advices made by the US administration.

Disputes between Baghdad and Arbil continued on the rights of the Kurdish local government to sign oil contract.

Baghdad threatened the US company of preventing it from excavation in mid and south of Iraq if implemented its commitments to Kurdistan, amid Kurdish protest that Baghdad intervention is illegal.

The Kurdish government is following its contracts with Exxon Mobil to provide it with more financial income.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28bzcivk45ephty453pytz555%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=149606&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28bzcivk45ephty453pytz555%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=149606&l=1)

- **Nusayif: exporting oil to Turkey "clear constitutional violation" by KR**

Baghdad, July 23 (AIN) -MP Aliya Nusayif of the Iraqiya Hurra bloc described the exportation of crude oil from Kurdistan Region to Turkey as a "clear Constitutional violation."

She said in a statement reported by the Information Office of the bloc "The behavior of Kurdistan Region to export oil to Turkey and to conclude contracts with foreign oil companies without the consent of the Central Government represent a clear violation for the Constitution."

Nusayif pointed out that "These actions taken by the Kurdistan Regional Authority is a violation of Article (110) of the Constitution, which says that the negotiations concerning conducting the international treaties and agreements , policies of borrow, and drawing the foreign sovereign economic and trade policy, is the prerogative of the Federal Government."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=14820:nusayif-exporting-oil-to-turkey-qclear-constitutional-violationq-by-kr&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14820:nusayif-exporting-oil-to-turkey-qclear-constitutional-violationq-by-kr&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **New British Ambassador to Azzaman: Visas shall be granted in Baghdad prior to end of this year**

The new British ambassador to Iraq, Simon Collis called for a dialogue among the political leaders to reach a solution for the outstanding issues on the basis of realizing the mutual interests, respecting the law and the independence of the institutions, to avoid problems aggravation and disrupting laws. "The ties between the Iraqi and British peoples are deep-rooted and were not affected by the political tension among the governments" Collis said in an interview – the first since assuming his post few weeks ago - with Azzaman indicating that "the ties between the two peoples is most important and strongest and were reinstated by virtue of the activities of the British Cultural Council and universities. The relationships among the companies and institutions in the two countries were also reinstated rapidly." With regard to the crisis between Baghdad and Erbil the British ambassador emphasized "We believe that it is necessary for all Iraqis to cooperate to find out a solution and overcome problems. Britain supports the unity of Iraq. The constitution delineates the nature of the cooperation between the

center and the parties and it also specifies the form of the regime whether it is a centralized or decentralized." He added that "approval has been obtained to open visa centers in Baghdad before the end of this year."

(Azzaman)

- **MP says Iraq close to join WTO**

BAGHDAD, July 23 / Aswat al-Iraq: A member of the parliament's economic and investment committee said on Monday that Iraq will soon join the World Trade Organization.

"Joining the WTO is very important for Iraq and it will happen soon," Salman al-Moussawi said in a statement, criticizing those who reject the idea, underlining that the move will positively affect Iraq's economic position, as well as it will turn the country to a partner in drawing up the global economic policies, not just an observer.

"Iraq should be a permanent member in the WTO two years ago, as it's an observer for more than five years," he added, noting that the organization has asked

Iraq to take series steps in this direction and to prepare to be an attractive atmosphere for investments through enacting laws encouraging and protecting investments.

(Aswat al-Iraq)

- **Electricity: our budgets amounted to \$ 37 billion since 2003**

Shafaq News, July 23 / The Ministry of Electricity announced on Monday that their budgets reached since 2003 till now \$ 37 billion as nearly half of it has been spent on the operational and investment budget, while Trade Bank of Iraq demanded to return \$ 7 billion reserved from its investment budget to the Development Fund for Iraq.

The spokesman for the Ministry of Electricity , Musab al-Mudares said in a statement reported for "Shafaq News" that "half the budgets allocated to the Ministry of Electricity since 2003 and up to the this day, amounting to (37) billion dollars is distributed to two budgets operational and investment."

"The operational amounted to (16) billion dollars that were spent as salaries and

wages of workers in the general directorates of the Ministry and its projects spread across the country, including the amounts spent for the oil ministry, up to one billion dollars a year for buying fuel processor to the stations of the ministry, as well as the fuel that was purchased from the neighboring countries, the operating budget also includes buying electricity from Iran and Turkey and other amounts allocated for simple maintenance purposes. "

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3055-electricity-our-budgets-amounted-to--37-billion-since-2003-.html>

- **Aftan inspects Khayrat power station in Karbala**

Baghdad, July 23 (AIN) -The Minister of Electricity Karim Aftan al-Jumaili visited the project of Khayrat power station in Karbala province which is being implemented by the Turkish Company (Sharlek).

The project includes the installation of ten generating units equipped by the US Company General Electric with a capacity of 125 MW per unit and a total capacity of 1,250 MW.

The Ministry's Spokesperson Musab al-Mudaris stated that "The Minister inspected in the visit the workflow in the project, stressing the necessity to speed up joining the units to the service within the specified deadline."

He added "Jumaili instructed to overcome all obstacles facing the Company's work which may delay achieving advanced completion rates."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=14816:aftan-inspects-khayrat-power-station-project-in-karbala&catid=37:economy&Itemid=41](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14816:aftan-inspects-khayrat-power-station-project-in-karbala&catid=37:economy&Itemid=41)

- **MoE: Salaries consume huge sums of Ministry's allocations since 2003**

Baghdad, July 23 (AIN) -The Ministry of Electricity announced that \$ 16 billion of the total \$ 37 billion allocated to the Ministry of Electricity since 2003, were spent on salaries and wages.

The Spokesperson of the Ministry, Musab al-Mudaris clarified "Half of the budgets allocated to the Ministry of Electricity since 2003 up to the present day which amounted upto (37) billion dollars, were

distributed into two budgets, Operational and Investment."

He said that "The Operational Budget that is \$ (16) billion was spent as salaries and wages of workers in the General Directorates of the Ministry and its projects spread across the country."

"As for the Investment budget which is \$ 21 billion, we have 7 billion currently reserved at the Development Fund of Iraq in Washington for bank guarantees to companies which have already signed contracts with our ministry," The Spokesperson assured.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=14817:moe-huge-sums-of-ministrys-allocations-since-2003-spent-on-salaries&catid=37:economy&Itemid=41](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14817:moe-huge-sums-of-ministrys-allocations-since-2003-spent-on-salaries&catid=37:economy&Itemid=41)

## 2. IRAN

- **High-Ranking Officials of Iran, G5+1 to Meet Today**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Deputies of Iran's top negotiator Saeed Jalili and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton are due to hold a meeting in Istanbul on Tuesday to discuss ways to reduce the difference

between Iran and the Group 5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany).

The deputies, EU's Helga Schmid and Iran's Ali Baqeri, will discuss ways to reduce differences in the talks on Tuesday.

The two sides will decide on the date and venue of the next round of talks between Iran and the world powers, if the expert-level discussions bear results.

Iran's top negotiator Saeed Jalili and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton will have a telephone conversation at the end of the Tuesday meeting to discuss the details of the negotiations.



According to a statement by the office of the EU foreign policy chief, Ashton and Jalili will keep in contact "about the prospects of a future meeting at the political level".

Earlier this month, Iran and the six world powers ended two days of talks by technical experts who discussed the details of the two sides' proposals to end the nuclear standoff between Tehran and the sextet.

A statement issued by the European Union at the end of the talks in Istanbul said the discussions lasted a full day.

The statement said experts from the G5+1 had met with the Iranian team, and "provided further detail of the 5+1 proposal given to Iran in Baghdad (while) Iran shared further detail of their proposal; and the experts explored positions on a number of technical subjects."

The meeting was part of the agreement reached by the two sides' top negotiators Jalili and Ashton at the end of their latest round of talks in Moscow.

After a 15-month hiatus, Iran and the Group 5+1 held several rounds of talks this year, with the latest one in Moscow on June 18-19. At the end of the Moscow talks, Jalili and Ashton announced that

they would hold a meeting after talks between their deputies.

After a meeting between Baqeri and Schmid, Jalili and Ashton will meet again.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251190>

- **Iranian Students Protest at Bahraini King's Invitation to NAM Summit**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian students voiced opposition to the government's decision for inviting Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa to a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Tehran in August.



In an open letter to the people of Bahrain on Monday, the policy-making council of the Students' Basij of Tehran Universities voiced strong opposition to the government's decision for inviting the Bahraini King.

In the letter the Iranian students said that they do not recognize the oppressive rulers of Bahrain as representatives of the Persian Gulf country to the NAM summit.

The 16th NAM summit will be held in Tehran from August 26 to 31.

Iran will assume the rotating presidency of the movement from Egypt for three years during the upcoming summit.

Iran announced late in June that that it has not yet sent an invitation letter to King Hamad to ask him to attend the upcoming Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Tehran, but it underlined that it has to do so in accordance with diplomatic norms.

Different students groups have already started protests against the Bahraini king's visit to Tehran.

Anti-government protesters have been holding peaceful demonstrations across Bahrain since mid-February 2011, calling for an end to the Al Khalifa dynasty's over-40-year rule.

The Manama regime has staged a flagrant crackdown on its people who have been demanding reforms through peaceful protests during the last 16 months.

Bahrainis continue anti-government demonstrations across the country despite the Manama regime's crackdown.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251166>

- **Iran to Build First National Gas Refinery**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian oil ministry said it has just finished the initial designing and siting of the country's first home-made gas refinery.



The research center of the Iranian oil ministry started the initial phase of building the gas refinery after a visit to the center by Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei

five months ago, during which he underlined the necessity for the construction of Iran's first national gas refinery.

The gas refinery is due to be constructed in Iran's Halgan region in the framework of a joint venture project by the Khatam ol-Anbia construction headquarters and the research and development department of the oil ministry.

The gas needed for the refinery will be supplied from five gas fields, namely Shahini, Gordan, Halgan, Sefid Baghoon and Dey.

The refinery will be developed in two phases and in the first phase the unit will refine over 20 million cubic meters of natural gas per day.

In January, Managing-Director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) NIGC Javad Oji announced that the country has boosted its gas refining capacity to 505 million cubic meters per day.

"We have now reached 505 mcm of gas refining capacity in the country," Oji said at the time.

Iran has the world's second-largest reserves of natural gas (15% of the world's total).

Iran possesses roughly 10 percent of the world's total proven petroleum reserves as well.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251154>

- **Iran to get compensation from Russia over failure to deliver S-300**

TEHRAN, July 23 (MNA) -- Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi has assured the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee that Iran will receive compensation from Russia since the Kremlin, under a pressure from the West and Israel, reneged on a contract to sell the S-300 missile system to Iran, MP Hossein Naqavi said on Sunday.

Naqavi stated that the defense minister also briefed MPs on the parliamentary committee about the production of long-range missiles, military sovereignty over

Iran's 20 percent share of the Caspian Sea, and the repulsion of the West's cyber attacks against the Islamic Republic.

Naqavi, who is the rapporteur of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, told reporters that Vahidi also elaborated on the Defense Ministry's plans to build long-range missiles.

"Brigadier General Vahidi announced that the move (construction of long-range missiles) has started, with a reliance on our scientific and technological expertise and successes have been made," the MP added.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1656182>

- **Iran will not block Strait of Hormuz as long as it can access it: admiral**

BANDAR ABBAS, July 23 (MNA) -- The deputy commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Naval Force has said that Iran will not block the Strait of Hormuz as long as it is able to use the waterway itself.

"As long as Iran can use the Strait of Hormuz, others are free to pass through

it,” Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri stated on Sunday in the Persian Gulf port city of Bandar Abbas.

He added, “The enemies are constantly stating that the Islamic Republic of Iran intends to block the Strait of Hormuz, but we say that common sense does not dictate that Iran should close the Strait of Hormuz as long as it uses it.

“However, this does not mean that we will stop exercising wise control over the strait.”

Tangsiri also said, “We are present in the strait, and, under circumstances where we will not be able to pass through it, we will not allow anyone to go through it.

“Since the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps was deployed in the Strait of Hormuz and assumed full responsibility for (controlling) the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf, warships and vessels passing through the strait have changed course toward the southern shores of the Persian Gulf after going through the strait, and each military vessel that plans to enter the Persian Gulf approaches the southern shores of the Persian Gulf and

enters the region, which illustrates Iran’s might.”

U.S. warships in Persian Gulf meant to protect Israel

Elsewhere in his remarks, Tangsiri commented on the presence of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman and stated, “U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf are playing the role of iron domes that have come to the region to prevent Iran’s missiles from being fired at the Zionist regime.”

“We have been stating for years that their presence undermines security,” he said, adding, “We should not give them even a moment to encroach upon the maritime borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

He added, “Our life is in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Sea of Oman. At present, basijis (volunteer forces) are aboard more than 60 vessels in the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and beyond and are protecting Iran’s interests. The Armed Forces are actively present in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Aden and have the ability to be present in more

distant waters to protect the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Over 90 military vessels of other countries are present in the region, Tangsiri stated, adding, “(This) foreign presence does not make any sense. Foreign forces constitute a threat to the region and neighboring countries. If something happens to U.S. nuclear aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf or the Sea of Oman, the destructive environmental effects will threaten the region for years.”

Faith of Iranians will determine outcome of any regional incident

Tangsiri also commented on efforts that certain Western countries have been making to promote Iranophobia in the world and said, “The formulation of the Iranophobia project and the creation of insecurity in various parts of the world and even (inciting) civil wars in weak countries by the United States and its allies are meant to (increase) the sale of destructive weapons because a large part of the U.S. economy is dependent on the sale of weapons to other countries.”

He went on to say that military equipment will not determine the result of any possible war against Iran.

“Should the need arise, faith and the Islamic and nationalist beliefs of the youth of the country will determine (the outcome of) any incident that occurs in the region,” he added.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1656737>

- **Iran’s Larijani proposes presidential polls as way to end Syria conflict**

TEHRAN, July 23 (MNA) — The Iranian Majlis speaker Ali Larijani has proposed presidential elections in Syria as a way to end the 17-month bloody conflict in the country.

In an interview with Arabic language Al-Alam TV aired on Monday, Larijani said presidential elections in Syria could be held while planning future parliamentary elections.

The Majlis speaker said fighting between the Syrian army and insurgents in different parts of the country, including Damascus, has blocked attempts to organize voting.

On Monday the Syrian army fought rebel forces in the northern city of Aleppo and stormed the southern Damascus neighborhood of Nahr Aisha, Reuters reported.

Syrian forces have reasserted control over several Damascus areas since they seized back the central Midan district on Friday following a devastating bomb attack that killed four top security officials.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1656775>

- **Iran warships to start voyages in Atlantic Ocean: Navy chief**

TEHRAN, July 23 (MNA) - Iranian warships will soon start voyages in the Atlantic Ocean, Iranian Navy Commander Habibollah Sayyari announced on Monday.

“The Navy has carried out successful activities in open seas, and in the near future we will witness the presence of the Navy in the Atlantic Ocean,” Sayyari stated.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1656794>

- **Iran joins research team for nuclear fusion project**

TEHRAN, July 23 (MNA) - The head of Islamic Azad University’s Plasma Physics Research Center says that Iran is now a partner in the development of the world’s largest nuclear fusion project.

“Iranian researchers, along with researchers from seven other countries, have started research in the nuclear fusion field,” Mahmoud Qoran Nevis told the Mehr News Agency.

Qoran Nevis said that the design and construction of the ITER reactor in France is currently under way and Iranian researchers have joined their counterparts from China, India, Japan, South Korea, Russia, the U.S. and EU for the project.

The International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) is the world’s largest and most advanced experimental fusion reactor and is based at the Cadarache facility in the south of France.

The construction cost of the project has been estimated at \$6.5 million and the first plasma is set to be produced in 2019.

The ITER fusion reactor itself has been designed to produce 500 megawatts of output power for 50 megawatts of input power, or ten times the amount of energy put in.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1656680>

- **Iran to use all capacities to maintain oil market stability: Official**

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast rejects the Western claims about Tehran's attempts to disrupt the global energy markets as unfounded and baseless.

During his weekly press conference on Tuesday, Mehmanparast said the Western countries are the ones trying to disturb the balance of the global energy market.



The Iranian official added that Tehran has frequently announced that it will use all its capabilities and capacities to sustain the stability of the oil market.

Commenting on the situation in Syria, Mehmanparast said Tehran's stance regarding Damascus has not changed, as the Islamic Republic supports the legitimate demands of the Syrian people and the reforms implemented by the country's government.

"At first, however, peace, security and stability must be restored in Syria," Mehmanparast said, adding that the conflicts supported by foreign countries must come to an end.

The Iranian official said Tehran's overall plan is to provide the right atmosphere for talks between the Syrian opposition and government.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since mid-March 2011. The violence has claimed the lives of many people, including security forces.

The West and the Syrian opposition accuse the government of killing protesters, but Damascus blames 'outlaws, saboteurs, and armed terrorist groups' for the unrest, saying that it is being orchestrated from abroad.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/24/252487/iran-not-after-oil-market-instability/>

- **China increases oil imports from Iran by 17% in June**

China's oil imports from Iran have increased by 17 percent to 2.6 million tons in June despite the Western sanctions on crude shipments from the Islamic Republic.



According to data from the Beijing-based General Administration of Customs, the world's second biggest economy imported about 635,000 barrels of Iranian oil per day in June.

China, Iran's number one oil importer, rejects the US-engineered oil embargo on Iran, calling its purchases of Iranian crude "completely justified and legitimate."

Last year, China imported about 557,000 barrels of oil per day from Iran.

In 2012, the United States and the European Union (EU) approved new sanctions against Iran's oil and financial sectors which aim to prevent other countries from purchasing Iranian oil or transacting with its central bank.

The US sanctions took effect on June 28, while the US-engineered EU oil bans against Iran were enforced on July 1.

Washington and the EU claim that the bans are meant to pressure the Islamic Republic to give up its nuclear energy program, which they claim includes a military aspect.

Iran rejects such allegations, arguing that as a committed signatory to the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is entitled to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/24/252472/china-increases-oil-imports-from-iran/>

- **Iran, P5+1 deputies to meet in Istanbul**

The representative of Iran and the P5+1 take part in the talks in Moscow, June 18, 2012.

Deputies to the top negotiators of Iran and the six major world powers of the P5+1 are set to hold talks in the Turkish city of Istanbul.



Ali Baqeri, the deputy secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC),

and Helga Schmid, the deputy to the EU foreign policy chief, will discuss ways to reduce differences in the talks on Tuesday.

The two sides will decide on the date and venue of the next round of talks between Iran and the P5+1 - Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany, if the expert-level discussions bear results.

SNSC Secretary Saeed Jalili and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton will have a telephone conversation at the end of the Tuesday meeting to discuss the details of the negotiations.

According to a statement by the office of the EU foreign policy chief, Ashton and Jalili will keep in contact “about the prospects for a future meeting at the political level.”

Iran and the P5+1 agreed to hold the expert-level talks during their negotiations in the Russian capital, Moscow, in June.

The Moscow meetings came after three sessions of plenary talks in Baghdad in

May and an earlier round of negotiations in Istanbul in mid-April.

The two sides had, prior to the Istanbul talks, held two rounds of negotiations, one in Geneva, Switzerland, in December 2010, and another in Istanbul in January 2011.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/24/252465/iran-p51-deputies-to-meet-in-istanbul/>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Ambassador: Regulations for Palestinians' entry to Egypt not changed**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Procedures for Palestinians entering Egypt have not changed, despite earlier reports that restrictions had been eased, Cairo's ambassador to the Palestinian Authority said Monday.



Yasser Othman told Ma'an that regulations for Palestinians' entry to Egypt were still applicable, although Palestinians arriving in Egypt would be granted a 48 - 72 hour visa to transit the country in limited cases.

"All the news circulated in the media about Palestinians' entry to Egypt are false, however human considerations will be taken into account regarding the deportation of Palestinians from the Egyptian airport to the Gaza Strip," Othman said.

Previously, Egyptian security officers escorted Palestinians to and from the Gaza border, often detaining them at the border or the airport for several days while they waited for an escort. As there is no airport in Gaza and Israel does not allow residents to use its airport, Palestinians must travel via Cairo.

The Associated Press reported Monday that changes to the regulations to Palestinians' travel in Egypt had not been formally announced, and were met with resistance from Egyptian security agencies.

It said the changes were a gesture from Egypt's President Mohammad Mursi to Palestinian leaders following his meetings with President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas chief Khalid Mashaal last week.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=507072>

- **Al-Malki: Arab countries support Palestinian UN bid**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Arab countries support a Palestinian bid for statehood recognition at the UN General Assembly, Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al-Malki said Monday.

The Arab League follow-up committee met in Doha on Sunday, and representatives expressed support for the initiative but did not set a date for the bid, al-Malki told Ma'an.



The minister said officials would communicate with member countries of the General Assembly and report back to the committee at its next meeting in Cairo on Sept. 5, when the timing of the appeal will be decided.

The General Assembly can upgrade Palestine's status to a non-member observer state, and al-Malki said he expected Palestine would win 130 - 140 votes, securing a majority.

In September 2011, President Mahmoud Abbas applied for full UN membership at the UN Security Council. Israel and the US staunchly opposed the bid, which failed due to a lack of support in the 15-member council.

Al-Malki said the Palestinian Authority did not fear US sanctions over the General

Assembly bid. "The decision is that the Palestinian leadership will go to the general assembly despite the consequences."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=507029>

- **Israel orders demolition of 8 villages for army training ground**

TEL AVIV, Israel (Ma'an) -- Israel plans to demolish eight villages in the West Bank to use the land for Israeli army training grounds, the Israeli daily Haaretz reported Monday.

Israel's High Court of Justice heard Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak's demolition plans on Sunday. Residents of the south Hebron villages will be allowed to access their land for farming on weekends and Jewish holidays, and during two one-month periods each year, when the Israeli army is not training in the area, Haaretz reported.



Israel regards the 1,500 residents of Khirbet al-Majaz, Khirbet al-Tabban, Sfai, Khirbet al-Fakheit, Halaweh, Mirkez, Jinba, and Kharoubeh as squatters, although the villages predate the establishment of the state of Israel by over 100 years, the report said.

Previous evacuation orders issued against the villages were frozen by Israel's High Court of Justice.

In 1999, over 700 residents were evicted due to "illegal residence in a firing zone" and Israeli forces confiscated property and demolished buildings and wells.

Israel's High Court issued an interim injunction, and Israeli forces allowed named petitioners to return but not their relatives. Meanwhile, many residents had nothing to return to.

Israel on Sunday claimed that an investigation conducted in 2000 found there were no permanent residents in the area. It claims that most villagers have permanent homes in Yatta, a nearby town.

Israel also says villagers have expanded their homes and structures in the villages illegally in recent years.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=506983>

- **Settlers Destroy Trees, Open Road in Palestinian Land near Bethlehem**

BETHLEHEM, July 23, 2012 (Wafa) – Israeli settlers Monday destroyed tens of trees and opened an unpaved road in a private Palestinian land in al-Khader, a town south of Bethlehem, according to a local activist.

Ahmad Salah, coordinator of the popular committee against settlements in al-Khader, said Palestinian farmers arrived in their land earlier Monday and found that Israeli settlers have opened an unpaved road and dug a 30-meter escarpment, destroying around 50 grape trees in the land.

The settlers opened the road to reach another plot of land that was illegally seized several years ago in preparation for building a settlement outpost in the area, said Salah, adding that settlers already started infrastructure construction of the intended outpost.

Salah called on human rights organizations to protect Palestinian farmers from the settlers' ruthless attacks ahead of the agricultural season.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20315>

- **Liberman: Syrian rebels rejected Israeli assistance**

Foreign minister tells Turkish journalists Israel unwilling to apologize to Turkey over 'Mavi Marmara' deaths but ready to repair bilateral relations, adds Israel will not compromise on safety of citizens.

The Syrian opposition rejected an Israeli offer of assistance, Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman said in an interview with Turkish media published Tuesday.

"We offered humanitarian assistance but they rejected it," he told the Turkish journalists in Jerusalem Sunday. "Everybody has told us that it is much better to keep the distance."

The foreign minister added: "We don't want to impose ourselves on the Syrian opposition. It is impossible to impose ourselves on somebody. We can only suggest but cannot impose," Turkish daily Hurriyet quoted him as saying.



According to Liberman's spokesman, the meeting was the foreign minister's first with Turkish media since the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident, during which Israeli commandos stormed the Turkish vessel as it attempted to break Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, killing eight. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu also met Monday with a delegation of eight senior Turkish print journalists the Foreign Ministry

brought to Israel in an attempt to "break the ice" with Turkey's public.

Liberman said he is ready to move forward and resolve any outstanding bilateral disputes with Ankara, but refused to apologize for the deaths of the eight Turkish nationals killed aboard the Marmara.

"We are ready to discuss [our problems with Turkey] in high-level or low-level open meetings," Liberman said. "We're really ready to discuss not only this issue but also the Iranian problem, the Gaza Strip or the support for Hamas. But [we're not ready] to discuss in what way we will protect our citizens," the foreign minister said.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=278669>

- **Mofaz on attempts to steal Kadima MKs: Good luck**

Kadima chair says Netanyahu broke coalition agreement by dismissing Plesner C'tee, making exit from gov't unavoidable. Kadima leader Shaul Mofaz Photo: Marc Israel Sellem / The Jerusalem Post

Kadima chairman Shaul Mofaz on Tuesday had a simple and dismissive message for Tzipi Livni and other former politicians who are attempting to siphon away MKs from Kadima: "Good luck."

Addressing any Kadima MKs considering leaving the party, he said, "If there are people who want to leave, if they think [Kadima] should have a different agenda, then they should leave."



The party has enough good members and plenty of good people who want to join Kadima, Mofaz told Army Radio.

Asked whether it was the right move to join the government for only 70 days, the Kadima chairman blamed Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, saying he failed to follow through on agreements reached between the two.

Kadima entered the government in order to advance four issues, he said, universal service, a change in the system of government, negotiations with the Palestinians, and passing a responsible social budget in 2013. "The first test was the Tal Law."

Netanyahu broke the coalition agreement with Kadima, Mofaz charged, by dismissing the Plesner Committee and its recommendations for replacing the Tal Law.

"Our exit [from the government] was unavoidable," he added.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=278674>

- **IDF makes int'l law class for field commanders**

The course is meant to familiarize commanders with international law pertaining to combat.

The IDF Military Advocate-General's Office is instituting a course on international law for field commanders.

The course is meant to familiarize commanders with international law pertaining to combat and the limitations it imposes on operations, particularly in urban settings such as those in the Gaza Strip or Lebanon.

The course will be mandatory for those undergoing training to become company, battalion and brigade commanders.

“It is important that commanders know the principles and what makes a civilian building like a mosque become a legitimate target, once it stops functioning as a mosque and becomes a place where rockets are fired from into Israel,” explained a senior officer who serves in the Military Advocate-General’s Office.

The officer said that while he hoped the course would reduce the chance that Israel will be accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity – as it was in the Goldstone Report following Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip in 2009 – he did not believe that would be the case.

Earlier this month, a senior officer in the IDF’s Northern Command warned that the Goldstone Report “will pale” in

comparison to the results of a future war with Hezbollah in Lebanon. The officer said such a war would be devastating for Lebanon due to Hezbollah’s decision to deploy its military forces and capabilities within towns and villages throughout the country.

“I cannot guarantee that there will not be another Goldstone Report, but we can try to minimize the criticism by doing the best we can,” the officer said.

“This will also help us defend against criticism after such a conflict.”

Military Advocate-General Brig.-Gen. Danny Efroni took up his post last year and has focused on completing the integration of legal officers in the operational levels within the military.

Now, for example, legal officers play a key role in approving targets before operations including target banks for Israel’s various fronts in Lebanon and Gaza.

“We are involved in all stages of operational planning,” the officer said, adding that legal officers would be present

in command posts during conflicts to assist brigade and division commanders in determining the legitimacy of attacking certain targets.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=278668>

- **Israeli negotiator: Social protest affected Netanyahu's decision on Shalit deal**

David Meidan reveals details of Israel-Hamas negotiations, Egyptian mediation and his first encounter with Gilad Shalit.

David Meidan, Prime Minister Benjamin's Netanyahu special envoy to negotiations for last October's release of Gilad Shalit, said Monday the decision to close the deal was influenced by political considerations such as the summer 2011 social protest.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israeli-negotiator-social-protest-affected-netanyahu-s-decision-on-shalit-deal.premium-1.453142>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Invisible hands are hindering Morsy's 100-day plan, says FJP official**

Huge banner for the Freedom and Justice Party demanding expulsion of Israel ambassador from Egypt, Mansoura, Daqahliya, 20 August, 2011. The party called for protest against killing of five policemen by Israel on the borders. Protesters shouted anti-Israeli slogans and called for retaliation for the killed, expelling the Israeli ambassador from Egypt and recalling the Egyptian one.

Photographed by Alsayed Albaz

Political forces are teaming up to find a better way to report misconduct on the part of public servants who may be getting in the way of President Mohamed Morsy's 100-day plan, said the Freedom and Justice Party's Mohamed Saad Eliwa on Monday.



The Muslim Brotherhood, the Freedom and Justice Party, the governor of Giza and other political and security forces are joining forces to work on this issue, Eliwa claimed.

The FJP's Helmy al-Gazzar said that anyone who holds up the implementation of Morsy's 100-day plan is actually hindering Egypt's interests.

There are "invisible hands" working against Egypt and hindering national development, Gazzar claimed, adding that these secret forces are inspired by the military council's policies.

Gazzar requested that the military council urge the Egyptian people to stand behind Morsy's 100-day plan and Renaissance project, and also asked that the army itself take an active part in enforcing the plan.

Secretary General of the FJP in Giza, Ali Khafagi, said that on Sunday the party campaigned to have its members and Muslim Brotherhood youth take part in directing traffic along with municipal authorities.

"Our actions send a message to society that the Muslim Brotherhood will do its best to enforce the 100-day plan," Khafagi said. But if the municipality refuses the party's offer to step into roles like directing traffic, the FJP will accept that decision, Khafagi continued, stating that the party is not a substitute for state institutions.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/invisible-hands-are-hindering-morsy-s-100-day-plan-says-fjp-official>

- **Committee investigating military detainees to recommend more releases**

The committee investigating cases of civilians detained by the military following the 25 January revolution plans to recommend that President Mohamed Morsy order the release of protesters convicted in Suez on 9 July, which is technically beyond the committee's jurisdiction, said committee head Judge Mohamed al-Mahdy on Monday.

Morsy had formed the Committee to Research Detainees' Files to investigate cases during the period between 25 January 2011 and the handover of power

from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to the newly elected president on 30 June 2012.

The committee includes staff from the Interior Ministry, the military judiciary and the public prosecution, as well as civil society and revolutionary representatives.



The Suez military court found eight demonstrators guilty on 9 July of charges related to violent incidents that broke out on 4 May around the Suez Security Directorate and the governorate's headquarters. The incidents coincided with the Abbasseya clashes in Cairo. The committee plans to recommend the release of those detainees.

Mahdy said the committee has received around 1,000 complaints from the National Council for Human Rights regarding civilian detainees in military prisons. The committee will continue to

examine these complaints and submit a report to the president, despite unequivocal assurances recently made by the Interior Ministry that the state is not currently holding any criminal or political prisoners, he added.

The committee is not responsible, however, for investigating cases of detained jihadists or members of Islamic groups, such as Mostafa Hamza, the main suspect in the assassination attempt on Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995, Mahdy clarified.

“We are only tasked with considering the cases of those detained on charges relating to the revolution or who were arrested without legal basis,” Mahdy said.

In a statement on Monday, the committee stated that special dispensations for these military prisoners for the purpose of community reconciliation is not a sign of disrespect for the law in this new political era.

Security authorities did not object to any of the names that the committee had recommended to the president to receive amnesty, the statement concluded.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/committee-investigating-military-detainees-recommend-more-releases>

- **Nasserists slam Brotherhood for ignoring 1952 revolution celebrations**

Political figures and Nasserist forces gathered at the tomb of late President Gamal Abdel Nasser on Monday to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the 23 July revolution.

Attendees sang songs from the revolution and chanted slogans against the Muslim Brotherhood and its Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie.



Political figures should join hands in opposition against Islamic political forces, urged Lawyers Syndicate head Sameh Ashour. He added that the Muslim

Brotherhood's disregard for the 1952 revolution does not make it any less important, claiming that the 23 July revolution and the 25 January revolution shared the same goals of social justice and freedom.

Former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi lauded both Nasser and the Egyptian people for their revolutionary spirit, but refused to comment on Morsy's speech made on Sunday in which the president questioned the actual achievements of the 1952 revolution. Sabbahi added that no one will stop the country from celebrating this anniversary.

Nasser will remain in the hearts of millions of Egyptian's, claimed the late president's son, Abdel Hakim Abdel Nasser. He urged the youth of today to continue in Nasser's path.

"The rights that the poor obtained thanks to the July revolution made one of them a president today. What the revolution left in people's minds is bigger than any celebration, so we do not care if the president celebrates it or not. The best celebration would be to continue supporting the Egyptian revolution," said

former Sharqiya governor and Nasserist activist Azzazy Ali Azzazy.

On the other hand, Nasser's grandson, Gamal Abdel Hakim, criticized what he called Morsy's disrespect for the leaders of the 1952 revolution, saying that Morsy would not be in his position today without them. He added that Egypt is now in desperate need of a leader like Nasser.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/nasserists-slam-brotherhood-ignoring-1952-revolution-celebrations>

- **Mali war crimes report sparks outcry**

Attacks in northern Mali by armed Islamists could amount to war crimes, according to an international rights group.

Mali asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) last week to investigate alleged war crimes committed in the nation's north, a move that drew praise from rights groups.

"The referral of these crimes by government of Mali to the ICC is an important action towards both the authors and the victims of most serious

crimes, in order to ensure that these crimes immediately cease and that they do not remain unpunished," said Souhayr Belhassen, president of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH).

Together with the Malian Association for Human Rights (AMDH), the FIDH had earlier detailed a series of abuses by armed groups in northern Mali in a joint report published July 12th.

The report's authors expressed their grave concerns "about the on-going abuses in northern Mali that could constitute crimes against humanity" and urged the international community "to intensify its efforts to reinstate legitimate institutions in Bamako and speed up the process of political transition, which is the only way to stop international crimes perpetrated with total impunity against civilians in northern Mali".

"This report presents the findings of the study and evidence gathered in northern Mali showing that dozens of rapes, summary executions and systematic looting were perpetrated during the capture of large towns in the north by armed groups," Belhassen said.

She added: "Having suffered violence at the hands of the MNLA, civilians in northern Mali are now subject to arbitrary rule and harassment by armed Islamists who are behaving unacceptably and destroying symbols of the history of humanity."

The report presented evidence and "verified" information about the campaign of rapes perpetrated in Gao and Timbuktu since the cities were captured by rebel fighters.

"Islamist groups are also targeting children in order to recruit them as soldiers," the report said. "Dozens of cases have been documented by our organisations, which are concerned about the recruitment drive currently being conducted by Ansar al-Din as there are children aged between 12 and 15 currently at their training camps a few kilometres away from Gao."

The rights groups also detailed "the summary execution of 153 Malian soldiers who were taken prisoner" at Aguelhok on January 24th.

"These abuses are serious violations of international humanitarian law which we have assessed as being tantamount to war crimes and possible crimes against humanity, and which are in any case a matter for the International Criminal Court," said Patrick Baudouin, the co-ordinator of the FIDH Legal Action Group.

The report also underlines that "all of these abuses were perpetrated during the four months of the conquest of northern Mali by the allied Touareg forces of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and Islamist forces of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al-Din and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and to a lesser extent by groups of vigilantes and soldiers from the Malian army."

Having ousted the MNLA from Gao on June 27th, Islamist groups Ansar al-Din and MUJAO now control all of northern Mali along with their al-Qaeda allies.

"Mali does not have the military capacity to restore security in the north of the country single-handedly, much less the judicial capacity to prosecute and try the

perpetrators of these crimes," according to AMDH president Moktar Mariko.

In Timbuktu, a UNESCO World Heritage site, Ansar al-Din has destroyed seven of the sixteen mausoleums of Muslim saints as well as the sacred entrance of a fifteenth-century mosque.

"In these circumstances, Mali must refer the matter to the International Criminal Court, which was created to deal with this kind of situation," said Brahim Kone, the President of the Inter-African Union of Human Rights and an honorary president of the AMDH.

[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2012/07/23/feature-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2012/07/23/feature-01)

- **UN calls for Maghreb-Sahel security strategy**

[AFP/Issouf Sanogo] The north of Mali has been a target for terrorists, causing Maghreb and Sahel partners to co-ordinate security efforts.

The scale of cross-border crime and terror activity in the Sahel and Maghreb regions require a joint counter-terror strategy,

participants in a just-concluded Rabat seminar agreed.

"The countries of the Maghreb and the Sahel must form a lasting partnership based on dialogue, co-operation and solidarity in order to address the various challenges that we face through the adoption of a shared vision and an all-encompassing, inclusive approach," Nasser Bourita, the Secretary-General of the Moroccan Foreign Ministry, said at the July 17th-19th event.

The workshop on the implementation of the UN Resolution 1624 on the prevention of terrorist incitement was held by the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) and the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Maghreb can help to stabilise the Sahel-Saharan region through "concrete" and "functional" co-operation mechanisms, Bourita said. The region needs to develop a shared vision that will serve as a platform for an international partnership to achieve security, political stability and economic development in the Sahel-Saharan region, he added.

In the period 2001-2010, the number of attacks in the region increased four-fold. The region witnessed some 300 attacks in the ten years, resulting in more than 2,000 fatalities and 6,000 injuries, according to the official.

Bourita warned of the proliferation of criminal networks involved in trafficking and their growing operational capacities.

Andrei Kovalenko of the CTED shared this view. He said it is absolutely essential to co-ordinate efforts and promote dialogue in order to raise awareness about these threats and deal with the socio-economic problems that contribute to terrorism.

Peter Knoope of the ICCT called for paying special attention to the social vulnerability and frustrations of people at risk of falling under the influence of terrorists. He underlined the role of civil society in promoting the values of dialogue, tolerance and open-mindedness.

International relations expert Derouiche Driss told Magharebia that counterterrorism is one of the most pressing reasons why the Maghreb needs

to be consolidated as a unit. Without a stronger and closer partnership, the region will find it difficult to eliminate the problem, he commented.

[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2012/07/23/feature-02](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2012/07/23/feature-02)

- **EU-Libya Chamber of Commerce Director General : Squaring the Circle in Long Relationship with Libya**

Mr Claudio Cassuto, a busy man, founder and director general of EU-Libya Chamber of Commerce

At the beginning of this year, the EU-Libya Chamber of Commerce was launched in order to help companies throughout the European Union that wished to establish themselves in Libya on a one to one basis. What follows is an interview KAREN DABROWSKA, The Tripoli Post's UK correspondent carried with the organisation's Director General, Mr Claudio Cassuto who first outlined a brief history of the Chamber and explained the aims and objectives why it was formed.

Mr Cassuto said it had been a concept that he gave a lot of thought to prior to the

launch, adding that he had been engaged with another organisation working on transition countries till January of this year. Then it seemed like a good moment to launch the organisation because none of the national chambers connected with Libya seemed to provide the service that the Chamber wanted to provide.

“Our unique selling point was that it would not have members. It would help companies throughout the EU that were wishing to establish themselves in Libya on a one to one basis. They would then become associates - clients that we could continue to work with.

He went on to say that “the reason for not having membership was that we did not want to provide the services that many other chambers were providing like organising trade missions. We wanted to keep it as a boutique and work on a one-to- one basis.

As a longer term strategy we wanted to be able to help the Libyans, be it official government departments or large companies, in Libya do road shows within the EU countries. This was something

none of the other existing chambers were doing.”

He said that they have already had an approach from the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry saying that they would like to help some Saudi companies enter the Libyan market and possibly even open an office in Tripoli for Saudi companies. Their main concern was security. They also wanted to see a road show come to KSA.

The interview then continued on a question and answer format

Who are some of your other clients?

By organising the Libya Post Revolution Investment & Infrastructure Summit 2012 we are in contact with companies who may want to participate and they may ultimately become associates. These companies include Coco Cola, Qatar Petroleum, Aramco, Alcatel-Lucent (a major energy company) and General Electric.

Can you tell the Tripoli Post about the summit?

The investment summit will provide the earliest opportunity to assess the economic opportunities which Libya presents across a wide spectrum of sectors central to its reconstruction programme. Since the termination of the old regime, a new society has emerged, one with fresh needs and aspirations particularly in relation to civil and commercial infrastructure, upgrading to establishing new policies and entities.

There is a newly emerged security environment, and space open in the NGO sector, and a total healthcare modernisation and expansion programme, as well as media and publishing.

While ongoing infrastructural projects are being renegotiated and gradually resumed, companies both re-entering the Libyan market, and those that are considering it for the first time, should use this timely and high-level networking summit to meet the newly elected public sector decision makers.

Delegates will be able to gain a first hand an insight into the new administrative and legal/regulatory procedures, and from dialogue and discussion with key

stakeholders learn how to engage in successful business and investment strategies in Libya.

Not much publicity has been given to a recent IMF mission that predicted encouraging trends - economic growth of 116.6 percent in 2012 after a contraction of 60 percent in 2011. Furthermore, the IMF report foresees that this growth will slow in 2013 to 16.5 percent, and will reach around 13.2 percent in 2014”.

Post summit we hope to organise road shows in European capitals which we know well: Paris, London, Berlin, Frankfurt, Milan. Many countries do that but Libya has never got to the stage where it has held road shows abroad to attract investors.

Has there been a lot of interest in the summit?

Quite a lot of interest, although there was some resistance to commit ahead of the elections. Now that these are out of the way successfully and world leaders have commented positively on the process and outcome, we anticipate confirmations to speed up. Also the speaker list from Libya

can now be updated and changed in accordance with new appointments although we are encouraged by those who already promised to make presentations.

Outside of Libya each of the top Maghreb Officials at the Commission, Bernardino Leo and the EIB, Alain Nadeau have confirmed, alongside the Former Italian Foreign Minister Prof. Gianni de Michelis, and Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean.

We are hoping that the Libya Rapporteur for the European Parliament, Madame Ana Gomes, will be able to fit it into her agenda. So we will have the three top people in terms of anything to do with the EU and Maghreb. We are working with international financing institutions to see if they can send representatives: the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.

This is a major undertaking. Do you have a big staff?

We are a very small organisation. We have two people in Libya and four in the EU. We are looking for more representations within the EU but we want to remain

small. It is a very niche, clearly defined and specialised activity. We will remain small and try and be complimentary and not competitive with existing organisations.

How do you see the future of Libya in terms of trade relations with the EU?

It depends on the final outcome post elections and how quickly a new government will settle in and declare clearly defined policies with clear deadlines, how funds will be unlocked and distributed to various ministries and how those funds are likely to be spent. We will then see which large companies can fulfil those needs and secure those contracts.

They could be different from the traditional ones from Italy and Spain. Italy's trade with Libya accounted for just over 16% in 2012. Next was France with nearly 7%. The UK didn't even feature – it was probably 2%. Post 2010 that situation may change.

I suspect that countries like Turkey, China and Asia in general may be making efforts to gain more market share. In 2010, 10% of China's and Turkey's trade was with Libya. The trade statistics in 2013 may

look very different from what they were in 2010.

Can you tell The Tripoli Post about your background and your association with Libya?

One of my earliest jobs was with an economic publication that became part of the Financial Times. I was very active in organising Financial Times conferences world-wide. This led me to become a founding partner of the conference organising company that is based in Brussels and worked very closely to promote what is now the euro.

When the euro was launched we started operating with transition countries, the next ones to join the EU: central Europe and south eastern Europe, then the Balkans, and we did an event in every single country right down to newly-independent Kosovo.

Up to 2007 until now we worked on the EU neighbourhood policy which looked at countries like Romania, the Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and also the Maghreb region which brought me into

contact with Libya for the first time in 2009.

The next year we decided to hold a summit there and it was a very, very difficult event to put together. No one would make decisions and the Leader was saying “I don’t want it now, I don’t want it here”. Somebody near the top was saying that it was going to be in Tripoli, then it was going to be in Sirte, then Seif Al Islam was going to open it.

It did however take place. Despite all the obstacles we had two Ministers, the Governor of the Central Bank and quite a lot of private sector speakers. There was a very big turn-out with 200 or more senior decision-makers from 25 countries. So that led me to believe there was a future in Libya. The revolution happened. There was a two-year gap and nothing could be done. Then I got the idea of the Chamber and me running it.



There was also a long historical connection. My late father was based in Cairo at the time of the Italian-Libyan war and because he was a journalist he was asked by the Italian government whether he would be a mediator and channel information across from prisoners of war back to their parents.

I have a box of letters and scripts that I hope will be translated and put in a museum or an archive and I wanted to complete that circle.

Some of the documents are very touching. The parents did not know if their son was still alive, still alive or their whereabouts, they wanted to send anything they could especially money so a couple of lira, which was a lot of money in those days, was often enclosed in an envelope for onward

transmission. So I would simply like to be able to complete the circle.

<http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=2&i=8871>

- **Tunisian Journalist, Attacked by Police, Abandoned by Employer, Quits Job**

Asma Ghribi

Hiba Missaoui is one of two Tunisian journalists who was assaulted by security forces last Saturday while interviewing a man on Tunis' Habib Bourguiba Avenue, a major downtown thoroughfare.

Habib Bourguiba Avenue is a highly symbolic venue, as it was the site of the Tunisian revolution.

More than one year after the Tunisian uprising which toppled the police state led by Tunisia's former President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, the country continues to witness instances of human rights violations. What has changed since the era of Ben Ali, however, is that citizens are now able to report on such encroachments and to legally pursue

those involved – even when the perpetrators are security forces.

Missaoui announced yesterday on Mosaique FM that, after her attack last Saturday, she filed a complaint against law enforcement forces. On the same day, the Union of Tunisian Journalists released a statement denouncing the verbal and physical attacks on Missaoui and one other female journalist.

Missaoui further elaborated that she quit her job at Tunisia World Television because her employer refused to support her.

“They [the management of Tunisia World Television] told me, ‘You have not been beaten up. You just wanted to gain some fame,’” stated Missaoui, who added that her employer requested that she finish her work – as long as the camera was not damaged.



Khaled Tarrouche, spokesperson of the Ministry of the Interior, told Tunisia Live that an investigation into the incident has commenced. “The Ministry of the Interior does not promote violence, and the perpetrator will be brought to justice,” he said.

Saturday’s attacks follow the announcement on July 1 issued by two bloggers and an actress claiming that they had been subject to verbal and physical assault by police officers, raising questions as to whether Tunisia’s police forces have been conducting systematic campaigns.

Tarrouche, however, emphasized that rumors about any organized campaigns have no basis in fact.

“We have to make sure not to believe anything that we see on social networks. We [the ministry] did not receive any official complaint regarding the actress story...So we are not going defend ourselves from things we are not sure we did,” he added.

Tarrouche concluded by saying that the Ministry of the Interior is working to

improve the relationship between security officers and citizens.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/07/23/tunisian-journalist-attacked-by-police-abandoned-by-employer-quits-job/>

- **Water Crisis in Gabes: Water, Water Everywhere and Not a Drop to Drink**

Afifa Ltifi

After a heat wave that swept across the country, causing water and electrical shortages, threats of a strike from employees of the National Water Supply and Distribution Company (SONEDE) in Gabes threaten to make matters worse.

Abdul Monaem, a technical assistant in SONEDE of Djerba and a temporary assistant in the SONEDE of Gabes, said that the would-be strikers are, “trying to warn the company and demand improvements to their situation.”

Gabes is located in Southern Tunisia and despite its naturally rich water supply, shortages have plagued the region in the past month.

The current water crisis in Gabes has multiple causes. TAP stated that the one cause is excessive consumption, which has depleted reservoirs. The chemical factory in Gabes, for example, consumes a large amount of water, roughly between 150 and 300 liters of water per second.

As a temporary solution, SONEDE has begun a new policy of diverting water from the chemical factory and instead prioritizing human consumption.

“We are trying to find a balance between the needs of agriculture, human consumption, and the chemical factory,” said Monaem.

While quantity is low, the quality of the water is also a concern. Water salinity is at an all time high in some areas of the region. “The city of Mareth, though incredibly rich with natural water supplies, has very bad water quality—it is contaminated with 2 grams of salt per liter.” added Monaem.

The number of communities affected by the water crisis is growing, with higher altitude regions particularly affected. “We have gravity-fed pipes which makes it

difficult to make the water reach the higher regions. We lack a water pumping system in the area,” complained Monaem.

The governorate has proposed building a desalinization plant, which will transform salty water supplies into fresh water sources, but Monaem said that the cost of the project is prohibitively expensive.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/07/22/water-crisis-in-gabes-water-water-everywhere-and-not-a-drop-to-drink/>

- **Civil Society: A Pathway to Power?**

Tunisia’s transitional government currently contains many influential leaders whose origins lie in civil society – an issue which raises concerns over the autonomy of Tunisia’s civil society from the government during this interim period.

Traditionally, civil society is tasked with serving as an intermediary between the public and the government, creating policy proposals, holding leaders accountable, and providing services that the government is unable to offer.

The end of the politically repressive rule of former Tunisian President Zine Abdine Ben Ali meant the opening of the Tunisian political arena. Many active members of civil society have used this opportunity to obtain government positions, both within ministries and the National Constituent Assembly (CA), merging elements of civil society with governmental sectors. Government members who transitioned directly from civil society positions into the government following the ouster of Ben Ali include major figures like Tunisian interim President Moncef Marzouki.

Marzouki has a vibrant background in human rights activism, previously heading the Tunisian League of Human Rights and the National Council for Freedoms in Tunisia. Additionally, Abdelkarim Harouni, the Minister of Transportation from the Ennahdha party, founded the General Tunisian Union of Students (UGTE) in 1985.

Most members of civil society organizations do not believe that government connections with civil society organizations are an impediment to their development. Instead, many believe that it ensures greater efficiency.

Mouheb Garoui, president of I-Watch, a non-governmental organization that monitors elections and hosts trainings, workshops, and polling projects, explains that the Tunisian government is willing to work with different organizations and is receptive to various sources of input.

“Government officials are more inclined to cooperate with civil society. Many people are neutral and are not biased to any one organization. I am happy with the work that the government has done in relation to civil society,” Garoui says.

Civil society is vital to the current transition’s sustainability. For civil society groups that aim to “raise awareness, promote civic education, fight corruption, and advance transparency,” having direct relations with the government is nothing but positive, Garoui concludes.

Lamjed Jomli, the Coordinator of Private Sector Department in UGTT, Tunisia’s largest labor union, shares Garoui’s sentiments.

Jomli finds it “...completely normal for people to move from civil society

organizations to politics. This experience will let them help the country.” He adds, “Despite their previous affiliation, they will not be in the government under the guidance of an organization.”

He explains that, while there are government members who had strong ties to civil society, they did not previously expect to have the opportunity to run for office. Jomli adds that it is unlikely that Tunisians view civil society leadership as a stepping stone to power, for it takes years to cultivate the contacts and programming to become a civil society leader.

Unlike civil society leaders, members of the government and the National Constituent Assembly have mixed reviews about government ties to civil society organizations.

Rabî Abdi, a CPR member in the CA, says that it is “too soon to assess these connections’ impact on transitional political development.” He remains unsurprised, however, that so many Tunisian politicians found their start within the civil society sector since, historically, civil society served as the only means of activism within the country.

Salma Baccar, a CA member from the Al Massar Party, also has mixed emotions about such connections between the civil society sector and Tunisia’s government. “It [the connection] could be positive or negative. Everything Tunisia needs to do should be in favor of Tunisian society. Civil society is a vibrant part of Tunisia’s collective past and future, and it serves a vital purpose.”

Baccar does, however, fear that government members could take advantage of their ties and support for civil society to garner increased power. “I am afraid that some people may use these connections to buy the peoples’ votes. Some of the politicians involved in civil society organizations use them as a means to get in the citizens’ good graces and own their votes. This is not moral.”

Still, Baccar concedes that not all politicians are misusing their connections, and instead use their connections to add to the success of the country’s transition. “Some officials...they are members of such [civil society] groups, but they do not use it [their membership] for their own needs.”

According to Baccar, the role of civil society within Tunisia has increased in importance since the 2011 revolution. “Activism in civil society is good. Tunisia needs these organizations more than ever,” she adds, citing economic and unemployment issues as a cause for increased civil society activism. “The economy is struggling, and we need to have social and political solidarity to help those people struggling,” Baccar concludes.

Other government officials recognize the issue as a conflict of interest. Chakib Darouiche, the press attache from the Ministry of Human Rights and Transitional Justice, understands the concerns surrounding governmental ties to civil society. He explains that Samir Dilou, the Tunisian Minister of Human Rights and Transitional Justice, left civil society groups to ensure that there was no conflict of interest within his allegiances. Darouiche adds that he, “wants to make sure that civil society organizations are independent, and that the government stresses the separation between the political and civil environments.”



All the representatives of civil society and the government that Tunisia Live spoke to recognized the importance of civil society in furthering the aims of post-revolutionary Tunisia. As Darouiche concludes, civil society, both before and after the revolution, plays a vital role in “...making sure that the political transition succeeds. We need to have a strong and independent civil society.”

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/07/23/civil-society-a-pathway-to-power/>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Fatfat slams Nasrallah’s “contradictory” remarks over weapons**

Future bloc MP Ahmad Fatfat said in remarks published on Tuesday that Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed

Hassan Nasrallah’s comments regarding Syria’s supply of weapons to his party were contradictory.

“Nasrallah’s remarks [in which he said that the rockets used by his party were Syrian made] contradicts what he said a month ago when he confirmed that the only country to supply the Resistance with weapons was Iran,” Fatfat told Kuwaiti daily Al-Anbaa.

“Nasrallah is contradicting himself from time to time and he insists on linking himself politically to the ailing Syrian regime... This is regretful for the Resistance, Nasrallah and for his popular representation,” he added.

Last week, Nasrallah defended Syria’s role as a resistance state, saying that Damascus provided rockets used by Hezbollah during the 2006 July War and Hamas during the 2008-2009 Gaza War.

In separate remarks during an interview with Voice of Lebanon (100.5) radio station, Fatfat said that President Michel Sleiman’s protest of the Syrian violations of the Lebanese border should have been voiced earlier.

“This protest should have been voiced a long time ago,” Fatfat said, adding that the president’s stance was “the least he could do in these circumstances.”

On Monday, Sleiman accused Syria of violating Lebanese territory after a house in the east of the country was hit by a blast and shells fell on the northern border.

Syrian troops have carried out a number of cross-border raids into Lebanon since the outbreak of the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad's rule in March 2011, sparking fears of a spillover of the conflict.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Gemayel: Sleiman’s position on Syrian border violations ‘courageous’**

Kataeb Party leader Amin Gemayel said in remarks published on Tuesday that President Michel Sleiman’s position regarding Syria’s violations of Lebanon’s borders was “courageous.”

“This courageous stance is one of the leadership stances that the Lebanese people have longed for after they had been through difficult circumstances, during which the dignity of the nation was at stake,” Gemayel told An-Nahar newspaper.

“[Sleiman’s decision] is the first step [taken by] Lebanon toward regaining its full sovereignty,” he added.

On Monday, Sleiman accused Syria of violating Lebanese territory after a house in the east of the country was hit by a blast and shells fell on the northern border.

Syrian troops have carried out a number of cross-border raids into Lebanon since the outbreak of the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad's rule in March 2011, sparking fears of a spillover of the conflict.

Lebanon's political scene is split between supporters of the Assad regime, led by Hezbollah, and the pro-Western March 14 coalition with which the Kataeb party is affiliated.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Jordan should avoid military role in Syria, analysts say**

The spike in violence in Syria and fears that Damascus could use chemical weapons has triggered alarm bells in Jordan that it could be dragged into the conflict with "severe" repercussions, analysts say.

According to sources close to the government, "daily meetings are being held to examine the possibility of dispatching special forces if and when the Syrian regime falls to secure its chemical and biological weapons."

This however could not be immediately confirmed by government officials. But it is clear that Jordan has been closely monitoring developments in neighboring Syria.

"Under the current circumstances, it is possible that Jordan would take such a dangerous move," analyst Oreib Rintawi, who heads the Al-Quds Center for Political studies, told AFP.

"I do not think Jordan is capable of doing that. Amman needs an Arab and international umbrella. Otherwise, the repercussions will be severe."

On Sunday, King Abdullah II and the government said security along the northern border had been tightened, vowing "to preserve national interests and security."

These concerns also come as an influx of Syrian refugees spills into Jordan, creating a financial and logistical burden for the country.

The king has warned that in the event of a descent into all-out war, chemical weapons could fall into the hands of extremists, including certain rebel groups.

The Syrian government said Monday that Damascus would only use chemical weapons in case of a foreign attack.

Fears have been rising that President Bashar al-Assad regime might be prepared to use Syria's arsenal of chemical weapons in the repression of a 16-month uprising after reports his stocks were being moved around the country.

"I am not sure of this alleged arsenal and I am not sure if there are real Jordanian fears. I think all of this is just an excuse for the West to draw Jordan into the Syrian conflict," said Rintawi.

"We need to be careful. The United States and others claimed Iraq had all kinds of unconventional weapons just to invade the country. They found nothing and look at Iraq now."

Little is known about Syria's chemical capabilities as the country is not a member of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which requires member states to be transparent and destroy stockpiles.

"If Jordan interferes, it will be doing so on behalf of the United States and Israel, and this we do not need. There are clear indications Jordan could facilitate a military intervention in Syria," political analyst Labib Kamhawi said.

"Jordan's role should be focused on humanitarian aspects and on helping the Syrian refugees. It should not be part of any military action, particularly that this

talk about chemical and biological weapons is nothing but a pretext to attack Syria."

Israel said on Sunday it was concerned that chemical weapons might land in the hands of the Lebanon's Hezbollah, an ally of Syria.

The United States has warned that Syrian officials would be "held accountable" if they failed to safeguard the country's chemical weapons in one place.

Nawaf Fares, who defected from his post as Syrian ambassador to Iraq, as well as the rebel Syrian Free Army have alleged that chemical weapons have already been used during the Syrian conflict.

"I think Jordan's location, the capabilities of its army and Amman's intelligence services make the country a strong candidate to help secure these alleged chemical arms," Mohammad Masri, analyst at the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies, told AFP.

According to risk consultancy Maplecroft, the "Eager Lion" military exercise held in Jordan in May with the participation of

the US and 18 other countries "included a strong focus on securing chemical and biological weapons."

"As the conflict escalates, it cannot be altogether discounted that the regime will consider using chemical weapons," it said.

Citing US and Arab officials, The Wall Street Journal reported in March that "American and Jordanian military chiefs are jointly developing plans to secure what is believed a vast Syrian stockpile of chemical and biological weapons."

Ordinary Jordanians do not hide their fears.

"We are already suffering from all types of problems here, like a bad economy, poverty, unemployment and corruption. Do we need more troubles? Can't we just focus on the Syrian refugees?" said Khalil, 25, a university student.

Jordan is already hosting more than 140,000 Syrians and the kingdom is building new camps to house the refugee influx.

"We are proud of our army, but we are not a superpower," said Mohammad, a 33-year-old architect. "What if this plan they are talking about to secure Syrian weapons fails for one reason or another? What's going to happen to us?"

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?>

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## 6. SYRIA

### • **Putin warns of long Syrian civil war if Assad ousted**

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned on Monday of a protracted civil war in Syria should President Bashar al-Assad be "unconstitutionally" removed from power by rebel fighters.

"We are afraid that if the country's current leadership is removed from power unconstitutionally, then the opposition and today's leadership may simply change places," the Interfax news agency quoted Putin as saying.

"One will become [the new] leadership and the other—the opposition."

Putin warned that in that case "a civil war will stretch on for who knows how long," Interfax reported.

The Russian leader's comments came as fighting raged in the main Syrian cities of Damascus and Aleppo on Monday.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Syrian army retakes most of Damascus**

Smoke rises over the Al-Mazzeah neighborhood of Damascus. (AFP/YouTube)

Syrian regime forces on Monday reclaimed most of Damascus after a week of heavy fighting with rebels, who are using guerrilla tactics to keep a foothold in the capital, activists and regime sources said.

"Unfortunately, regime forces have taken control of almost all the capital. There are still skirmishes in the southern district of Qadam and Daraya," a suburb to the south, an activist who named himself as Omar told AFP via Skype.

"There are still members of the [rebel] Free Syrian Army in Damascus, but they are hiding now," he added.

Anti-regime activist Lena al-Shami said helicopters were continuously overflying her district of Mazzeh in western Damascus.

"Regime forces are everywhere in the capital, but that doesn't mean they control the city," said Shami, describing the FSA as resorting to a guerrilla strategy.

Another activist, who identified himself as Ahmad, told AFP that "the battle to liberate Damascus continues, and there is still fighting in several areas of the city."

Ahmad from Al-Midan neighbourhood, the scene of fierce clashes last week, said: "That was the first phase, and a second will follow. More strikes against the regime will be carried out."



A security source in Damascus said most of the city had been reclaimed by government forces.

"The army has succeeded in taking control in some areas by force, but in others raids are still being carried out, notably Kfar Sousa," he said, adding that the objective was to "find the hidden terrorists."

The head of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdel Rahman, said "regime troops have taken control of some areas, but in others the rebels are still present."

State news agency SANA said regime forces have "restored security" in the outskirts of Razi, near Mazzeh, "surrounding and killing many terrorists."

They also arrested other "terrorists" hiding in sewers, SANA said, adding that the army seized automatic rocket launchers, rifles, machineguns, communications equipment and stolen medicines.

Regime forces deployed reinforcements on Monday in several districts of

Damascus, struck by shelling during the night, according to activists and an AFP journalist

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **What will the Shia do?**

Hanin Ghaddar , July 23, 2012

A vigil for Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon after fleeing the Assad regime. Lebanese Shia must decide how they as a community will react to the influx of refugees who once helped them. (AFP photo)

"Hezbollah; I don't know what they are anymore," says Soha, a 50-year-old Shia woman who's lived her whole life in South Lebanon. She survived the Lebanese civil war, every Israeli invasion, and has never ever complained about Hezbollah, despite her disagreement with the party's ideology. "I saw them grow and develop into the most reliable party in the South. They took the notion of resistance beyond clichés and speeches. They have actually resisted Israel and liberated the South. That's when their only concern was

liberation. Today, they seem distracted with other concerns; they've become weak," she says.

Many other Shia share Soha's concerns today. They see Hezbollah stuck in a corner and acting defensively, and they don't like what its leadership is doing on many levels. But they are also scared because they cannot abandon the Party of God, their only political reference.

Hezbollah has embittered its supporters for three main reasons.

First, Hezbollah still supports the Syrian regime, which is getting weaker and weaker every day. Some of the party's supporters, especially the Leftists and ex-Communists, cannot tolerate this stance. For them, the Syrians have the right to revolt against their dictator without being called terrorists or thugs. Others are just afraid of Hezbollah's fate when the Syrian regime falls and think the party should be more pragmatic.

Second, the increasing corruption throughout Hezbollah's ranks cannot be ignored anymore, especially considering the deteriorating economic situation in

Lebanon. While many are losing their jobs or at least struggling with everyday expenses, Hezbollah's members and their families seem to be flourishing financially without hiding it. This has created grudges among non-Hezbollah members who have to beg for aid, contrary to the many Hezbollah members who seem to have gained considerably from reparations following the 2006 July war.

Third, for the first time, Hezbollah and its allies are in control of the worst government in decades in the opinion of many Lebanese. State services are nonexistent, there's never been less electricity, unemployment is on the rise, and Syrian forces have been violating the Lebanese borders weekly while the government sticks to its "disassociation policy" regarding the Syrian uprising. Also, crime is on the rise.

No one in Lebanon is happy. But the Shia are both unhappy and afraid. Today, Hezbollah is a beast bleeding from many wounds. Israel said on Friday it would consider military action if needed to ensure Syrian missiles or chemical weapons did not reach Bashar al-Assad's allies in Lebanon, i.e., Hezbollah. And

who's going to pay the price for such action—again? The Shia. At the same time, countries across the world are pointing the finger at Hezbollah and Iran for involvement the suicide bombing that killed Israeli tourists in Bulgaria last week.

Meanwhile, the Lebanese government, led by Hezbollah, still turns a blind eye to the increasing number of Syrian refugees coming to Lebanon and refuses to offer them the help and aid the Shia were offered when they took refuge in Syria during the 2006 war. While Hezbollah is hiding behind the rhetoric of resistance and willfully forgetting the hospitality of the Syrian people, many of their followers feel guilty and cannot hide it.



“When the war started in 2006, I left with my family to Damascus, where we stayed with another family whom we did not know,” says Imad from Bint Jbeil. “We had common friends who took us in. They

were so welcoming and shared their food and house with us. We stayed in touch, and today they contacted me to see if they can come over for a few days until the clashes in Damascus subside. They are Sunnis, and I am not sure if they are going to be safe here in the South, so I told them the truth and put them in touch with my friends in Beirut. I don't know if they will go, but I feel so bad and ungrateful. Why does it have to be that way?”

This is not about the Resistance anymore. It doesn't matter whether the Syrian regime actually supports the Resistance or not. The question today for the Shia is: When (not if) the Syrian regime is toppled, what are you going to do?

Are the Shia ready to pay the price of another war? Are they ready to remain the human shield behind which Hezbollah hides? In his last speech, Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah called slain Syrian Defense Chief Assef Shawkat “a comrade in arms and resistance.” No Lebanese can deny his crimes in Lebanon or how many Lebanese suffered because of him and his regime. Are the Shia willing to suffer the consequences of the war

Hezbollah declared against the Syrian people?

The Shia are already on the edge, and their discontent with Hezbollah is on the rise. How long will it take for them to look behind them and say, “Enough!” A small dose of human interaction can be louder than any political words. They can start by helping the Syrian refugees. They can also ask Nasrallah to speak for himself, but that will probably take some time.

Hanin Ghaddar is the managing editor of NOW Lebanon. She tweets @haningdr

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **Is Assad finished? And, if so, what happens next?**

Alex Rowell, July 21,

A still taken from a YouTube video purportedly showing an FSA rebel defacing President Assad’s portrait at a Syria-Turkey border crossing captured by rebels on Thursday. (AFP/YouTube)

What with Wednesday’s assassination of three senior members of Syrian President

Bashar al-Assad’s inner circle (a fourth, National Security chief General Hisham Ikhtiyar, died of his wounds on Friday); the takeover of major Syrian border crossings to Turkey and Iraq by rebel units on Thursday; the accelerating pace of high-level army defections; and reports of members of Assad’s minority Alawite sect fleeing to their traditional coastal heartland; it’s perhaps unsurprising that analysts are wondering aloud whether the regime is in its final days. While experts contacted by NOW Lebanon varied in their confidence of a quick victory for the opposition, they also argued that what will follow the defeat of the regime may prove no less vexing, for Syrians and the international community alike.

Michael Weiss, Syria specialist at the London-based Henry Jackson Society and occasional NOW contributor, believes that recent developments rule out the possibility of the regime’s survival. “Whatever else happens, the one safe bet is that Assad is finished,” he told NOW. “The fact that the rebels have gained control of the borders is huge. Turkey and Iraq, the way I think about them, are the [militant opposition] Free Syria Army’s barracks and weapons supplier,

respectively. And another thing that people aren't saying enough about is that the Turks have already created a de facto buffer zone along the border. Any helicopter that comes within three miles is chased away by Turkish F-16s.

“But the variables of how Assad will be finished are key. I'm not willing to make any long- or short-term prognostications at this point, simply because he could still use fighter jets, he could still deploy chemical weapons.”

Other commentators were somewhat more cautious. “I think it's too soon to conclude that we've seen the end of the regime, but it seems very clear that the momentum has shifted in the opposition's favor and the regime is now very much on the defensive,” said Steven Heydemann, senior advisor and Syria specialist at the United States Institute of Peace. “It has become almost impossible to imagine how Assad himself or the regime will recover from the setbacks of the past week.”

And Andrew Tabler, senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, believes that the regime itself may outlive its current president. “Assad is finished,

but I don't know what 'finished' will look like or how long it will take; he might be finished, but the regime might not be. In terms of the end of the regime's grip all over Syria, yes, that's come to an end, but in terms of it existing on this planet, that could continue for a while over a smaller geographic area.”

Indeed, the week's events have revived speculation that Assad may look to carve out an Alawite enclave in his co-religionists' historical heartland along the Mediterranean coastline. A number of Alawites have reportedly already relocated to the so-called “Sahel” region.

But Heydemann is unconvinced. “I have to say that I don't find that a very likely scenario, although I'm aware of indications that some preparations for that kind of move have been made. I have very significant reservations about the viability of that scenario, and it seems to me that even if key figures within the regime do decide to take a kind of last stand or try to establish some sort of semi-autonomous zone around Latakia, it's going to prove almost impossible to sustain, and it strikes me as a very short-term strategy at best. My own feeling is

that if the regime loses Damascus, it's finished."

Weiss was similarly skeptical, adding that there are large Sunni populations throughout the coastal region that would not readily submit to such an outcome.

Moreover, NOW has previously reported on myriad further economic and political impediments to such a move.



Elsewhere, the purported increased likelihood of a rebel victory has also sparked concerns about what are believed to be substantial quantities of chemical and biological weapons held by the regime. According to Charles P. Blair, senior fellow at the Federation of American Scientists, Syria's "massive" arsenal includes "large stockpiles of deadly nerve agents, including VX, the most toxic of all chemical weapons," in addition to blistering agents, mustard gas

and "Scud missiles carrying warheads loaded with sarin nerve agent." Tabler argued in print on Thursday that these weapons "could fall into the hands of Sunni extremists" as the regime's control wanes.

However, for now at least, such scenarios are hypothetical. What, then, remains to be done for the rebels to clinch victory? "I believe it is critical for the opposition to continue activities that threaten the regime's survival," said Heydemann. "The only conditions that are likely to produce any sort of negotiated transition are those in which the regime is finally and decisively persuaded that it will not survive, and that the international supporters of the regime are persuaded that they need to back a process in order to prevent the country from entering a period of chaos and conflict."

Weiss suggests a more direct approach. "The rebels need to storm the presidential palace, and they need to kill Assad and prove to the Syrian people that he's dead. Then, they either need to kill or in some way incapacitate the remaining Baathist leadership.

“But in some ways, toppling the regime is the easy part. What happens the day after?”

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=421265>

- **Authorities Repel Terrorist Groups Crossing the Border from Lebanon, Jordan**

PROVINCES, (SANA)- The authorities on Monday repelled armed terrorist groups that were attempting to infiltrate across the Lebanese borders into Syria at different sites in Talkalakh area in the countryside of Homs province.

A source in the province told SANA reporter that the terrorist groups tried to cross the border and smuggle weapons carried on mules from al-Bireh town in Lebanon towards the Syrian territories at the sites of al-Tahouneh, Halat, Edlin and Tabet al-Shahm.

The source added that the authorities repelled the terrorist groups inflicting heavy losses upon them, noting that a number of terrorists fled back to the Lebanese territories.

Army units pursue terrorists in Nahr Aisha and al-Sayida Zainab

The Syrian Army forces today pursued the defeated armed terrorist groups at Nahr Isha neighborhood in Damascus after they terrified the citizens, devastated and spread chaos in the area.

The Army units inflicted big losses to the terrorists, arrested scores of them and confiscated their weapons.

In Damascus countryside, the authorities are hunting the terrorists and mercenaries at al-Sayida Zainab, Hajera and al-Diybia neighborhoods, causing big losses among them, arresting other while many of them gave themselves up to the authorities.

Inflicting heavy losses among terrorists in Aleppo

The competent authorities today clashed with armed terrorist groups which were attacking the families. Killing innocents and braking off roads at al-Sukari and Salah al-Din neighborhoods in Aleppo.

An official source told SANA reporter in Aleppo that clashes with terrorists

inflicted heavy losses among the terrorists where many of them surrendered and handed their weapons to the authorities.

Authorities Destroy Operation site of Armed groups in al-Qseir

The competent authorities today destroyed the operation site of the armed terrorist groups on al-Mouh road near Ain al-Tanour in al-Qseir, Homs.

A big number of terrorists, among them Abul-Majid al-Rahil, Diyab Hassan al-Diab and Hussein al-Ukla were killed.

Terrorist Infiltration Attempt from Jordan Thwarted

The border guards foiled an infiltration attempt by an armed terrorist group west of Nasseeb border crossing on the Jordanian-Syrian borders.

A source in the governorate told SANA reporter that the clash with the terrorist group left a number of terrorists dead, among them Ahmad Abdul-Aziz Zreikat, Anas Issam Oklah al-Mahameed, Abdul-Halim Ahmad Zreikat, Kassem Abdul-Aziz

Zreikat and Mahmoud Ali Muhammad al-Zo'bi.

In Kherbet Ghazaleh, the competent authorities clashed with a terrorist group that attacked the law-enforcement members in the town.

The source indicated that the clash inflicted losses on the terrorist group whose weapons were confiscated.

The source added that two terrorists of Arab nationalities were among the dead.

Authorities Kill Terrorists in Idlib

The security authorities chased armed terrorist groups in Sahel al-Rouj in Idlib countryside causing heavy losses among their members.

An official source in the province told SANA reporter that the terrorists Mohammad al-Beik, Khaled Issa, Abdulmajeed Jadoue, Nasif al-Ahmad and Sattouf Ramadan were identified among the dead.

Authorities Chase Terrorists, Seize Weapons in Deir Ezzor

Authorities on Sunday chased terrorists in al-Hamidiyeh and Deir al-Ateeq neighborhoods in Deir Ezzor.

A source in the province told SANA reporter that the authorities inflicted heavy losses upon the terrorists and seized their weapons.

In Lattakia Countryside, the competent authorities clashed with an armed terrorist group at Rabia Region, inflicting big losses upon the terrorists, of whom some run away towards the Turkish borders.

According to SANA reporter, two security personnel were martyred: Chief Warrant Officer Nazih Mahmoud Suleiman and Conscript Mahmoud al-Hussein.

In Idlib Governorate, an armed terrorist group assassinated Ali Abazid, a pediatrician at the children hospital in the governorate, after kidnapping him.

In Al-Hassakah Governorate, security forces raided yesterday a terrorist hideout and arrested 18 of them, among them were many of Arab nationalities.

The operation led also according to official source, to seizing an 80 caliber mortar, mortar shells, 13 automatic rifles, 4 guns, an RBG launcher, and 2 Degtyaryov machineguns , machinegun barrels, Brno rifle, large quantities of ammunition and cash: 10 thousand dollars, 150 thousand Syrian Ponds, and 4 SVU cars.

<http://www.sana.sy/eng/337/2012/07/24/432903.htm>

- **Foreign Ministry: Chemical and biological weapons are secured and would only be used in the case of external aggression**

DAMASCUS- Foreign and Expatriates Ministry on Monday stressed Syria's stance that any chemical or biological weapons will never ever be used during the crisis in Syria notwithstanding the developments inside the country.

A statement by the Ministry, read by spokesman Dr. Jihad Makdissi in a press conference, said that such weapons stocks are secured and directly monitored by the Syrian Armed Forces and would only be used in the case of external aggression on the country.

The Ministry made clear that it has followed with concern the proceedings of the political and media campaign directed against Syria, stressing that this campaign aims at justifying any possible military intervention on Syria under the false claim that Damascus is using weapons of mass destruction and preparing the international public opinion for such an intervention.

"The Foreign and Expatriates Ministry has previously declared the content and details of this stance to countries which expressed concern that unconventional weapons would reach a third part," the statement added.

The Ministry, at the same time, warned of "another matter of concern" regarding the possibility of supplying the terrorist groups in Syria with arms from abroad in light of "the increasing bankruptcy".

It said the aim of such possibility is "to hit the political system in Syria through using tactical bombs or mines containing biological substances that would explode somewhere in a village and then accusing the Syrian forces of doing that."

The statement reiterated the Ministry's stress that this systematic political and media campaign will not at all avail to help Syria overcome its crisis.

The Ministry admonished those countries claiming concern for Syria and the Syrians "to spare their efforts and negative media campaigns to persuading those whom they back, host, fund and arm to abide by a political solution to the crisis" according to the plan of the international envoy Kofi Annan.

Answering a question on the recent events taking place in some of Damascus neighborhoods, Makdissi said that "It is clear that the Syrian army is defending the Syrians and that we are in state of self-defense. There might be clashes in certain areas but the security situation is much more better."

He added that the state will respond to those who carry weapons in the same way, stressing that doors are open those who call for dialogue and adopt political solution.

Makdissi assured those who left their houses that it is an urgent situation that will not last for more than two days before everything is back to normal, adding that Damascus Governorate is cooperating with charity organizations to provide help for those people.

Regarding news on armed terrorist groups taking control of border crossings with Turkey and Iraq, Makdissi said that the last to be liberated are two border crossings which were already abandoned and out of service since last June.

Commenting on the statement of the Arab Ministerial Committee in Doha, Makdissi said that changing Annan's mission is not at the hands of the Arabs, underlining that talking about transitional power system constitutes a flagrant interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.

Makdissi regretted the Arab League immoral way in dealing with a founding state and instead of helping Syria, they are complicating more the situation.

He said that the Syrian people is the one to decide the future of country and the decisive factor is the ballot boxes and

sitting down for dialogue serving Syria's interests and not others'.

Makdissi said that "If these Arab countries are honest in their keenness on the Syrian blood, then they should stop arming and instigating against Syria because these acts can't contribute to overcoming the crisis in peaceful ways."

He added that this alleged keenness of these Arab countries is fake and proves their political hypocrisy. As for the statements of the Russian ambassador in Paris, Makdissi stressed that the Russian diplomat is to clarify his statements not the Syrian Foreign Ministry, adding that "We agreed on a political process within Annan's plan which was approved by the UN Security Council. We agreed on a political process led by Syria and the Syrians."

He highlighted that Syria didn't demand Annan's mission, but the international community pretended it wanted to help Syria, "Shifting or amending Annan's plan is entrusted to the UN Security Council," he said.

Makdissi underscored that the obstacles hindering Annan's plan are made by the sides which are funding, arming and talking about weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and making preludes for things that will not happen.

Answering a question on the external political escalation which synchronies with a visit of the US Secretary of Defense to Israel to discuss the possibility of targeting the sites of the Syrian weapons, Makdissi said that "Even though I don't know the agenda of the visit, but the reasons can't be good. Anyway, I told you that they are making a media and political campaign, we are defending ourselves. If there are such weapons, they are for defending Syria against external aggression. Any military person knows that such weapons can't be used in a guerilla warfare."

On the possibility of a comprehensive war taking place in the region in case Israel decided to bombard the sites of the chemical weapons in Syria, Makdissi said "Don't ask a diplomat about a war option, I don't talk about a war and, God's willing, there will not be a war."

<http://www.champress.net/index.php?q=en/Article/view/4626>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

### • **Opposition Leader Unveils Saudis' Continued Role in Suppression of Bahrainis**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A prominent Bahraini opposition figure said that Saudi forces are still in the tiny Persian Gulf island and play active role in suppression of Bahraini protesters.

The leader of Bahrain's Al Wefaq National Islamic Society Sheikh Ali Salman announced that Saudi forces wear Bahraini police uniforms in their crackdown on anti-regime protesters in Bahrain.



He added that the Peninsula Shield Force uses Bahraini police uniform when

cracking down on anti-government protesters.

The cleric emphasized that his group will never resort to arms and will continue peaceful protests.

Anti-government protesters have been holding peaceful demonstrations across Bahrain since mid-February 2011, calling for an end to the Al Khalifa dynasty's over-40-year rule.

Violence against the defenseless people escalated after a Saudi-led conglomerate of police, security and military forces from the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) member states - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar - were dispatched to the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom on March 13, 2011, to help Manama crack down on peaceful protesters.

So far, more than 69 people have been killed, hundreds have gone missing and thousands of others have been injured.

Police clampdown on protesters continues daily. Authorities have tried to stop organized protests by opposition parties

over the past month by refusing to license them and using tear gas on those who turn up.

The opposition coalition wants full powers for the elected parliament and a cabinet fully answerable to parliament.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251188>

- **Gulf states back Yemen in Iran spy cell row**

The energy-rich Gulf Cooperation Council on Monday expressed support for Yemen's security days after Sanaa said it uncovered what it called an Iranian spy spell.

GCC secretary general Abdelatif Zayani praised Sanaa for dismantling the alleged spy ring and said the six-nation council "fully backs Yemen in all the measures it undertakes to reinforce stability and security," a statement said.

Yemen's defence ministry said last week that authorities dismantled an "Iranian spy network that had been operating in Yemen for seven years under the

leadership of a former leader in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ramin Mehmanparast dismissed the accusation as "baseless."

Relations between Sunni-majority Yemen and Shia Iran have been strained as Sanaa accuses the Islamic republic of backing rebels from an offshoot of Shiite Islam in the north of the Arabian Peninsula state.

Tehran has repeatedly denied the claim.

Yemen's mountainous north is a stronghold of the Zaidi rebels, also known as Huthis, who from 2004 fought six wars with central government forces before signing a truce in February 2010. The rebellion claimed thousands of lives.

Dozens of people have also been killed in sectarian clashes since last year between the rebels and Sunni Salafists in the north.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478>

- **UAE endorses World Energy Day on Oct 22**

His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has endorsed a plan by Professor Harold Hyun-Suk Oh, President and Founder of the World Energy Forum (WEF), to name October 22 as World Energy Day.

Dubai's Supreme Council of Energy has adopted the initiative and included it in the forum's agenda. World Energy Day will be launched in Dubai, and will also be adopted by the United Nations to be celebrated annually, in the same manner as World Environment Day.

The initiative will be further strengthened by the presence of over 40 presidents, and the commitment of governments and policy makers to put together a roadmap to implement a global energy sustainability system. The system will benefit all nations and promote a global paradigm that revolves around energy. It will contribute to launching a global movement towards providing safer and cleaner energy to all, and sustainability for mankind.

( L-R ) Waleed Salman Board Member of Supreme Council of Energy, Mr. Nejb Zafrani, Secretary General and CEO-CSCE, Vice Chairman Executive Committee, Ms. Khawla Al-Mehairi, High Committee Coordinator and Vice Chairperson - WEF Dubai, Dr. Dinesh Kumar, Executive Director-World Energy Forum and Dr. Elissar Sarrouh, UNDP Resident in UAE at the Press Conference announcing the World Energy Forum at Armani Hotel, Burj Khalifa, Downtown Dubai. - KT Photo by Leslie Pableo



A meeting took place on Monday between Saeed Mohammed Al Tayer, Vice-Chairman of the Supreme Council of Energy and Harold Hyun-Suk Oh, attended by Dinesh Kumar, Executive Director of the World Energy Forum, Dr Yousef Al Akraf, Chairperson of the Logistics Committee for WEF 2012, and Khawla Al Mehairi, Vice-Chairperson of the Media

and Communications Committee for WEF 2012.

The meeting focussed on discussing directives issued by Shaikh Mohammed which tackled a number of global sustainability issues and the role of the UAE, as a global player in the field, to support the future of sustainability. He has approved this initiative and stressed the importance of the work done by the Higher Organising Committee and providing the necessary support to the WEF.

The meeting was part of the preparations to host the World Energy Forum 2012 from October 22 to 24 at the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre. The World Energy Forum will be hosted outside the UN headquarters in New York for the first time.

[http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/nationgeneral/2012/July/nationgeneral\\_July349.xml&section=nationgeneral](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/nationgeneral/2012/July/nationgeneral_July349.xml&section=nationgeneral)

- **Saudis free Al Qaida linked women detainees**

Release of women demanded by Al Qaida captors of diplomat

Five Al Qaida-linked women detainees have been freed by Saudi authorities but the move was not linked to demands by the Al Qaida captors of a Saudi diplomat in Yemen, the government said on Monday.

Abdullah Al Khalidi, the Saudi deputy consul in the southern Yemeni port city of Aden, was kidnapped outside his residence on March 28. His captors demanded a ransom and the release of detainees held in Saudi prisons but the government said in April that it could not negotiate with Al Qaida.

Al Khalidi has appeared in two videos since then, posted on the internet, begging King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz to meet his captors' demand for the release of women detainees.

"Release those women, they release me the next day," he said in the second video posted earlier this month.

The women, who were held by Saudi security services, are relatives of Al Qaida fighters, Al Khalidi said.

Asked if they were released to meet the demands of Al Khalidi's captors, Interior Ministry spokesman Mansour Al Turki said: "The investigation bureau and public prosecution office decided to release two of the women detainees by court order as they were [pregnant] and close to their due dates."

The other three were released on bail on Saturday pending trial, he said. One more woman detainee is serving a jail sentence.

In April, a militant who claimed responsibility for Al Khalidi's kidnapping threatened to kill him unless a ransom was paid and Al Qaida prisoners were freed from Saudi jails.

"We cannot consider this release as heeding to demands of the captors because, on principal, states do not accept to be subject to blackmail," said a Saudi official who declined to be named.

"There was a coincidence between the release of the women detainees on humanitarian grounds and the demands of the captors."

The government hopes the move will prompt Al Khalidi's captors to release him on humanitarian grounds, the official said.

The United States and its Gulf Arab allies have watched with mounting alarm as radicals, emboldened by political instability in Yemen, gained ground in the south of the country in the past year.

Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula — the name of the Al Qaida group operating in Yemen — is seen by US officials as the most dangerous offshoot of the global militant network.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudis-free-al-qaida-linked-women-detainees-1.1052555>

- **Envoy to give Saudi spy agency diplomatic savvy**

Bandar has ability to think outside the box, analyst says

The appointment of Saudi Arabia's longtime envoy to the United States as intelligence chief marks an attempt to give the service a diplomatic edge at a time of turmoil in the region, analysts say.

Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, who served in Washington from 1983 to 2005 and was named intelligence chief on Thursday, has the ability "to think outside the box, overcome obstacles, make decisions and work in an innovative way", international relations analyst Abdullah Al Shummari told AFP.

He could play a key role in helping the kingdom "re-evaluate its strategies in foreign policy... [as] major geostrategic changes across the Arab world will rearrange the roles of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran in the Middle East," Al Shummari said.

Saudi Arabia has "an opportunity to regain its leading role" in the region after it "subsided in favour of Iran and Turkey following the September 11, 2001 attacks and the US invasion of Iraq" in 2003, he said.

Abdul Aziz Sager, chairman of the Gulf Research Centre, believes that "the current situation requires greater coordination, not only on a regional level but also internationally".



The kingdom, which had traditionally focused on maintaining strong ties with Western powers, had in recent years tried to “establish good relations with Russia and exchanged visits on the highest levels”, said Sager.

But relations with Moscow have taken a series of hits since the Arab Spring uprisings swept the region last year, notably over Russia’s support for its longtime ally Syrian President Bashar Al Assad.

While Saudi Arabia has openly called for the arming of rebels fighting Al Assad’s regime, Russia has joined China in repeatedly using its veto to block tough action at the UN Security Council over the 16-month revolt.

The situation “requires someone accustomed to the game of interests” of international powers, Sager said, noting

that Prince Bandar had achieved “several” major successes on the world stage over the years.

For instance he managed to convince Russia not to oppose UN resolutions to expel now executed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussain’s troops from Kuwait following his invasion of the emirate in 1990.

He “is among the people who best understood US policies and managed to deal well with the decision-makers,” said Anwar Eshki, president of the Saudi-based Middle East Centre for Strategic and Legal Studies.

He “will be able to achieve better understanding between Americans and Arabs” as the Middle East faces persistent upheaval from the Arab Spring uprisings that erupted at the end of 2010, said Eshki, who worked with Bandar in Washington.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/envoy-to-give-saudi-spy-agency-diplomatic-savvy-1.1052497>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Kabul Accuses Islamabad Of Fresh Shelling**

July 23, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Afghan officials have accused Pakistan of fresh crossborder missile attacks.

Fazlullah Wahedi, the governor of eastern Kunar Province, told RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan that some 100 rockets were fired from Pakistan on July 23.

The fresh claims follow Kabul's warning on July 22 that any further crossborder shelling by Pakistani forces could significantly harm Afghanistan's relations with Islamabad.

The warning came after at least four people were reported killed from shelling in Afghanistan's eastern Kunar Province on July 20 and 21.

Wasifullah Wasifi, a spokesman for the Kunar government, said more than 300 heavy artillery shells and rockets were fired by Pakistani forces into Kunar's Dangan district.

The reported shelling came after new Pakistani Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf last week visited Kabul for talks with President Hamid Karzai aimed at smoothing relations.

Last month, a barrage of crossborder fire from Pakistan into Kunar forced thousands of villagers to flee their homes after Islamabad accused Kabul of protecting militants who infiltrated to kill 13 Pakistani soldiers.

Based on reporting by AP and AFP

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Pakistani, Afghan leaders agree to pursue**

contacts with Taliban, other insurgent groups

ISLAMABAD, July 23 (Xinhua) -- Pakistani Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf, who visited Kabul on Thursday last week, has agreed with Afghan President Hamid Karzai on the need to pursue multiple channels of communication and contact with the Taliban and other armed opposition groups in the country.

According to a joint statement issued simultaneously in Islamabad and Kabul at the conclusion of Ashraf's day-long visit, Pakistan also vowed to "work together" with Afghanistan in an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process involving the Taliban, Hizb-e-Islami of former Prime Minister, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and other insurgent factions.

Afghan Ambassador to Islamabad, Omar Daudzai, told Xinhua that Afghanistan wants Pakistan to play an "important role" in helping facilitate the talks with the armed insurgent groups, especially the Taliban.

Pakistan has been trying to convince the Taliban to enter into direct talks with the Afghan government but the insurgents have so far refused.

Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Yusuf Raza Gilani, had launched a rare public appeal to the Afghan Taliban and other armed groups in February to start talks with the US-backed Afghan government.

The former head of the powerful Taliban Political Affairs, Agha Jan Mutasim, has

told Xinhua that the United States and the Taliban are two major parties in the conflict and that the Taliban, at the moment, do not want to talk to the 'powerless regime' in Kabul.

He said the Taliban would consider talks with Afghans after they reach an agreement with the U.S. Mutasim was critically wounded in an ambush in the Pakistani port city of Karachi in August last year and is now undergoing treatment in Turkey.

Despite the Taliban's refusal to enter into intra-Afghan talks, Pakistan has not given up its efforts to encourage the militants to sit down with the Karzai's administration or High Afghan Peace Council so that Afghanistan can achieve peace before the departure of the U.S. and NATO troops in 2014.

Pakistan is also under mounting pressure from the world, especially from the U.S., NATO and Afghanistan, to 'take practical' steps to facilitate the peace and reconciliation process in the war-shattered country before 2014 to avert another civil war.

In February, President Karzai visited Islamabad and sought assurance from Pakistan that it would give a 'safe passage' to those Taliban leaders and their representatives who want to hold talks with the Afghan government.

Kabul had earlier complained that leaders of insurgent Afghan groups who wished to talk to the Afghan government were either killed or kidnapped while in Pakistan.

Analysts said that the reopening of the supply line for NATO forces in Afghanistan after nearly an eight-month was a signal that Islamabad was doing its share in helping the peace process in Afghanistan.

The world community welcomed Pakistan's decision on the unblocking of NATO supply routes despite opposition to the decision at home by hard-line religious groups.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Afghan Police Officer Kills Three NATO Contractors**

July 23, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

An Afghan policeman shot dead three foreign staff at a police training center in Herat Province on July 22.

Afghan security and intelligence officials say the gunman also injured the trainers' Afghan translator.

The attacker reportedly worked for the regional police command.

He was killed later in a shoot-out with troops from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

An ISAF statement said the three foreign staff were civilian contractors working for NATO as trainers.

Meanwhile, officials say an Afghan army soldier opened fire on his NATO colleagues in northern Afghanistan on July 23, injuring two U.S. troops.

The deputy governor of Faryab Province, Abdul Satar Barez, said the Afghan soldier was killed when U.S. soldiers returned fire.

Killings of foreigners by Afghan government forces has escalated this year

as Kabul recruits more Afghans to take over security ahead of NATO's planned withdrawal by the end of 2014.

A total of 29 foreign troops or civilian contractors have been killed by Afghan police or soldiers since the beginning of the year.

With reporting by AFP and the BBC

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Afghan conflicts, insurgency claim 37 lives in 2 days**

by Abdul Haleem

KABUL, July 23 (Xinhua) -- Continued conflicts and Taliban-linked militancy have claimed the lives of 37 people including three children and five service members of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) since Sunday, officials confirmed on Monday.

The latest victims of continued insecurity incidents as confirmed by officials were three innocent children killed by a roadside bomb in Taliban former stronghold Kandahar province 450 km south of Afghan capital Kabul.

"Three innocent children were killed on Sunday when they found a device from a road in Marouf district and wanted to play with it, but suddenly it went off killing the trio on the spot," a statement released by Kandahar provincial administration on Monday said.

In another security incident, three civilian employees with the NATO-led coalition forces were killed Sunday when a man wearing an Afghan police uniform turned his gun against them in western Afghanistan, the coalition confirmed on Monday.

"The individual who fired on the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) contracted civilian employees was killed during the engagement. The incident is currently under investigation," the NATO-led ISAF said in the statement without giving more details.

Meantime, spokesman for Herat provincial administration Mohihudin Nuri confirmed that the attacker was a police and served in Herat province.

Addressing a press conference in Herat city 640 km west of Kabul, on Monday, Nuri said, "the attacker was Eidi Mohammad from Badghis province who had served a police for the past three years here in Herat. Eidi Mohammad who entered the compound of foreign advisors at 07:30 p.m. local time on Sunday opened fire killing three advisors and wounding another along with an interpreter."

He also added that the advisors assisted police in training.

The attacker Eidi Mohammad was also killed, Nuri official confirmed, saying it is yet to know the motivation behind the bloody incident.

Taliban-led continued militancy had also killed two more service members with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) on Sunday, the military alliance confirmed in a statement.

"Two International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) service members died following an improvised explosive device (IED) attack in southern Afghanistan

Sunday," the brief statement said without identifying the nationalities of the victims.

The violent incidents and insecurity has been on constant rise since Taliban launched spring offensive coded "Al-Farooq" from May 3 this year in the post-Taliban country.

Afghan police during series of operations across the country have killed 19 anti-government militants and captured 14 others over the past 24 hours, Interior Ministry said in a statement released here Monday.

"The operations have been carried out in Balkh, Ghazni, Helmand and Nimroz provinces over the past 24 hours during which 19 armed insurgents were killed, four wounded and 14 others were arrested by Afghan National Police," the statement stressed.

In similar development, "Afghan National Security Forces and coalition forces killed 10 insurgents during a small arms engagement in Alah Say District, in eastern Kapisa province on Sunday," the ISAF's Regional Command East (RC-E) said in a statement on Monday.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Afghan Women's Shelters, A Lifeline For Many, Face Uncertain Future**

July 23, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

By Frud Bezhan

KABUL -- Mumtaz, her disfigured face a collage of bulging red scars, fidgets nervously with a pen as she attempts to write her name for the first time.

The 18-year-old, standing among a handful of women in a makeshift classroom, is attending her daily lessons at a women's shelter in Kabul. The shelter is one of more than a dozen around Afghanistan that provide refuge for abused Afghan women who have fled their homes.

Mumtaz's face lights up as she writes her name correctly on a chalkboard. But her smile quickly vanishes when asked about the events that led her to seek protection at the shelter, run by the Afghan nongovernmental organization Women4AfghanWomen, five months ago.

The shelter currently houses around 20 women, some with young children. Many, unable to return to their homes and families for fear of being killed, have been there for years because they have nowhere else to go.

Mumtaz says she was victimized by a scorned man who decided that if he could not marry her, he would make sure nobody else would want to. The middle-aged man, who reputedly had links to a local militia, had asked for her hand in marriage, but her father refused the request.

In response, Mumtaz says, the man, accompanied by six others, broke into her home in northern Kunduz Province, beat her father, and sprayed skin-burning acid over her mother and three sisters. Mumtaz says her one-time suitor pulled her hair back and emptied a bucket of acid over head and body before fleeing.

"They took me to a hospital in Kunduz, where I stayed for about 10 days. They wouldn't even look at me there," she says. "The women's group brought me to Kabul. I had one operation but then they

discharged me, saying I wouldn't get better and would die. Finally, they sent me to India."

#### Indebted To The Shelter

Against overwhelming odds, Mumtaz survived after receiving several life-saving medical procedures in New Delhi. Mumtaz's family members, too, survived, although their safety remains precarious as many of the men accused of involvement in the attack are still at large.

After months of rehabilitation at the shelter in Kabul, Mumtaz is in stable condition and is able to speak, move, and eat freely. Doctors are still closely monitoring her fragile psychological condition as Mumtaz battles trauma and depression.

Mumtaz says she is indebted to the shelter, which helped pay her expensive medical and travel expenses. She hails the efforts of women's shelters, many of them run by Afghan NGOs and funded by a mix of private donors, international organizations, and foreign governments.

Many, she says, continue to work despite routine death threats and assassination attempts by the Taliban, which often claims the shelters are brothels and a haven for drug use.

"The shelter has helped me a lot. If they hadn't helped me, I probably would have died," Mumtaz says. "I'm very happy here. They help me in every aspect, including food, clothes, and ensuring I have my own room. They do everything for us."

#### Fear Of Progress Undone

To many, Mumtaz's shocking ordeal highlights the fragile state of women's rights in Afghanistan, where domestic abuse is routine, forced marriages are the norm, and female suicide rates remain among the highest in the world despite gains made since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001.

Now, as the United States and its NATO allies prepare to withdraw from Afghanistan by 2014, fears are rising that what little progress women have made could be undone if the Taliban reenters the political scene.

The country's independently run and funded women's shelters, a prime symbol of that progress, are already bearing the brunt of growing conservatism within the government. In February 2011, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, under pressure from powerful social and religious circles, attempted to bring the shelters under government control.

The draft law, which was abandoned following a flurry of Western media attention, would have required women to obtain government approval and even virginity tests before they would be granted access to shelters.

#### 'We Don't Trust Our Own People'

Muzhda Saleh, who has worked as a volunteer for the Women4AfghanWomen shelter in Kabul for the past two years, says Afghan women are already struggling to shed their second-class status in one of the world's most religious and conservative countries.

"In the provinces [outside the major cities], very few people have accepted that their girls should study, go to school, and eventually work," Saleh says. "Many

women will lose the gains that they have made in the last 10 years. This is not easy to say, but we women don't trust our own people. Perhaps the rights that women have now will be taken away from them. The only environment in which these rights can be saved is when international forces are here."

Mumtaz, too, is pessimistic about the future. Despite repeated pledges from the international community that Afghan women will not be abandoned, she predicts the West will lose interest and the Western-backed Afghan government will sell out women as it negotiates a peace settlement with insurgents.

Whatever unfolds in the next few years, Mumtaz, who insists she can never go back to her village for fear of her life, maintains she will embark on a new chapter. Mumtaz hopes to finish school and eventually give back to the cause that she says saved her life.

"I don't know what will happen to me in the future. I would like to study and work in this office for women. They always come to the aid of desperate women," she says.

"Whenever I reflect on my own experiences, I think if they weren't there then I would have died. I had no life and my family didn't have the means to help me and take me to the hospital. Every girl and woman in Afghanistan is living under hardship."

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

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