



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

**The Restructuring Procees of Iraq**

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## 1. IRAQ

### • Editorial Trouble in Iraq

27 July 2012

Iraq appears to be descending further into chaos. Last Monday marked the bloodiest day of the year amidst heightening sectarian violence— a potential consequence of tensions brewing amidst the top echelons of powerbrokers.

Ever since the US forces left Iraqi soil in December 2011, politicians of various hues have been wrestling and bickering for influence. The power-sharing arrangement fell into shambles when last year Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, issued an arrest warrant against Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi on terrorism charges. Maliki's detractors in the parliament have increased over the years, accusing him of acting like an autocrat. And under the auspices of the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, they unsuccessfully tried to muster a no-confidence vote against Maliki in June. The prevailing political impasse not only threatens to bring down Iraq's fragile democratic system, but also reignite

sectarian violence that plagued the country in 2005 and 2006.

The past few months have been particularly gory for Iraq. Even though for most, the US was an unwanted occupier, its presence nevertheless acted as a stabilising force in a deeply divided country. But now that the stabilising force is gone all that's left behind are frustrated Iraqis desperate to fulfill their political aspirations. After suffering repression for decades under Saddam's dictatorial rule they're now willing to fight for their share of power.

Iraq's disturbing story bears an uncanny similarity to the events in Tunisia and Libya, where representative governments have emerged after decades of dictatorship. In places where the political will of the public has been hitherto suppressed and trust amongst stakeholders lacking, the winners want to appropriate all the power they can. Thus, nascent democracies are particularly overwhelmed by tribal, sectarian and regional affiliations, because different powerbrokers inevitably have to share power in a democracy.

While politicians squabble for control in the Iraqi parliament, the roads and streets of the country are stained with blood of innocent people. If the country's politicians don't realise the gravity of the situation and reach a compromise, there's a possibility that Iraq might become ungovernable again.

[http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=/data/editorial/2012/July/editorial\\_July53.xml&section=editorial](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=/data/editorial/2012/July/editorial_July53.xml&section=editorial)

- **Editorial: Terror Attacks In Iraq**

29 July 2012

The United States has condemned the bombings and violent attacks that occurred in more than a dozen Iraqi cities on July 23.

The United States has condemned the bombings and violent attacks that occurred in more than a dozen Iraqi cities on July 23. At least 115 people were killed and over 200 wounded in the bloodiest day in the country in more than two years.

State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland deplored the carnage:

“We strongly condemn these attacks which took place ... in Iraq. The targeting of innocents is always cowardly. It's particularly reprehensible during this holy month of Ramadan. I would like to say it's unusual. Unfortunately it is not unusual that we have seen terrorists exploit the holy month, exploit the peaceful efforts by Iraqis to worship, to commit acts of terror.”

Al Qaida in Iraq, known as AQI, released a statement claiming responsibility for the attacks, which occurred one day after AQI announced it would be starting a new offensive in the country. The attacks bore a number of AQI hallmarks: they were coordinated, occurring within a few hours of each other; and they targeted mostly Shiite neighborhoods, although many Sunnis were also among the victims.

State Department Spokesperson Nuland said the “horrific tactics” used by al-Qaida in Iraq are “desperate efforts to call on Sunnis to turn against their government, to assassinate judges and investigators and to ... turn against all of these democratic institutions.” AQI will fail, she said:

“The Iraqis know they’re going to fail. But regrettably, this is a bloody pattern that we’ve seen in years past that Ramadan has been exploited for the agendas of terrorists and those who don’t have the best interests of Iraq at heart.”

Ms. Nuland noted that overall, the security situation has improved over the last couple of years, as has the capability of Iraqi forces. She highlighted continued U.S. support for Iraqi Security Forces, who have been handling their own security for some time. “They fought long and hard,” Ms. Nuland said, “to get to this stage where they are taking responsibility for their own security.”

<http://www.voanews.com/policy/editorial/s/Terror-Attacks-In-Iraq--164151896.html>

- **Kirkuk: “City of Life and Death”**

By ROZH AHMAD

KIRKUK, Kurdistan Region, July 27 -- Xalil Mahmoud, 72, was sitting on a chair outside his home in the Domis district of central Kirkuk, describing the state of his

city, when the sound of a thunderous explosion suddenly interrupted him.

Mahmoud is a typical elderly man from the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, one of the most dangerous and disputed areas of Iraq. Calm yet persistent, he held a cigarette between his fingers and waved his hands in the air as he continued to passionately tell his story after hearing the blast.

“It is routine. Kirkuk is the city of life and death. I can tell the explosion is not nearby. Can you hear the sirens? It is far away, trust me,” he said.

Mahmoud added, “We hear these kinds of noises almost every day. Perhaps it is a terrorist blowing himself up. Yesterday, we heard one that was even louder at midnight.”

The explosion turned out to be part of a string of roadside bombings that struck the city in the early hours of July 8, targeting police cars. It resulted in the death of a policeman and nine others were injured, including civilians.

According to Kirkuk police, they were roadside bombs detonated by mobile phone devices.

Kirkuk is unique to the rest of Iraq because it is an ethnically integrated city. However, because it is also the center of Iraq's petroleum industry, the three major ethnic groups -- Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen -- claim the region as their own.

The city has witnessed consecutive occupations and violence throughout its history but, despite the efforts to systematically Arabize the city by former Iraqi regimes, Kurds have always made up the bulk of the city's population.

Under the former Baathist regime's codes of conduct for citizens of Kirkuk, Kurds were systematically displaced. After the 1991 uprising of the Kurds, which led to the liberation of several Kurdish cities, the displacement intensified.

Back then, under the policy of "identity correction," Kurds of Kirkuk who refused to "correct" their identity to "an Arab from Kirkuk" were displaced to the liberated Kurdish areas of Erbil, Sulaimani and Duhok. The Baathist state then

assumed their property, money and ration cards.

Unlike the cities currently booming under the sovereignty of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Kirkuk has not seen much development. Its infrastructure is a far cry from the new innovations and stylish reconstruction that began to take shape across Kurdistan when the region entered a phase of post-war recovery.

Mahmoud wore Arab dress but described himself as Kurdish in his "heart of hearts."

He said the city is now worse for everybody because, he thinks, "it is divided along ethnic lines like never before."

He claimed his was one of the very few Kurdish families still living in the Domis district, an area well-known for its predominantly Arab population.

Outside Mahmoud's house, he greeted passersby in Kurdish, Arabic and Turkmeni.

"I am Kurdish, not an Arab or a Turkmen, but we have lived here together for so

long we got to know the languages. My neighbors are mainly Arabs, but remember Kirkuk belongs to Kurdistan, not Iraq,” he said.

“There aren’t many Kurds living here anymore. They left for the Kurdish areas but some of us refuse to move, even if they detonate a bomb right inside our home,” Mahmoud said. “I am sure it is the same for Arabs and Turkmen who refuse to leave Kurdish neighborhoods for the same reason.”

Following the 2003 occupation of Iraq, a status referendum was introduced for the “disputed” regions of Diyala, Kirkuk, Salahaddin and Nineveh so that people could decide to either become part of the autonomous Kurdistan Region or remain under the control of Iraq’s central government.

The referendum was supposed to take place in 2007, as specified in Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution which emphasized reversing the Arabization that took place in Kurdish regions at the hands of Saddam Hussein’s regime.

Although many displaced Kurds have since returned to Kirkuk, the constitutional referendum has yet to be held, five years later.

In contrast to the Domis district, the Rahimawa neighborhood is known for its predominantly Kurdish population. It is located in northeast Kirkuk, with only a handful of Arab families left living in the area.

Fazl Mansour, a 32-year-old resident of the neighborhood, said, “Rahimawa has always been known as the Kurdish Quarter, even when Saddam Hussein was ruling against the Kurds with an iron fist. But I am an Arab and I was born here, too.”

He added that, though his friends find it strange that he is from Rahimawa, he is proud to live there as an Arab. However, although Baathists have disappeared from Kirkuk, Mansour makes it clear that the regime’s culture of terror still lives in the city.

“When the Baath Party was in power, everybody in Kirkuk lived in fear because you didn’t know what was going to

happen to you next. I don't think much has changed in terms of that, as you leave your house on your own will but are never sure whether you will return safely because of the violence and terror haunting us day and night," he said.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/5008.html>

- **Conflict In Syria Forcing Iraqi Refugees Out**

The increasing instability in Syria is leading Iraqi refugees to return home. Previously, thousands of Iraqis went to Syria to escape the growing violence in their neighborhoods. Now that trend is reversing. Exact numbers of how many have crossed the border are imprecise as of now, and there are stories spreading that Iraqis were being targeted in Syria as well. Since the situation is so fluid, none of these reports can be confirmed. What is for sure is that as the chaos spreads in Syria more Iraqis will return, but they face an uncertain future back home.

The television and newspapers have been full of reports recently about an Iraqi exodus from Syria. Iraqi Airways claimed that 10,000 people had returned from

Syria to Anbar and Baghdad in July. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repeated that number as well. The main reason for their return is the increased fighting in cities like Damascus and Aleppo. A member of Iraq's foreign affairs committee in the Iraqi parliament, and a few news stories have claimed that Iraqis are being targeted in Syria as well. One source claimed that Syrian rebels were going after Iraqis saying that they were being associated with supporters of the Syrian government. The UNHCR said that Iraqis were going after other Iraqis to settle old scores from the civil war days. A parliamentarian from the Iraqi National Movement told the press that Iraqis were being told to leave. The situation has gotten so bad in Syria that the Iraqi government has called on Iraqis to return. It has sent planes to Damascus and Aleppo to pick people up, and buses are available as well. Most Iraqis live in those two cities. When the fighting first broke out in Syria, it was away from those urban centers, so Iraqis were largely untouched. Now the rebels are directly challenging the Assad regime at its base, dragging Iraqis into the fray. There isn't enough information available yet to determine whether Iraqis are being

singled out, but the violence is spreading quickly, which poses a threat to them.

Iraqis coming back to Iraq are likely to face more hardships. In Syria, if they registered with the United Nations, they could get a monthly cash stipend. The cost of living was also cheaper there, and jobs were more plentiful. In Iraq, prices are going up, there is a severe housing shortage, and jobs are not as easily available. Baghdad has also proven not up to the task of receiving such a large influx of people in such a short period of time. This was despite the fact that back in February, the Minister of Displacement and Migration stated that his ministry was ready for any emergency regarding refugees in Syria. Not only that, but Shafaq News reported that the Defense and Interior Ministries were questioning refugees heading back to Baghdad in an attempt to weed out any Baathists that might be amongst them. That has led to a large number of refugees being held in Abu Ghraib outside the capital waiting for interrogation. Living in Syria as refugees was no easy task for many Iraqis, but it might be even more difficult going back to Iraq. While the civil war is over, there are still terrorist attacks, especially now that insurgents are

launching their summer offensive. In the immediate situation, Iraqis can expect little help from the authorities adjusting to life back home. The Iraqi government is notoriously inefficient, and that makes it especially ill prepared for an emergency situation like this. In the bigger picture, former refugees might find it especially hard to live in Iraq right now. Wages have gone up, driving up costs. Unemployment and underemployment are also high, especially for the young. Workers need to get a government job to make decent wages, and those are usually only offered to followers of political parties. Since many of those returning have been out of the country for several years, they will struggle to deal with all of these issues. That's also a reason why there are large numbers of Iraqis remaining in Syria, because they know about the hardships back home.

The number of Iraqis living in Syria is unclear. During the mid-2000s there were a reported 1.2 million refugees there, the largest amount of any nation. Today, only 87,741 Iraqis are registered with the U.N. At the same time, the UNHCR has recorded around 50,280 coming back from Syria from January 2011 to May 2012.

That was a huge increase from previous years. From 2009-2010 for instance, only 29,135 returned. Obviously not all Iraqis have signed up with the United Nations, others have likely moved on to third countries. At the same time, there has been some controversy over how many Iraqi refugees there were in the first place. Whatever the true figure is, there are still plenty of Iraqis in Syria, and more of them are likely to want out as the rebels and government forces increasingly face off against each other across the country.

Syria has historically been a refuge for Iraqis. First, people wanting to get away from Saddam Hussein went there. Then, more and more Iraqis came as the insurgency turned into a civil war after the United States invasion. Now the situation has changed. Syria is in the midst of a growing civil conflict. As it reaches the major cities it will threaten more and more people, including Iraq's refugees. Some will try to stick it out, some will go to other countries like Lebanon or Jordan, and some will go back to Iraq. Thousands have already taken the last choice, and are flowing across the border. Now they will have to start a new life back in Iraq, where

there is no promise that it will be an easy one.

\*With an MA in International Relations, Joel Wing has been researching and writing about Iraq since 2002. His acclaimed blog, Musings on Iraq, is currently listed by the New York Times and the World Politics Review. In addition, Mr. Wing's work has been cited by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Guardian and the Washington Independent.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/8/318869/>

- **Insurgents and Troops Clash in Iraq**

CAIRO -- Insurgents from Al Qaeda in Iraq clashed with the country's security forces on Thursday, the second attack this week in what the insurgent group's leader has depicted as a new offensive aimed at recapturing lost ground.

The attack came as Syrian refugees tried to flee across the Iraqi border, joining migrations to Turkey and Lebanon over the past week. At a border crossing near Al Qaim, Iraq, where the Syrian side of the

border was under rebel control, more than 2,000 Syrian refugees arrived in recent days, said Saadoun Shallan, head of the Anbar Provincial Council.

At least 12 people were killed in an attack in Diyala Province, including five Iraqi policemen and seven militants, a police official said. The Associated Press reported that an Iraqi helicopter was shot down, but Iraqi officials said it had only been damaged.

The fighting began Wednesday night in Hadid, a town about six miles northwest of Baquba. The area was once an insurgent stronghold.

"It was fierce fighting and lasted several hours between the security forces and Al Qaeda fighters," said Blaer Hassan, a provincial security official in Diyala. "This is a setback because we are worried about the capacity of Iraqi forces in the face of the growing strength of Al Qaeda," he added.

On Sunday, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, who uses the pseudonym Abu Bakir al-Baghdadi, announced in an unusual audio recording, posted on a jihadi Web site,

that an offensive was about to begin in which the insurgents would seek to regain ground they had held in Iraq before American forces helped oust them.

The next day, the group began a coordinated series of at least 40 attacks that killed more than 100 people throughout Iraq. Al Qaeda has also announced its intention to join the conflict in Syria on the side of the popular uprising there, although opposition leaders have disavowed any connection with extremist groups.

Omar al-Jawoshy contributed reporting from Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Diyala and Anbar Provinces.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/27/world/middleeast/al-qaeda-claims-new-attack-in-iraq.html>

- **Call to form Election Commission soon**

Jul 28 2012

The Secretary General of the White al-Iraqiya urged forming the election commission as soon as possible in order to hold provincial council elections.

Jamal Batikh said, "The election commission is a necessity, especially for the provincial and local elections in Iraq." He considered holding elections on time as 'important' as to get Iraq out of the political census, and added that "Holding these elections on time is important so the provincial authorities will not obey the political census."

<http://kirkuknow.com/english/?p=11922>

- **Kurd leader warns against budget cuts by Iraq**

Massoud Barzani says any move to cut funding to the region in a dispute over oil sales would be a "declaration of war".

Jane Arraf Last Modified: 28 Jul 2012

SALAHADIN, IRAQ – The president of Iraq's Kurdish region has warned that he would view as a "declaration of war" if the federal government cuts funding to the region in a dispute over oil sales to Turkey.

In an interview with Al Jazeera this week, Massoud Barzani also said his region would take measures to counter any military threat from the Iraqi government.

The comments, in the Kurdish leader's first international interview in months, appear to serve notice to the government in Baghdad that he does not intend to back off on the escalating dispute over its authority over the region.

Speaking at his presidential palace outside Erbil, Barzani said the issue could be solved if political parties agreed to pass an oil and gas law. Hostility by the Iraqi prime minister and others towards the Kurds was holding it up, he said.

"And of course cutting the budget of the region from Baghdad we would consider it as war, a declaration of war and Baghdad will be held responsible for the consequences," he said, speaking in Kurdish through his official interpreter.

Asked to explain what that would mean, the Kurdish president said: "It's obvious what it entails. It's premature [to talk about that now] but certainly the moment they do that [cut budget] then we consider it a war declaration."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/07/2012728173833768598.html>

- **Jaafari: Barzani phoned me and we discussed the issue of moving the troops**

Shafaq News, July 29 / The Head of the National Alliance (NA), Ibrahim al-Jaafari revealed that a phone call took place between him and the President of Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani as they discussed the issue of Peshmerga preventing the security forces of the army and police from entering Fashkhabour crossing, indicating that he would discuss the issue with Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki soon.

Peshmerga forces have prevented last Friday an Iraqi force from reaching Fashkhabour crossing border between Syria and Iraq, located within the territory of Kurdistan Region in Dohuk province.

Jaafari said in an interview with Al-Hurra U.S. channel that "We look forward to resolve the issue, as Massoud Barzani phoned me from Erbil and there will be a conversation between me and the Prime Minister in the same context."

Jaafari described, "The issue (of moving some Iraqi military divisions toward the Syrian border) as something that became

bigger and turned into a crisis, which is - in fact - not a crisis, the real crisis is a political crisis."

"This troubled atmosphere made us to the test ... I think that the Constitution is clear and as soon as we proceed to the practical steps trust will come back and evaporate all of these concerns."

The Prime Minister and Commander of the Armed Forces , Nouri al-Maliki refused Kurdistan position of preventing the security forces from the army and police from entering Feshkhabour crossing border between Syria and Iraq, considering it as have a violation of the constitution.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3104-jaafari-barzani-phoned-me-and-we-discussed-the-issue-of-moving-the-troops.html>

- **KA urges to settle differences between KRG, CG internally**

Baghdad, July 29 (AIN) -The official spokesman for the Kurdistan Alliance, Muayed al-Tayeb, said "The crisis between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Federal Government cannot be limited by the issue of oil and gas law or the

outstanding issues between the Region and the Federal Government,” calling upon political parties to “resolve the crisis internally without opening the door to external powers,” considering it a national duty.

MP al-Tayeb told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) Sunday that "The problems between Baghdad and KR are part of the whole Iraqi crisis, it is the issue of autocracy and the question of the marginalizing the other components of the Iraqi people," noting that "The other differences are caused by the attitude of the State of Law Coalition related to autocracy in governance and monopolizing political decision as well as avoiding commitment to the constitution and political agreements which the political process was based on and the government was formed according to those agreements."

He called upon political parties to "work on adopting an internal solution for the crisis and not to involve external sides which are non-neutral and have the certain ambitions and interest to intervene in the internal affairs of Iraq," considering it as "A national duty and the

best solution for settling the crisis within the constitutional framework."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=15253:ka-urges-to-settle-differences-between-kr-g-internally-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15253:ka-urges-to-settle-differences-between-kr-g-internally-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Peshmerga calls Maliki to put an end to the army leaders who incite for crisis**

Shafaq News, July 29 / The Ministry of Peshmerga has blamed unnamed parties of violating the Constitution and their solidarity of the military institution and security forces behind Vichabour crossing crisis, while confirming that the joint committees between the Peshmerga and the Federal Army has worked for two years without any problem.

Peshmerga forces have prevented last Friday an Iraqi force from reaching Vichabour crossing border between Syria and Iraq, located within the territory of Kurdistan Region in Dohuk province.

The Secretary-General of the Ministry of Peshmerga in Kurdistan Regional Government , Jabbar Yawar said in a

statement in which "Shafaq News" received a copy of it in response to the statement by the Office of the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces that, "We hope that the content of the statement won't be from the thoughts and directions of Mr. Nuri al-Maliki, especially at this sensitive stage in which we live , and we are confident that Mr. Maliki would put limits on those who provoke and deepen the crisis hiding under the cover of the General Command of the army. "

The Prime Minister and Commander of the Armed Forces , Nouri al-Maliki refused Kurdistan position of preventing the security forces from the army and police from entering Vichabour crossing border between Syria and Iraq, considering it as have a violation of the constitution.

"Lack of initiative of the Ministry of Peshmerga to any work deepens the current crisis, and the forces that act on that are moving their forces and bringing it to places outside the scope of their work."

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3105-peshmerga-calls-maliki-to-put-an-end-to->

[the-army-leaders-who-incite-for-crisis.html](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15254:yawar-calls-decision-makers-to-)

Yawar calls on decision makers to deter Peshmerga forces' transgressions

- Baghdad, July 29 (AIN) -The Secretary General of the Justice and Reform Movement Abdullah Ajeel al-Yawar condemned the Kurdish Peshmerga forces acts to prevent the units of the Iraqi Federal Army to advance forward in Nineveh province, describing it as "Constitutional violation and disregard to the Iraqi Central Government."  
Yawar said "The Peshmerga forces impose control on many important and vital areas in provinces of Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala to prepare for dividing and joining them to the Kurdistan Region."  
"We consider the transgressions on the Iraqi Army by these forces as an violation for the morals of the Iraqis as a whole and it cannot be tolerated," he stressed.

"It is the Prerogative of the IA to impose its control on the entire Iraqi grounds including KR," he added.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=15254:yawar-calls-decision-makers-to-](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15254:yawar-calls-decision-makers-to-)

[deter-peshmerga-forces-transgressions&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](#)

## 2. IRAN

- **Minister Underscored Iran's Resolve to Develop Joint Oil Fields**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi stressed that development of joint oil and gas fields shared with the neighboring countries sets a priority for his ministry and the Iranian government.

Underlying development of joint oil fields with neighboring states, Qassemi said Iran must exploit South Pars oil field more than ever to utilize the capacity of joint oilfield to secure Iran's interests.

The oil minister said the ministry's policy is to make technical knowledge in oil industry localized, therefore Iranian constructors and manufactures must be more active than before in their professional careers quantitatively and qualitatively.



South Pars Gas Field as one of the biggest gas reserves in the world is located in the Persian Gulf waters shared by Iran and Qatar.

The Iranian part of the field covers an area approximately 3.700 square kilometers with in place gas reserves more than 14 trillion cubic meters which is equal to 8 percent of total gas reserves of the world and half of the country's discovered gas reserves.

The gas field has been divided into 24 phases of which development of the first 10 phases have been completed. Also a contract was signed with a domestic consortium in June 2010 for the development of 8 other phases, including phases 13, 14, 19, 20, 21 and 22 to 24 in a 35-month period while development of phases 15, 16, 17, 18, 12 and 11 are also underway.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251969>

- **Speaker Renews Iran's Full Support for Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, in a meeting with visiting Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem in Tehran, underlined Iranian nation and government's full support for Syria against enemies' plots.

"The government and nation of Iran like before have stood and will stand beside the government and nation of Syria," Larijani said on Sunday.

He also stated that a big international and regional plot against Syria is underway, and said enemies of Syria are discontent with progressive stances of the Syrian government and nation against the Zionist regime.

The Iranian speaker, however, noted that Syrian government and nation through their resistance against the foreign terrorists showed that they enjoy strong support and they are capable of resolving different crises.



During the meeting, Muallem said that the Syrian nation will never forget the supports of the Iranians.

He stressed that the Western governments are trying to exert pressure on the Syrian nation and spread of crises in that country by imposing sanctions against Syria.

"The Syrian government and nation standing beside each other and by showing resistance managed to make a big plot be defeated and today Damascus is safe and tranquil," the Syrian minister added.

Meantime, in a statement signed by 245 Iranian lawmakers on Sunday, the Iranian parliamentarians underlined their full support for the people and government of Syria, and called on Damascus to continue resistance against enemies' plots.

They also expressed pleasure in the failure of the plots hatched by the arrogant powers and Israel as well as the reactionary Arab regimes' all-out support for extremist and violent groups.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251965>

- **Official: Iran Breaks Europe's Monopoly on Shipping Insurance**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior Iranian official voiced Iran's preparedness to provide insurance cover for all foreign ships and oil tankers, in a move to push back the US-engineered EU embargos against Tehran, and said Iran has managed to break Europe's monopoly on the shipping insurance industry.

"The sanction imposed by the foreign insurance firms made us launch Iranian insurance of P&I and this has been gifted to us by the sanctions," Managing-Director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines Mohammad Hossein Dajmar told FNA on Sunday.

"Before this, the Europeans had the monopoly of shipping insurances and a few number of countries owned the

insurance firms and coverage but we have now succeeded in starting Iranian shipping insurance through government's cooperation," he added.



Iran has voiced preparedness to provide insurance cover for all foreign ships and oil tankers.

Also earlier this month, a senior Iranian oil official stressed that the western insurance companies are the main losers of anti-Iran sanctions as they have lost a huge source of revenue.

Director of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) for International Affairs Mohammad Ali Khatibi said Iran is prepared to provide full insurance coverage for both Iranian and foreign tankers.

"Buyers of Iran's oil have two options. They can either use their own tankers to ship the purchased oil or they can hand

over this task to the Iranian fleet," he stated.

"Iran is fully prepared to provide complete insurance coverage for the transport of its oil. The commitments undertaken by the Iranian insurers are no different from those of Western insurance firms and all risks and hazards are covered."

European Union sanctions against Tehran have stopped European insurers, who dominate the marine insurance sector, from offering cover on Iranian crude.

But the lack of shipping cover has failed to disrupt the flow of Iranian oil to Iran's major customers in Asia - China, India, South Korea and Japan.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251915>

- **Official: Iran to Accelerate Nuclear Activities If Faced with Increased Sanctions**

TEHRAN (FNA)- An Iranian official warned on Sunday that if the western states intensify their sanctions against the Islamic Republic, Tehran will accelerate its nuclear activities.



"It is not at all acceptable that Americans allege that they keep the window of diplomacy open on one hand and impose sanctions and try to disrupt (Iran's) enrichment on the other hand," General Manager of Iran's Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution for International Affairs Javad Mohammadi told FNA.

"Yet, if they deepen and accelerate the sanctions, we will deepen our nuclear activities and will increase their speed," he added.

Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions and the western states' unilateral embargos for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

Tehran has dismissed West's demands as politically tainted and illogical, stressing that sanctions and pressures merely consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

Political observers believe that the United States has remained at loggerheads with Iran mainly over the independent and home-grown nature of Tehran's nuclear technology, which gives the Islamic Republic the potential to turn into a world power and a role model for the other third-world countries.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104251909>

- **Iran had trade ties with 150 countries in last year: economy minister**

TEHRAN, July 29 (MNA) - Iran conducted economic transactions with 150 countries in the last calendar year, which ended on March 19, the finance and economic affairs minister says.

In an interview with IRNA news agency published on Sunday, Shamseddin Hosseini said of this number 80 countries transited their products through Iran.

Iran continues trading with the world at a time when certain countries are trying to put hurdles in front of its economic progress, the minister said.

Iran's annual trade turnover is projected to reach \$160 billion by the end of the fifth five-year development plan (March 2016), an official with the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) said in May.

Kiyumars Fathollah Kermanshahi added that the value of annual imports and exports are planned to reach \$77 billion and \$83 billion respectively by 2016.

Customs Administration director Abbas Memarnejad said in April that the non-oil trade balance decreased to \$17.9 billion last year from \$30.5 billion the year before.

China, the UAE, and Iraq were the main destinations for the Iranian goods, while the UAE, China and South Korea were the main exporters to Iran last year.

Economy Minister also said to counter some of the obstacles created to stop the transfer of money or goods, Iranian

consumers are expected to buy domestically.

“Goods produced at home should replace foreign products.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1661256>

- **Iran expresses regret over clashes in Tajikistan**

TEHRAN, July 29 (MNA) – The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Sunday expressed regret over the recent internal conflicts in Gorno-Badakhshan Province in Tajikistan which have resulted in death and injury of some country’s citizens.

“We hope the recent incidents in the Province of Badakhshan will end quickly with minimal human and financial losses, and security and peace persist,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said.

The clashes erupted after Major General Abdullo Nazarov, the security chief Gorno-Badakhshan province, was assassinated on July 21.

Following the incident Tajik President Emomali Rahmon had sent troops into the

area on Tuesday in pursuit of former opposition field commander Ayombekov, accusing him of killing Nazarov.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1660824>

- **Syrian foreign minister in Tehran for talks with Iranian officials**

TEHRAN, July 29 (MNA) - Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem arrived in Tehran on Sunday for talks with some senior Iranian politicians.

In the meeting with his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi the two sides are expected to discuss regional issues particularly the latest developments in Syria.

The two top diplomats will discuss international issues as well.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1660759>

- **‘Rate of population decrease in Iran is faster than other countries’**

TEHRAN, July 29 (MNA) - The rate of population decrease in Iran is faster than

other countries, an official at the organization for civil registration says.



The rapid decline in population growth has prompted a study of the issue in parliamentary committees, Ali Akbar Mahzoon said.

In an interview with the Mehr News Agency, Mahzoon said that statistics about birth rate and the number of the population held by the organization for civil registration matches those of the National Population and Housing Census of Iran which were released recently.

Mahzoon went on to say that if the decline in population continues and if officials don't take necessary measures to prevent it, in the future the country will experience a negative population growth.

If the birth rate stays the same, in 2032 Iran will face an aging population, so now

it is the time to set the policy for the next 20 years, he opined.

According to the First Five-Year Development Plan (1995-2000) the birth rate was predicted to fall to 3.2% by 2011, however it continued to fall more and it reached 2.3% by the current year, he explained.

He said policies such as encouraging marriage and discouraging divorce among couples, revising the culture of one child per family are needed to put a brake on population decline.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1660733>

- **Bunker buster bomb threats against Iran signal world conflict**

India, the ally Israel has "banked" on to offset this possibility, now stands between two budding nuclear superpowers, Pakistan and China, and would be forced to stand down. This would force nuclear intervention by the US which would immediately bring about a massive nuclear response by China and trigger a strike on the US by Russia if a secret

protocol exists and such an endeavor would serve Russia's interests."

Moves this week by the United States to position specialized massive "penetrator" bombs for an attack on Iran clearly demonstrate a total lack of grasp by key players of the risks involved and the chain of events that will inexorably follow.

This week, a threat against Iran by the United States was published by the UK Telegraph. Peter Foster, of their Washington Bureau met with Mike Donnelly, US Air Force Secretary to question him about deployment of experimental "bunker buster" bombs.

Donnelly is a Washington Insider, a computer programmer and administrative planner but did three years in the army, having served that short period after the end of the Vietnam War.

He has no combat experience and cannot fly an airplane. He is a perfect choice to run an Air force.

This is what Donnelly said:

"If it needs to go today", would be available. We continue to do testing on

the bomb to refine its capabilities, and that is ongoing," he said "We also have the capability to go with existing configuration today. We continue to do testing on the bomb to refine its capabilities, and that is ongoing. We also have the capability to go with existing configuration today."

This weapon, the Massive Ordnance Penetrator or MOP weighs 14 tons and cost nearly \$100 million to design.

It has never been successfully tested. Essentially, it is an 8" cannon barrel filled with high explosives hoped to be dropped from the B2 Stealth Bomber. Each B2 costs \$2.1 billion dollars not to mention the \$300 billion in design costs.

Some members of congress have serious doubts it is capable of penetrating the "underground weapons labs in Iran" that the CIA had briefed the same members on. That briefing told congress that no such labs existed.

This February, James Reisen and Mark Mazzeti of the New York Times reported the current level of American intelligence regarding Iran and nuclear weapons:

“Recent assessments by American spy agencies are broadly consistent with a 2007 intelligence finding that concluded that Iran had abandoned its nuclear weapons program years earlier, according to current and former American officials. The officials said that assessment was largely reaffirmed in a 2010 National Intelligence Estimate, and that it remains the consensus view of America’s 16 intelligence agencies.”

Thus, the same members of congress concerned over the performance of the weapon have been officially briefed that there is no potential use for the weapon although they have clearly indicated that they intend to use the weapon despite the fact their own best information indicates their “opinions” are not rooted in reality.

There are further concerns, other than dropping a defective bomb on non-existent targets without rationale or legal authority.

It is also hoped that Iran has not modified its air defense radars as Serbia had, allowing them to shoot down America’s

stealth planes. Serbia downed several back in the 1990s.

This weapon, the “MOB,” was developed to replace a Bush (41) era “nuclear bunker buster” that proved ineffective. The \$100 million dollar project is almost identical to the “Tall boy,” a World War II era weapon used against German submarine pens.

The UK Telegraph’s article credits Israeli influence with congress’ flawed judgment, identifying a decision making process that is more “conspiracy to commit war crimes” than “national defense.”

“(The “MOB”) is the critical piece of military hardware that underwrites American assurances to Israel that it will neutralise Iran's nuclear facilities if diplomacy and sanctions fail.”

Additionally, the Obama administration has offered these weapons to Israel, the UAE and South Korea and other nations.

None have aircraft capable of delivering such a weapon. The likelihood of the MOB being sold on the world’s weapon “black market” is very high.

Israel's unsubstantiated claims, not for the first time, have a powerful effect on American decision making. All members of congress involved in this project have accepted large campaign contributions from Israeli sources in the past few months and are expecting more.

Israel's other issue is that they have expressed the concern that their current inventory of GBU 28 bombs, a smaller 5000 pound version might not be able to destroy Iran's real or imagined nuclear facilities. These GBU 28 bombs were a gift from the US. Israel sold much of their current inventory to North Korea and will require replacements.

Both Germany and China have acted as intermediaries in these sales which have included even the most advanced Patriot III missile systems.

More covert preparations for an attack on Iran have been uncovered.

We learned through top secret sources, that an American ship, flagged as a naval vessel but leased to Germany and crewed by Israelis, the USS Grapple, delivered a number of GBU 28 bombs to the Black Sea

port of Poti between June 10 and 12, 2010.

Accompanying the USS Grapple were 12 Israeli torpedo boats that made runs at Russian craft in the region that were observing this operation as the Grapple moved through international waters.

It is believed these weapons were transferred to Azerbaijan where Israeli aircraft stand by, having been transferred to this forward position during joint bombing exercises with the Turkish Air Force in 2010.

Some Israeli forces have entered Kurdistan, taking control of a former US airbase. This has been done in defiance of the Iraqi government in Baghdad. Israeli drones are currently being operated from this facility. We have "on site" confirmations.

With public statements from both President Obama and Prime Minister Putin that discussions with Iran should continue over the Iranian weapons systems that both leaders have been informed by their own security services do

not exist, an aspect of unreality seems to prevail.

In a January 2009 article in Asia Times, Sam Gardinier points out a number of inconsistencies that may well indicate that policies have not changed but rather rhetoric, with the availability of accurate information waning based, more on media control and “money in politics,” than changing geopolitics. From Asia Times:

“The United States falls into a trap in assuming that Russia doesn't want a nuclear-armed Iran.

Russian officials repeat over and over that they have no evidence that Iran has a weapons program.

US officials discount that statement but shouldn't. The United States needs to remember that Russia has nuclear engineers inside Iran working with the Iranians.

#### Strategic partnership

There are three examples in the past few months that suggest a strategic partnership: the nuclear power plant at Bushehr, the S-300 missile, and a refinery

in Armenia. (Note: The S-300 missile sale is currently “off the table.”)

The work on the Bushehr (Iranian) nuclear reactor has been punctuated by continuous delay. One almost got the impression that Russia was dragging its feet on purpose. However, Russia appears to have a renewed commitment to the work.

Russia recently announced that it was planning to dispatch up to 3,000 technicians there.

It's hard to argue that Russia has any interest in punishing Iran for enriching in light of this project.

The refinery in Armenia is not as blatant, but equally meaningful. The discussions between GAZPROM, Russia's gas export monopoly, and Armenia are for a refinery that would serve both Armenia's needs as well as export to Iran. On the top of almost everyone's list for the next level of sanctions against Iran is refined petroleum products; Israel wants it and even Obama suggested it when he gave a speech to the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee convention last summer. Russia is

diminishing the sanctions on refined petroleum in advance of a formal proposal by the United States.

On Friday January 23, Russia and Iran signed an agriculture agreement in Moscow. The Russian Minister of Agriculture called Iran a "strategic partner." Although the agreement is a small step, this is the first time I recall a Russian using that phrase.

Over the weekend, I talked to a member of the defense sub-committee of the House Appropriations Committee. He told me he has had recent conversations with some Iranian officials. They told him the United States has forced Iran in the direction of the Russians. That's certainly consistent with recent developments.

I also exchanged e-mails on this subject with a former European ambassador to Tehran. His made a very interesting point. Iran is the only potential competitor for natural gas to Europe. He said Moscow doesn't want Tehran to get too close to Europe to the point it could jeopardize Europe's dependence on GAZPROM. We've seen the evidence of Russia and GAZPROM leverage over Europe recently."

The evidence is increasingly clear. With Putin in Tel Aviv recently voicing concerns about Iranian nuclear weapons, playing to an Israeli audience while directly contradicting established Russian policy, it becomes clear why such contradictions are accepted by the press without question.

What is made clear is that there is, in fact, no independent mainstream press.

Though, withholding air defense systems and now overtly supporting sanctions, Russia had already, not only arranged for Iran to have adequate supplies of refined petroleum but has thousands of technicians in Iran working on many of the same nuclear projects Israel says it plans to target.

The result leaves Russia with "double flexibility," both influence in Israel to offset increasing US intransigence and hostility to Israel's interference in American domestic politics and Russia, should Syria collapse, can again become more active advocates for Iran, another "flip-flop" the world press has chosen to ignore.

In deals signed over the past weeks, Saudi Arabia has begun a massive nuclear weapons program.

Pakistan's nuclear arsenal stands ready for transfer to Saudi Arabia on a moment's notice, according to a DEBKA report, a publication often cited for wild fantasy and conspiracy theory, that and the voice of the Mossad.

The other unseen player is Pakistan. According to the Stockholm Institute as reported in the UK Telegraph, Pakistan has a clear advantage in nuclear capability over India and that "nuclear gap" is growing exponentially.

The global reality is that, though India likes to compare military capabilities with Pakistan though the likelihood of China weighing in is more than remote.

Israel is said to depend on her close alliance with India to offset "the Muslim bomb," as they refer to Pakistan's nuclear capability.

Another extreme misconception is that Pakistan, were Israel to attack Iran with

nuclear weapons, would stand aside because of differences in Islamic sects.

This purposeful misconstruance has a deadly reason behind it.

Were a nuclear attack on Iranian population centers to be instigated, a likely response were Iran to retaliate against an Israeli attack by decimating Israelis Dimona nuclear weapons plant, a "fat" target for Iran, cascading events would ensue.

Pakistan, with a significant nuclear arsenal, which includes large numbers of tactical nukes not public "counted," would likely either supply nuclear weapons to Iran, said by WikiLeaks to have financed Pakistan's nuclear program, or to destroy Israel's major population centers itself.

India, the ally Israel has "banked" on to offset this possibility, now stands between two budding nuclear superpowers, Pakistan and China, and would be forced to stand down.

This would force nuclear intervention by the US which would immediately bring about a massive nuclear response by

China and trigger a strike on the US by Russia if a secret protocol exists and such an endeavor would serve Russia's interests.



Reports indicate that protocol does exist and such an endeavor, whatever Russia's relations with Israel may have been, would serve Russia's interests, in fact, her survival.

Israel would no longer be a factor as she would no longer exist and her population which includes a rapidly diminishing number of Palestinian "hostages" would no longer be the factor it had once been.

The entire situation, as described, is orchestrated by two groups, ultra-nationalists inside Israel and the assumption that America will retaliate if Israel is destroyed.

The solution, the sane one, involves removal of all nuclear weapons from the Middle East, systematic regional security conferences stressing economic growth and interdependence which include Israel and Iran and defusing the arms race in South Asia.

All require vision, courage and leadership. As things currently stand, we are less than a year from a world war. Consider this "August 1913."

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/30/253459/attack-on-iran-can-presage-world-war/>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel cabinet to mull 5% cuts in ministry budgets**

The treasury says the cuts in the regular budgets are necessary to free up funds to cover new expenses.

In addition to the package of tax hikes that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz will be presenting to the cabinet on Monday for its approval, the ministers will also be asked to vote on a flat, across-the-board

cut of 5% in most ministries' 2012 budgets. The cuts would come to NIS 700 million this year.

The treasury says the cuts in the regular budgets are necessary to free up funds to cover new expenses. These include steps to stop the entry of migrants across the Egyptian border, to upgrade the country's firefighting network and to improve civic defense preparedness in times of emergency.



Although the budget for next year has not been fleshed out yet, the cabinet is being asked on Monday to approve an additional 3% cut to ministry spending in 2013, amounting to a reduction of NIS 1.8 billion.

The cabinet is expected to approve the spending cuts by a large majority. Ministers from the Shas party are

expected to either vote against the measure or to abstain.

Over the weekend, Steinitz reached agreement with the leader of Yisrael Beiteinu, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, ensuring the party's support for the proposals as long as they do not apply in full to the Immigrant Absorption Ministry. Reductions in the suggested 2012 cuts will apply vis-a-vis the Defense Ministry, the Social Affairs Ministry and the Education Ministry.

Although in principle the ministries have free reign to decide where they cut spending, in practice the process will be overseen by the budget division of the Finance Ministry.

<http://www.haaretz.com/business/israel-cabinet-to-mull-5-cuts-in-ministry-budgets-1.454555>

- **India, US looking to learn from Israel's border security**

Growing number of countries flock to Israel to study construction of Egypt border fence; India to send delegation to review technologies for its fence with

Pakistan, Bangladesh; US examining Elta radars for Mexico barrier.

A growing number of countries are flocking to Israel to study border security as the Defense Ministry works to complete the construction of a physical and technological barrier along the Egyptian border.

In August, a delegation from India will arrive to study the various technologies used by the IDF to secure the borders with the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Egypt, and which could be implemented as part of India's own fence with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The interest in Israeli border security has spiked since Israel began constructing a barrier along its border with Egypt to stem terrorism and infiltrations by illegal migrants. The Defense Ministry and IDF have so far completed about 150 km, of the fence; plans are to complete the remainder by the end of the year.

The fence is 5 meters in height and layered with barbed wire. It is supported by dozens of radars that are deployed along the border to issue alerts about

possible crossings while the potential infiltrators are still kilometers away.

Israel's primary concern is with the growing number of terror attacks along the border. Last week, shots were fired at a bus carrying IDF soldiers. While there was damage to the bus, no one was wounded. On June 18, terrorists crossed into Israel from Sinai and killed an Israeli contractor working on the border fence, while last August eight Israelis were killed in a cross-border attack.



India is interested in beefing up its border security to prevent future incidents like the Mumbai attacks in 2008.

The Indian press reported Sunday on a tunnel that had been discovered under the border with Pakistan in the contested Kashmir region.

Another country closely following Israel's decisions on border security is the US, which is building a barrier along its border with Mexico.

The Department of Homeland Security is, for example, testing the ELM-2112 family of persistent ground surveillance radars, developed by Elta Systems, a subsidiary of Israel Aerospace Industries, and used by the IDF to detect intruders before they reach the border.

Five different versions detect individuals at ranges from 300 m. up to 20 km., and vehicles at up to 40 km.

The radars feature four stationary antennas, each covering a 90-degree sector enabling persistent surveillance and tracking over a wide area.

Several radars can be integrated into a single network to provide an integrated picture of a border area. In addition, the command-and- control interface features icons resembling an animal, vehicle or person based on the target detected by the radar.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=279366>

- **IDF kills Palestinian who rushed W. Bank checkpoint**

Two Palestinians, 1 officer also injured when car fails to stop at checkpoint near J'lem; IDF: Men "had intent to harm officers."



Border Police officers fired upon a Palestinian vehicle traveling towards a checkpoint adjacent to A-Zaim near Jerusalem Sunday night. A Border Police spokesman said the driver failed to stop his car despite repeated warnings by the officers.

Palestinian paramedics evacuated two Palestinians to a Ramallah hospital, while a third, who suffered severe injuries, was rushed to Hadassah University Medical

Center in Jerusalem's Ein Kerem. The man eventually died of his wounds.

A Border Police officer that was lightly injured from shrapnel was taken to Hadassah University Medical Center on Jerusalem's Mount Scopus.

A spokesman for the Border Police stated that the Palestinians "had intent to harm the officers." According to Palestinian medical workers, the men were traveling to pray in Jerusalem.

Forces were searching the vehicle and opened an investigation into the incident.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=279367>

- **Panetta kicks off ME tour, touts Israel-US ties**

US defense chief suggests Israel on board with int'l efforts to pressure Iran, has not decided on unilateral strike.

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta on Sunday touted the close security relationship between Israel and the US, suggesting that Israel remained on board

with international efforts to pressure Iran on its nuclear program and had not decided to unilaterally strike the Islamic Republic.

Panetta was speaking at the start of a week long trip to the Middle East and North Africa that will bring him to Israel for talks with top officials, in which discussion of Iran's nuclear program is expected to figure prominently. His trip will come after US Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney's visit to the Jewish State which concludes on Monday.

Earlier on Sunday, a senior aide to Romney said the candidate would respect an Israeli decision to use military force to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. Romney himself balked at repeating that position when asked by CBS' "Face the Nation" program.

Panetta declined to comment on the Romney aide's remarks but appeared to suggest an Israeli attack was hardly a foregone conclusion.

"With regards to where Israel is right now, my view is that they have not made any decisions with regards to Iran and that

they continue to support the international effort to bring pressure against Iran," Panetta said.

As Romney tries to portray US-Israeli ties as strained, Panetta said there was unprecedented defense cooperation between the two countries.

"I'm proud of the defense partnership that we've built over the past several years. The US-Israel defense relationship, I believe, is stronger today than it has been in the past," he said.

[Click here for full Jpost coverage of the Iranian threat](#)

Panetta also addressed ongoing violence in Syria on Sunday, saying attacks on the city of Aleppo are putting the nail in the coffin of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government and showing he lacks the legitimacy to rule.

Panetta did not offer any new steps the United States might take even as he renewed calls for a united international effort "to bring the Assad regime down."

Helicopter gunships opened fire over Aleppo on Sunday and the thud of artillery boomed across neighborhoods as government forces and rebels fought for control of the city.

"If they continue this kind of tragic attack on their own people in Aleppo, I think it ultimately will be a nail in Assad's own coffin," Panetta said, speaking to reporters shortly before landing in Tunis.

"What Assad has been doing to his own people and what he continues to do to his own people makes clear that his regime is coming to an end. It's lost all legitimacy," he said, adding, "It's no longer a question of whether he's coming to an end, it's when."

Panetta mentioned the need to "provide assistance to the opposition," but did not appear to signal any new support.



The United States has said it is stepping up assistance to Syria's fractured opposition, although it remains limited to non-lethal supplies such as communications gear and medical equipment.

Reuters has learned that the White House has crafted a presidential directive, called a "finding," that would authorize greater covert assistance for the rebels, but stop short of arming them.

Panetta said he expected Syria to loom large in talks this week with leaders in Israel and Jordan, and flagged concerns about the security of Syria's chemical and biological weapons sites and the flow of Syrian refugees.

His trip began with a visit to Tunisia, which Washington has held up as a model for democratic change in the Middle East after a popular revolt forced autocratic leader Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to flee the country on Jan. 14, 2011, touching off a wave of political unrest across the Arab world.

The North African country has since calmly elected its own government, defying predictions it would descend into chaos,

while Ben Ali's secret police has been disbanded and the news media enjoy unprecedented freedoms.

Still, Panetta said Tunisia had growing concerns about how to deal with the threat from al-Qaida and how to protect its borders.

After visiting Tunisia, Panetta is expected to travel to Egypt to hold talks with newly elected Islamist President Mohamed Mursi and military chief Field Marshall Hussein Tantawi.

Panetta said he would urge the Egyptian government to complete the transition to full civilian rule and provide for as "broad a coalition as possible" within the government.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=279351>

- **Medics: Israeli soldiers kill man at checkpoint**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Israeli soldiers killed a Palestinian worker and injured two others, one of them seriously, after opening fire at a van as it approached a

checkpoint near Jerusalem early Monday, medics said.

Hasan Badee Omar, 46, was hit several times in the chest and abdomen and evacuated to hospital, where he died from his injuries, Palestinian medics told Ma'an.

Ashraf Abdullah was hit in his shoulder and thigh while Khalid Imad Abdullah was shot in his right leg.

"We were 13 workers in a Ford Transit traveling to our working place in Jerusalem. Before we arrived at Zayem checkpoint, the driver received a message from another driver who approached the checkpoint before him telling that strict procedures were being applied and he should go back," one of the survivors Khalid Abdullah told Ma'an.



"As the driver started to turn, border guard officers opened fire at the car without asking the driver to stop," he added.

Local Palestinian residents living near the checkpoint telephoned ambulances to evacuate the victims.

A spokesman for Israel's border police, which is stationed at checkpoints in the area, could not be reached for immediate comment.

Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem, land the Palestinians want for a future state, during a 1967 Middle East War in a move that has not won international recognition.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=508456>

- **Arafat inquiry like looking for 'needle in the ocean'**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The investigation into late President Yasser Arafat's death is ongoing, director of the committee responsible for the inquiry said Sunday.

Tawfiq al-Tirawi told Ma'an that a medical committee headed by Abdullah al-Basheer is undertaking research in coordination with international specialists and will brief officials on the results once investigations reach their final stages.

"We haven't initiated the investigation based on the hypothesis that Arafat was killed by poison, but we agreed to begin an investigation searching directly for the killer regardless of the medical reports which will eventually show the method of killing and name of the toxin," al-Tirawi told Ma'an.

"We are looking for a needle in the ocean," he added.



The Palestinian Authority is willing to exhume Arafat's body if required and will arrange for the late president's wife, Suha Arafat, to travel to Ramallah to aid inquiries if necessary, al-Tirawi said.

"All Palestinian people know the truth about Arafat's death," he added, stressing that the committee needs time to get produce results.

Israel does not know the details of the investigation and could block the inquiry if they did, al-Tirawi said, adding that the committee will work with any Arab or international committee to reach the truth.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=508459>

- **Attili: Israeli settlers draining Palestinian water supply**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- Israel allocates 70 times more water to each settler than to the average Palestinian in the West Bank, the head of the Palestinian Water Authority said Sunday.



At a press conference in Ramallah, Shaddad Attili said Palestinians received 105 million cubic meters of water, less than the amount allocated in the 1995 Oslo Accords and around a quarter of the 400 million cubic meters needed according to international standards.

Israel controls most of the water resources in the West Bank and refuses to increase the amount of water it allocates to Palestinians, Attili said, forcing Palestinians to buy water from Israel.

Water is a final status issue in negotiations with Israel and postponing the issue to final talks has created a water crisis in Gaza and the West Bank, the official said.

The Palestinian Water Authority has had to buy water and is billions of shekels in debt, Attili said. The Palestinian Authority,

in the midst of its own fiscal crisis, has not helped with the debt, he added.

Meanwhile in Gaza, 95 percent of the water is not fit for human consumption, and sea water -- contaminated with sewage -- is leaking into the over-extracted coastal basin, threatening long-term problems of kidney disease. Within two years there may be no drinking water left in Gaza, Attili said.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=508418>

- **Fayyad Meets British Deputy Prime Minister in London**

LONDON, July 29, 2012 (Wafa) - Prime Minister Salam Fayyad Sunday met British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg during Fayyad's visit to London as head of the Palestinian Olympic delegation.

Fayyad also met the Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, and FCO Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt.

Clegg said, "Fayyad and I discussed the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and agreed on the urgent need

for progress in the Middle East Peace Process.'

He said that progress in the peace process is in the great interest of both Palestinians and Israelis, therefore, both should restart negotiations.

Clegg assured Fayyad of the UK's strong and continued support and discussed the need for all donors to provide predictable and consistent funding to allow this work to continue.

"I also reiterated to Fayyad the Government's serious concern at Israeli human rights violations in the OPTs, including demolitions of and evictions from Palestinian homes, restrictions on freedom of movement and the continued stifling of the Gaza economy. We agreed that the threatened demolition of entire villages in the southern Hebron hills, by Israel, is utterly unacceptable," he said.

Clegg stressed the UK's particular concern over continued Israeli settlement construction.

In a related matter, Burt and Fayyad discussed support the UK had provided for

the Palestinian Paralympic Team, in particular the close co-operation between the British Consulate General in Jerusalem, the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government to enable athletes from Gaza to visit Jerusalem for the first time.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20356>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Turkey Training Libyans to Become Law Enforcers**

Turkey, that has always had very good relations with Libya, before, and after the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi, particularly in the construction business, are reported to be training Libyan law enforcement to help establish security and promote a peaceful transition to democracy in a united Libya.

Libya was a major Turkish trading partner before the revolution, with \$2.4 billion in bilateral trade, largely oil imports from the resource rich country, and the two countries have waived travel visas to boost trade.

Aimed at boosting security during Libya's transition to democracy following the revolution The Turkish Weekly has reported that Turkey has started training Libya's country's law enforcement.

A total of 817 Libyan police academy students have reportedly arrived in Istanbul last week to train at the Adile Sadullah Mermerci Police Centre, where they will spend seven and a half months before returning home to take up police duties.

According to Aytekin Geleri, a professor at the Turkish National Police Academy, the Libyan students will be instructed in the practical skills necessary to perform the various duties of law enforcement.

Last year, Ankara presented Libya with 30 police vehicles and 6,000 uniforms as part of the training programme.

Geleri said that a successful transition to democracy necessitates maintaining security in Libya.

Turkey has maintained very good relations with Libya and during the revolution even presented it with 30 police vehicles and

6,000 uniforms as part of the training programme

It is an open secret that there is great rivalry along tribal and regional lines in Libya, especially between eastern and western regions, and the establishment of a professional police force to maintain law and order - regardless of sect, tribe or political affiliation - would certainly add to the long-term security, stability and unity of the country.

Geleri told SES Türkiye: "There are students from 18 different countries that are being trained at our police academy. We believe that long-term peace and security should be protected by strongly educated professionals."

Turkish officials have been reported saying that Turkey is also working to train Libya's judges, prosecutors and employees at corrections facilities, and is providing financial support and has signed a number of oil deals.

Fevzi Sanverdi, a ruling AKP politician and former chairman of the Turkey-Libya Friendship Group said that their only goal and wish is that free Libya fulfils its

development expectations on both security and socio-economic fronts.

Turkey is increasingly seen as a regional model for countries such as Libya, because of its democratic system, economic development and Muslim identity.

Sanverdi told SES Türkiye: "We believe that we are the best model for our Libyan brothers. We are ready to promote our best for Libya's future."

For Mehmet Akif Okur, associate professor of international relations at Gazi University and a Middle East analyst at the Ankara Strategy think-tank, Turkey should strongly encourage unity in Libya to make sure that everyone in the country has a voice.

He said that security is a number one problem in Libya. "I'm sure our government is ready to provide as much training as it is needed to make sure that all the deficiencies in the Libyan transition are being fulfilled," he added.

<http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=1&i=8894>

- **Council of Europe Delegation Assesses Tunisia's Constitutional Progress**

In the presence of a delegation representing the Council of Europe (COE), the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly (NCA) held a hearing on July 26 and 27 addressing the pros and cons of different constitutional systems.

The COE delegation consisted of legal experts from the Venice Commission, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly, and a delegation from the Congress of Regional and Local Powers.

Simona Granata-Menghini, deputy secretary of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, told Tunisia Live that choosing Tunisia's next political system is a decision that "...belongs only to the the National Constituent Assembly." However, she explained that the role of legal experts is to help members of the Constituent Assembly, "...identify what checks and balances and safeguards should be put in the constitution in order to avoid the risks which each constitutional system carries – typically, political instability in the case of a parliamentary regime, and excessive concentration of powers in the hands of

the president in the case of a presidential or semi-presidential system.”

The debate over the rights and powers of the next Tunisian president, prime minister and parliament has raised both controversy and tension amidst the National Constituent Assembly, since assigning powers will define Tunisia’s next political system.

Still, Granata Menghini emphasized that the role of the delegation was not to push any particular system. “We cannot express a view on what would be the best political regime for Tunisia. There is no such thing as an ‘ideal’ political regime,” Granata-Menghini underlined. She further highlighted that whatever system is instated should be adapted to Tunisia’s particular context.

Additionally, Granata-Menghini urged the constitutional committee in charge of legislative and executive powers to finalize their decisions and to proceed with drafting the rest of the constitution. “Tunisia needs to find its own recipe – and to make it work,” she said.

As divides grew between different blocks of the National Constituent Assembly, Granata-Menghini justified the tension saying, “The main challenge for the Constituent Assembly is to achieve a consensus on the new constitution.” She reiterated that another great challenge in the current constitutional process is for NCA members to engage and consult with Tunisian society.



“The new constitution must be felt and accepted by everyone, or at least by as many as possible, as it is the best chance for Tunisia to achieve its democratic revolution.”

In a general assessment of the discussion that took place at the National Constituent Assembly, Granata-Menghini expressed satisfaction with the quality and depth of views exchanged. “Discussions were very intense and proved that a lot of

work has been done, and that the crucial questions have been identified. We hope to have contributed to clarifying these questions," she added.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/07/29/council-of-europe-delegation-assesses-tunisias-constitutional-progress/>

- **Egypt's Morsi, Tantawi commemorate 10 Ramadan victory anniversary**

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi praises role played by Egyptian Armed Forces in 1973 victory over Israel and army's role during and after last year's Tahrir Square uprising

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi on Sunday was received by Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, head of Egypt's military council, at Cairo's Galaa Club, where the Egyptian Armed Forces held a banquet to celebrate the anniversary of Egypt's 10 Ramadan victory against Israel in 1973.

Several high-profile figures turned out for the event, including Armed Forces Chief of Staff Sami Anan and other high-ranking military figures.

On the same day, Morsi, speaking on his daily call-in radio show, reminisced about the 6 October victory – which fell on 10 Ramadan in the Islamic calendar – when the Egyptian Army successfully crossed the Suez Canal in the face of fierce resistance from its Israeli counterpart.

"I was a university student at the time; it was a great day for Egyptian youth," the 60-year-old Morsi recalled. "We were keen to liberate our land. The victory breathed life into all of us."

"Ever since, 10 Ramadan has represented unity between the Egyptian people and army, which has remained intact until now," the president added.

The relationship between the Egyptian Armed Forces and the public was substantially boosted during last year's Tahrir Square uprising. During the uprising, army troops were deployed in the streets to protect civilians following clashes between anti-Mubarak protesters and police personnel, which had resulted in hundreds of death and thousands of injuries.

The chant "The people and army are one hand" could be heard at most protests and gatherings in the months that followed. Later, however, many Egyptian revolutionaries turned against the Armed Forces to protest the policies of the then-ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which assumed power upon former president Hosni Mubarak's ouster in February of last year.

The use of deadly force against protesters, the practice of hauling civilians before military courts, and a tendency to ignore outstanding revolutionary demands – including calls for social equality – were the main reasons why much of the public eventually turned against the military.

Until now, protesters have continued to chant against the SCAF, which ceded power to Morsi in late June but which continues to hold considerable authority, thanks largely to a controversial 'constitutional addendum' granting it certain powers at the expense of the presidency.



Morsi, for his part, has attempted to assuage the tension between public and army by voicing praise for the latter's role during the 2011 uprising.

"The Egyptian Army assumed responsibility on 11 February 2011 under difficult circumstances," he stated. "It was a move that was no less important than that it played during the October War."

"The Egyptian army also relinquished power to a civil authority [the presidency] after the people elected their own president on 30 June 2012, which represented the realisation of another dream," Morsi went on.

"The Egyptian people and army are one hand; there is no scope for discussing conflict [between them] or accusing individuals or institutions of betrayal," he added.

Some revolutionaries had accused the SCAF of "turning against" the uprising and sponsoring what has come to be known as the 'counter-revolution,' which many attribute to 'remnants' of the Mubarak regime.

The Muslim Brotherhood, from which Morsi hails, last protested against the SCAF over the issue of the constitutional addendum, the revocation of which the group had called for shortly after Morsi's inauguration.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49021/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-Morsi,-Tantawi-commemorate--Ramadan-victory.aspx>

- **Libya's NTC on track to hand power to newly elected congress**

Senior official says Libya's interim authorities will formally transfer power to newly elected congress in second week of August.



TRIPOLI - Libya's interim authorities will formally transfer power to the newly elected General National Congress in the second week of August, a senior official said on Sunday.

"August 8 is expected to be the date on which power is transferred from the National Transitional Council (NTC) to the General National Congress," said Othman Ben Sassi, a member of the outgoing NTC.

Ben Sassi said that the handover would be marked by a "symbolic ceremony" and that the 200-seat congress would formally start working a day or two later, when all the members meet for their first session.

An official of the country's electoral commission said details of the transition are still being hammered out but that the congress's first meeting is expected around August 9.

Libyans on July 7 participated in the country's first free elections since a popular revolt, which escalated into a civil war and drew the intervention of NATO and regional powers, toppled long-time leader Moamer Gathafi.

They elected a 200-member legislative assembly, comprising party and independent representatives, which will lead the country through a transition period until fresh elections can be held on the basis of a new constitution.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53628>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Jordan opens camp to deal with more Syrian refugees**

ZAATARI, Jordan, July 29 (Reuters) - Jordan braced on Sunday for an expected new influx of refugees from the fighting in Syria by opening a camp with 2,000 tents to accommodate them near the border.

Diplomats say around 115,000 Syrians have fled their country, mostly to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, to escape the 17-

month rebellion against President Bashar al-Assad.

The Jordanian authorities say around 130,000 Syrians have come to Jordan since the uprising began, but diplomats say not all of them are classified as refugees.

"We can only expect that more people will be coming across, more people who will be in need of assistance," Andrew Harper, representative for the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Jordan, said at the camp's opening.

"We are seeing women and children without their husbands, without their fathers, coming across the border," Harper said at the still-empty camp, the first to become operational for Syrian refugees, near the town of Mafraq, about 10 km (six miles) from the Syrian border.

Tens of thousands of Syrians have fled to Jordan through official border points or clandestinely crossed the mostly desert frontier.

Most have found accommodation on their own, or through Islamist charities and

compatriots who had fled an earlier wave of repression by Assad's father, the late President Hafez al-Assad, in the 1980s.

Syrian troops have tried to prevent refugees from crossing by mining parts of the border, and in some cases, shooting at fleeing civilians, which has prompted Jordan to send armoured reinforcements to the frontier.

Diplomats say there have been several instances of Jordanian and Syrian forces exchanging fire following the killing of refugees who had attempted to cross as they were in the "no-man's land" between the two countries. (Reporting by Mohammad al-Ramahi; Editing by Michael Roddy)

[http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/jordan-opens-camp-to-deal-with-more-syrian-refugees?utm\\_source=Lebanon+News&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/jordan-opens-camp-to-deal-with-more-syrian-refugees?utm_source=Lebanon+News&utm_medium=twitter)

- **Qahwaji: Army will not allow establishment of 'buffer zone'**

Lebanese Army Commander General Jean Qahwaji said in a statement on Monday that the army would stand in the way of

any plans aimed to establish a "buffer zone" for Syrian rebels on Lebanese soil.

"[The Lebanese army] will not allow for the wishes that many have for the turning [Lebanon] into a scene for settling scores [related to the Syrian crisis]... as well as for establishing a buffer zone outside state authority," the statement quoted Qahwaji as saying.

He added that the army's response to such threats would be "decisive and effective."

"The army will always be ready to completely bear its national responsibilities according to the decisions of the political authorities... in order to ward off the repercussions of the [troubles in Syria] and to protect the residents of the border regions."

The army commander also said that the military was not at risk of divisions because of political tensions, but was rather "more coherent and solid."

"The attempts to pit the army against [Lebanese civilians] will not prevail, nor will the allegations that some members of

the military are loyal to parties and political movements.”

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

- **Hobeish: Merhebi’s remarks do not represent Future Movement’s views**

Future bloc MP Hadi Hobeish said on Monday that the slanderous remarks made by Future bloc MP Mouin al-Merhebi against Lebanese army Commander General Jean Qahwaji did not represent the views of the Future Movement.

“Merhebi does not represent the views of the Future Movement, which is supportive of the Lebanese army and which counts on its role and on cooperation with security forces,” Hobeish told Voice of Lebanon (100.5) radio station.

On Sunday, the Lebanese army command accused Merhebi of making up lies about it during an interview with a local radio station.

Earlier that day, Merhebi said that Qahwaji was a “loser.”

“[Qahwaji] is an employee and he must perform his duties. He is using the [military] institution to reach the presidency,” he added.

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

## 6. SYRIA

- **Panetta: Aleppo assault 'nail in Assad's coffin'**

UN reports 200,000 civilians have fled Aleppo, many trapped after tanks, attack helicopters deployed.

The battle for Aleppo heats up

ABOARD A US MILITARY PLANE - US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta warned Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on Sunday that the assault on his own population in Aleppo would be a nail in his coffin.

Fighting raged on the second day of a fierce government offensive, as the United Nations said 200,000 civilians had fled and many were trapped after Assad deployed tanks and attack helicopters to try to dislodge the rebels.

The Syrian opposition says government forces are preparing to carry out "massacres" and is pleading the international community to provide heavy weapons to enable rebels to meet the regime onslaught.

"It's pretty clear that Aleppo is another tragic example of the kind of indiscriminate violence that the Assad regime has committed against its own people," Panetta told reporters on a military plane en route to Tunisia.

"And in many ways, if they continue this kind of tragic attack on their own people in Aleppo, I think ultimately it will be a nail in Assad's coffin," he said.

"He's just assuring that the Assad regime will come to an end by virtue of the kind of violence they're committing against their own people."

According to Panetta, Assad has "lost all legitimacy, and the more violence he engages in, the more he makes the case that the regime is coming to an end."

It's no longer a question of whether the regime will fall, "it's when," he added.

More than 20,000 people have been killed, including 14,000 civilians, since the uprising against Assad's rule erupted in March 2011, according to the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"The United States and the international community have made very clear that this is intolerable, and have brought diplomatic and economic pressure on Syria to stop this kind of violence, to have Assad step down and to transition to a democratic form of government," Panetta said.

Obama, waging a tough domestic battle ahead of the November 6 election, has demanded that Assad stand down and offered logistical support to the opposition, but his administration has ruled out using force.

International efforts to squeeze Assad by isolating his regime and seeking sanctions against his inner circle have been frustrated by Russian and Chinese opposition at the UN Security Council.

Panetta said the United States was paying particular attention to securing Syria's chemical and biological weapon sites, especially by maintaining "close cooperation with countries in the region."

His trip to Tunisia is the first stop of an international tour that will also take him to Egypt, Israel and Jordan.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53632>

- **Hell in Salaheddin: Syrian military helicopters pound rebel-held district**

Opposition fighting against regime includes both Syrians, foreign fighters, who say they belong to Liwa al-Tawhid al-Mujahedeen.

Dawn in the Salaheddin district of Syria's second city Aleppo brought a firestorm with four buildings quickly set ablaze as rebels and foreign fighters battled a long-anticipated army offensive.

"It started at 4:00 AM (1:00 GMT) and eight hours later it's still hell. This is madness," a correspondent reported on Saturday.

Four helicopters launched salvoes of rockets before the rebel-held district, which has been surrounded by President Bashar al-Assad's forces and was bombarded by artillery and tanks.

The opposition fighting against regime forces includes both Syrian rebels and foreign fighters, who said they belonged to the Liwa al-Tawhid al-Mujahedeen (United Mujahedeen Brigade).

The foreigners said they hailed from Chechnya, Algeria, Sweden and France. When the correspondent was about to pass the phone to a French fighter, the line went dead.

An attack on the Hamdaniyeh district, where the correspondent was stationed, was repelled.

On the road were three tanks and two armoured vehicles destroyed by the opposition, as well as the bodies of five or six soldiers and four rebels.

A senior Free Syrian Army (FSA) colonel, Abdel Jabbar al-Oqaidi, said that 100 tanks

were massed on the outskirts of Salaheddin.

In the large district in the southwest of the city, rebels had mounted a machinegun on a red pick-up truck with the words "United Mujahedeen Brigade" spray-painted on its side.

A video posted online by activists shows them shooting frantically at the helicopter gunships above, spurred on by the rallying cries of other rebels in the street.

Another video shows flames licking from a building as gunfire crackles in the background and verses from the Koran can be heard from a nearby mosque.

Women and children have been evacuating the Salaheddin area since Friday, seeking refuge in other areas of the city. Those residents who have opted to stay behind have sought refuge in the basements of houses.

According to the correspondent, there is no electricity and water in the city, and food stocks are so low that it is nearly impossible to find bread supplies.

"There are thousands of people in the streets fleeing the bombardment. They're being terrorised by helicopter gunships flying at low altitude," said one activist who identified himself as Amer.

"There's a large number of civilians who have taken refuge in public parks in safer areas, but most took refuge in schools," he said via Skype.

"They cannot get out of town and there is no safe place left for them in Syria," he added.

Until recently, both Aleppo and the capital Damascus had been considered to be relative safe havens.

A Syrian security source said: "Hotspots have been completely blocked off to stop the terrorists from escaping," the term the regime uses when it refers to the rebels.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53615>

- **Joan Juliet Buck: Mrs. Assad Duped Me**

Just before the Arab Spring, Vogue writer Joan Juliet Buck wrote an infamously rosy

profile of Syria's first lady. For the first time, she tells the story behind the debacle.

Late in the afternoon of Dec. 1, 2010, I got a call from a features editor at Vogue. She asked if I wanted to go to Syria to interview the first lady, Asma al-Assad.

“Absolutely not,” I said. “I don’t want to meet the Assads, and they don’t want to meet a Jew.”

The editor explained that the first lady was young, good-looking, and had never given an interview. Vogue had been trying to get to her for two years. Now she’d hired a PR firm, and they must have pushed her to agree.

“Send a political journalist,” I said.

“We don’t want any politics, none at all,” said the editor, “and she only wants to talk about culture, antiquities, and museums. You like museums. You like culture. She wants to talk to you. You’d leave in a week.”

A week: clearly my name was last on a list of writers that the first lady had rejected

because they knew nothing about Mesopotamia. I didn’t consider the possibility that the other writers had rejected the first lady.

“Let me think about it,” I said. I had written four cover stories that year, three about young actresses and one about a supermodel who had just become a mother. This assignment was more exciting, and when else would I get to see the ruins of Palmyra?

I looked up Asma al-Assad. Born Asma Akhras in London in 1975 to a Syrian cardiologist, Fawaz Akhras, and his diplomat wife, Sahar Otri. Straightforward trajectory. School: Queen’s College. University: King’s College. Husband: president of Syria.

Syria. The name itself sounded sinister, like syringe, or hiss. My notions about the country were formed by the British Museum: the head of Gudea, king of Lagash, treasures from Ur, Mesopotamia, Sumer, Assyria, and Babylon—all of which had occupied what is now Syria. Both Aleppo and Damascus had been continuously inhabited for more than five

millennia. This was where civilization was born, 6,000 years ago.

I knew the country's more recent past was grim, violent, and secretive. The dictator Hafez al-Assad took power in 1970 and, until his death in 2000, ran the country as cruelly and ruthlessly as his idol Stalin. He was an Alawite; he dealt with a Sunni Muslim Brotherhood uprising in Hama in 1982 by killing 20,000 of its men, women, and children.

Bashar al-Assad looked meek. He'd been studying ophthalmology in London in 1994 when his older brother, the heir to the presidency, died in a car accident. Bashar was brought home, put into a series of military uniforms, and groomed for power. At Hafez's death, a referendum asked whether the 34-year-old Bashar should become president. There was no other option. He "won." At first he was perceived as a reformer, but his only reforms were to do with banking.

Under Bashar al-Assad, Syria was still oppressed, but the silence and fear were such that little of the oppression showed, apart from vast numbers of secret police, called Mukhabarat.

"You have to choose between being secure and being ... psychotic," Bashar al-Assad told me. (Bulent Killc / AFP-Getty Images)

Syria and Hizbullah were the suspects in the 2005 car-bomb murder of the former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri. Damascus was home base for Hizbullah and Hamas; Syria was close to Iran. But these alliances also made Syria a viable interlocutor for the West, even a potential conduit to peace in the Middle East. In December 2010, Obama had just named a new ambassador, the first since George W. Bush had broken off diplomatic relations in 2005.

In 2010 Syria's status oscillated between untrustworthy rogue state and new cool place. A long 2008 piece on Damascus in the British Condé Nast Traveller described its increasing hipness. It was the Soviet Union with hummus and water pipes. In the worldview of fashion magazines, Syria was a forbidden kingdom, full of silks, essences, palaces, and ruins, run by a modern president and an attractive, young first lady. Nancy Pelosi and John

Kerry had visited, as well as Sting, Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, Francis Coppola.

It was also a Pandora's box.

Syria was a dictatorship, which was the default mode throughout the region. Bruce Riedel, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a veteran of 30 years in the CIA, says: "Until a year ago, every Arab state was a police state—some cruel, some not so cruel."

In 2010 I didn't call Bruce Riedel.

I called Barbet Schroeder, who'd made the ultimate documentary about a dictator, General Idi Amin Dada.

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/07/29/joan-juliet-buck-my-vogue-interview-with-syria-s-first-lady.html>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahraini police attack demonstrators, injure several**

Bahraini policemen walk past graffiti on a wall reading "Down with Hamad," in reference to King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa,

during an anti-regime demonstration in Sitra, July 13, 2012.

Bahraini policemen walk past graffiti on a wall reading "Down with Hamad," in reference to King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, during an anti-regime demonstration in Sitra, July 13, 2012.



Bahraini security forces have attacked protesters who were holding demonstrations in the northeastern island of Sitra and several other villages to demand the downfall of the Al Khalifa regime.

The demonstrators took to the streets in Sitra on Sunday, chanting slogans against the ruling family.

They also called for a democratically-elected government.

Several protesters were injured when the security forces used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the demonstrations.

Last week, similar demonstrations were held in the village of Dair, located on the northern coast of the Muharraq Island, and the northwestern village of Diraz.

Anti-regime protests in Bahrain continue despite the heavy-handed crackdown by the regime.

Bahraini demonstrators hold King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa responsible for the killing of the protesters during the uprising that began in February 2011.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/30/253457/bahrain-police-injure-several-protesters/>

- **Qatar joins arms race amid regional buying spree**

BERLIN - Qatar is considering buying up to 200 German tanks at a cost of around two billion euros (\$2.46 billion), according to a report published on Sunday.

News weekly Spiegel reported that the Qataris were interested in acquiring the Leopard-2 tanks and that a delegation from defence firm Krauss-Maffei

Wegmann had already travelled to Qatar to discuss the possible deal.

Last month, Saudi Arabia expressed interest in buying between 600 and 800 Leopard-2 tanks, Germany's main battle tank, for up to 10 billion euros, according to media reports.

The reported sale caused difficulties for Chancellor Angela Merkel, who came under fire from opposition politicians and even members of her own ruling centre-right coalition in light of democratic uprisings in the Middle East.

Spiegel said both Merkel's office and the economy ministry were in favour of the deal with Doha.

US Defense Department, Pentagon, said last week that it plans to sell 60 more Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3) missile systems to Kuwait in a deal worth an estimated USD4.2 billion.

The deal includes the sale of 60 PAC-3 systems, 20 launching stations, four radar systems and control stations, personnel training and training equipment, and spare parts.

Kuwait is one of the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which are all major buyers of US armaments.

On Thursday, December 29, 2011, the US formally announced a 30-billion-dollar arms deal with Saudi Arabia which is set to create around 50,000 job opportunities for Americans grappling with an ailing economy.

According to the agreement, the US will provide the Saudi military with 84 new Boeing F-15SA fighter jets and modernize 70 existing warplanes. The deal also includes munitions, spare parts, training and maintenance contracts, US officials said.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53622>

- **Secret service detains Kuwaiti royal over ‘his political views’**

Gulf rights group criticises arrest of member of Gulf state's ruling family for expressing ‘political views’ deemed offensive.

KUWAIT CITY - A Gulf rights group and a Kuwaiti MP on Sunday criticised the arrest of a member of the Gulf state's ruling family for expressing "political views" deemed offensive.

"Freedom for Sheikh Meshaal al-Malek al-Sabah who was arrested by the state security police," the Gulf Forum for Civil Societies, an organisation of liberal activists, said on its Twitter account.

It said Sheikh Meshaal was arrested "because of his courageous views that opposed the policies of the Kuwaiti ruling family."

Islamist opposition MP Waleed al-Tabtabai deplored the arrest of Sheikh Meshaal "for his political views," and criticised what he called the return of a government policy of harassing activists who use social media.

Tabtabai said Sheikh Meshaal has been detained by the secret service for the past three days. Activists said he was arrested on Thursday on his return from Saudi Arabia where he met the governor of Riyadh.

So far, there has been no official comment on his arrest.

Sheikh Meshaal is a member of the Al-Sabah family which has ruled the oil-rich emirate for the past 250 years without challenge.

In tweets he wrote over the past few days, he said he will contest the next parliamentary election to become the first royal in Kuwait to do so, and also vowed that if he becomes an MP, he would expose corruption among top officials.

He also complained that the Kuwaiti constitution entrusts power to only one branch of the Al-Sabah family -- the descendants of Mubarak Al-Kabeer who ruled Kuwait from 1896 to 1915.

Sheikh Meshaal, who is not descended from Mubarak Al-Kabeer, called for the constitution to be amended and the introduction of political reforms.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53623>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

### • Afghan District Governor, Son Killed In Attack

July 29, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Afghan authorities say a government official and his son were killed in an attack by armed insurgents on July 29.

A government spokesman in Afghanistan's central Wardak Province said Ismael Wafa, the governor of the province's Chak district, was killed when gunmen opened fire on his car.

Wafa's adult son was wounded in the attack but died as he was being taken to the hospital.

The Taliban militia has claimed responsibility for the incident.

The provincial governor's office in Helmand said in a statement that the Taliban also attacked a police outpost in the province. Three police officers and three civilians were killed in the fighting.

The incident took place in the volatile district of Greshk.

The statement says that the commander of the outpost and two others were wounded.

Based on reporting by dpa, AP, and AFP

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

- **2 US-led troopers killed in Western Afghanistan**

Press TV  
July 29, 2012

At least two US-led foreign soldiers, enlisted by NATO have been killed in an attack by militants in the west of the war-torn Afghanistan.

“Two International Security Assistance Force service members died following an insurgent attack in western Afghanistan today,” International Security Assistance Force said in a statement on Sunday.

Further details regarding the soldiers’ identities or the exact location of the incident have not yet been released.

On Saturday, two US-led soldiers were killed in eastern Afghanistan, while a third one was killed in the north.

Insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan despite the presence of about 130,000 US-led forces in the country.

The high number of military casualties in Afghanistan has intensified opposition in the United States and other NATO members against the protracted war in the country.

A total of 566 US-led forces died in Afghanistan in 2011. However, 2010 remains the deadliest year on record for foreign military casualties, with a death toll of 711.

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

- **17 insurgents killed in Afghanistan within 24 hours: gov't**

KABUL, July 29 (Xinhua) -- A total of 17 Taliban insurgents have been killed and 18 others detained in five cleanup operations carried out by the Afghan police, army and the NATO-led coalition forces in deferent provinces within the past 24 hours, the Afghan Interior Ministry said on Sunday.

"The joint force also found and defused five different mines besides seizing four RPG-7 or rocket propelled grenades, five PK machine guns, eight pistols, 25 rounds of shells and a hand grenade in the above operations," the ministry said in a statement providing morning operational updates.

Separately, Afghan police found and defused an anti-vehicle mine in western Farah province on Saturday, it said.

In another development, up to 12 Taliban insurgents were killed during a cleanup operation in Gilan district of eastern Ghazni province late Saturday; provincial police chief Zarawar Zahid told Xinhua Sunday, adding two local Taliban commanders named Mullah Aghajan and Mullah Abdul Haleem were among the killed.

The Taliban insurgents, who launched in May this year spring offensive against Afghan and NATO forces, have yet to make comment.

Afghan forces and some 130,000 NATO-led coalition troops have intensified

cleanup operations against insurgents recently. More than 432 insurgents have been killed and over 280 others detained since July 1 by the joint forces.

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

- **Afghan officials arrested for supplying militants with weapons**

Press TV  
July 29, 2012

Four afghan army officials, including Kunar Province Army Brigade Facility Chief, have been arrested on charges of supplying militants with arms in the war-torn country.

Afghanistan's Defense Ministry spokesman Daulat Waziri said on Saturday that "The Army Brigade Facility Manager in Kunar and three of his staff who had gathered weapons" and sought to deliver then to militants "were arrested with the help intelligence officials."

This is while Waziri rejected the detainees' involvement in planning or launching terrorist attacks.

The development came as a recent report shows that militant attacks in Afghanistan have increased by 11 percent during the past three months in comparison with the corresponding period last year.

The figures, which the US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) released on Thursday, also reveal that the month of June alone accounted for the highest number of attacks in nearly two years, with more than 3,000 assaults.

Insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan despite the presence of some 130,000 US-led forces in the war-torn country.

The US-led war in Afghanistan, which has caused record-high civilian and military casualties, has become the longest military conflict in the American history.

Overall, 3,021 civilians died in violence related to the war and 4,507 were wounded in 2011.

Washington invaded Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of combating terrorism.

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

- **America must learn from past: US ambassador to Afghanistan**

Press TV

July 29, 2012

As the US is reportedly mulling potential military options against Syria and Iran, a top retiring American diplomat has advised the US policy makers to learn the lessons of the recent past.

Ryan C. Crocker, the outgoing US ambassador to Kabul, said American decision-makers must focus on three key facts in charting the country's course in probable future wars:

They should remember the law of unintended consequences, recognize the limits of the United States' actual capabilities and understand that getting out of a conflict once you are in can often be dangerous and as destructive for the country as the original conflict, said Crocker, who is most associated with the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the New York Times reported.

Crocker, who enjoys some 40 years of experience, expressed his deep skepticism that Americans on foreign soil can be

anything other than strangers in a strange land.

“We’re a superpower, we don’t fight on our territory, but that means you are in somebody else’s stadium, playing by somebody else’s ground rules, and you have to understand the environment, the history, the politics of the country you wish to intervene in,” said the envoy who is retiring at the end of July.

Crocker and William J. Burns, then special assistant to the secretary of state, prepared a secret memorandum in 2002 to examine the potential dangers associated with the invasion of Iraq.

They predicted that the operation to attack Iraq, titled “The Perfect Storm,” would rekindle sectarian and ethnic violence after the ouster of Saddam Hussein and engage regional players -- Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran - in a violent brew.

The analysis described with striking accuracy the disintegration of Iraqi society that came to pass.

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

## ● **Tajikistan Rebels Dig in Against Government Offensive**

Mark Snowiss

VOA News

July 28, 2012

Armed militants in Tajikistan who recently fought deadly clashes with security forces have refused to disarm or hand over a former opposition warlord wanted by authorities despite a tense cease-fire.

The Tajik prosecutor-general said Saturday the heavy fighting killed 17 troops, 30 rebels and one civilian in violence that has raised concerns about the stability of the majority Muslim nation. Security sources said authorities have not ruled out a second phase of the military operation.

The clashes in Tajikistan have been on the rise for weeks.

Fighters in the eastern Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region near the Afghan border are locked in a standoff with the government after President Emomali Rakhmon sent helicopter gunships, armored vehicles and thousands of troops into the area Tuesday, following last

week's killing of General Abdullo Nazarov, the regional security chief.

Tajik officials accuse ex-warlord Tolib Ayombekov of orchestrating Nazarov's murder and running an organized crime group that smuggles drugs, tobacco and precious stones over the Afghan border into Tajikistan.

Ayombekov, a rebel leader during the 1992-97 civil war that followed the breakup of the Soviet Union, denies any involvement in Nazarov's death. He told the Associated Press the security operation was aimed solely at rounding up former civil war commanders.

Tens of thousands died in the conflict, in which Rakhman's Moscow-backed troops fought a loosely aligned opposition that included many Islamist fighters.

Fearing possible infiltration by Taliban-linked militants who support Ayombekov, the Tajik government last week closed all border crossings with Afghanistan, only allowing trucks carrying cargo for NATO troops there to pass.

Tajikistan remains the poorest of the ex-Soviet republics. It is important to U.S.-led military operations in Afghanistan and serves as a main transit route for opium destined for Russia and Western Europe. Observers say an eruption of sustained violence there could trigger unrest in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which also are key countries in the Afghan campaign as routes for military supply and withdrawal.

Russia, which still has 6,000 troops stationed in Tajikistan, is worried about instability spreading across Central Asia when the U.S. begins pulling its forces out of Afghanistan in 2014.

Tajikistan's authority in Gorno-Badakhshan - which covers around half the country - is fragile and most of the region's 250,000 inhabitants sided with the opposition in the civil war.

Some information in this report was provided by Reuters, AP and AFP.

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

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