



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Proces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

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Ethnic and Secterian Groups

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Relations with the West

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1. IRAQ

- **Jaafary invites blocs' leaders to meet Tuesday**



Baghdad (AIN) –MP Suzan al-Saad of the Iraqi National Alliance mentioned that “The head of INA, Ibrahim al-Jaafary invited all the leaders of the political blocs to attend an Iftar banquet to be held at his residence on Tuesday evening.”

Saad stated to AIN that “The Premier Nouri al-Maliki and the leader of the Iraqiya Slate are expected to attend the banquet.”

She also expected that “The political leaders will hold dual meetings after the banquet to review the political situation in the Iraq as well as the Region.”

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15388:jaafary-invites-blocs-leaders-to-meet-tuesday-&catid=40:2011-11-19-15-20-50

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15404:parlimant-to-vote-on-amendment-of-local-elections-law-drafts-&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19

- **Parlimant to vote on amendment of local elections law draft**

Baghdad (AIN) –The parliament, during its regular session of Tuesday, will vote on the amendment of the local elections law draft in addition to reading the report over the Parliament bombing.



A parliamentary source stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The parliament will vote on the local elections law draft No.11 for 2007 and will read the report over the parliament bombing."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15404:parlimant-to-vote-on-amendment-of-local-elections-law-drafts-&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19

- **Talabani congratulates Moroccan King for National Day**

Baghdad (AIN) –The President, Jalal Talabani, congratulated the Moroccan King, Mohammed VI, on the National Day of Morocco.



In the congratulatory letter, he said "I would like to congratulate the Moroccan Kingdom on the occasion of the National Day of Morocco on behalf of the Iraqi people, wishing you good health condition and the Moroccan people the development and prosperity."

"I would also like to express our adherence to develop the mutual relations in all fields to serve the people of both countries," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=

[15373:talabani-congratulates-moroccan-king-for-national-day-&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15373:talabani-congratulates-moroccan-king-for-national-day-&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19)

- **Jaafary criticizes Alwani for describing Nasrallah as (Liar)**

Baghdad (AIN) –An altercation broke out between the head of the Iraqi National Alliance, Ibrahim al-Jaafary and one of the MPs of the Iraqiya Slate (IS) in the parliament on Monday session.

A parliamentary source told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) on Monday "An altercation broke out between al-Jaafary and the IS' MP Ahmed al-Alwani, on the background of the latter's description of the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah as a [liar]," noting that "Jaafary criticized Alwani for this bad description and demanded him for apology."



The source added that "Another altercation broke out on the same subject between the State of Law Coalition's MP, Adnan al-Shahmani, and MP Maysoun al-Damlouji of the IS when Damlouji defended her colleague, Alwani, against the accusations made against him."

MP Ahmed Alwani of the IS has described, in a television interview, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, as "liar" and praised the Qatari Princess Moza, the wife of the Qatari Emir.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15372:jaafary-criticizes-alwani-for-describing-nasrallah-as-liar&catid=41:2011-11-19-15-21-19

- **Leaders of political blocs to meet on Tuesday evening**

Baghdad, July 30 – Leaders of political blocs will meet on Tuesday evening, July 31, on the invitation of the National Alliance.

Source at the National Alliance told NINA on Monday, July 30, that leaders of political blocs will discuss in their meeting latest political developments and work

toward finding solution to current political crisis, as well as the country's security situation.

(NINA)

- **Unity of Kurdish ranks stressed, Barzani**

ARBIL,30 July 2012- Kurdish region president Masoud Barzani meeting with Kurdish government and political circles here stressed the unity of the Kurdish ranks, defence of Kurdish rights and solving differences with Baghdad through dialogue and the implantation of the constitution.

The meeting was held after days of tension between Baghdad and Arbil following Iraqi forces try to enter disputed areas near the Syrian borders, which were under Kurdish control since 2003.

The meeting resulted in several points, namely, unity of the Kurdish ranks and stands, readiness to defend Kurdish achievements, solving political differences through dialogue, the implementation of the constitution and accords and stressing the brotherhood between the Arabs and the Kurds, in addition to other

components, as a major base to govern in Iraq.

The conferees expressed their hopes that Iraqi circles and public opinion will play their historic role in defending democracy, institutions and joint action in administering the state and power.

(Aswat al-Iraq)

- **Ahrar bloc rejects Ahmed al-Alwani remarks against cleric Hassan Nasrallah**

Baghdad , July 30 – Ahrar parliamentary bloc within Sadrist trend described remarks made by PM , Ahmed AL-Alwain for the Iraqiya Slate in which he described cleric Hassan Nasrallah as a liar.

In a press statement delivered by head of the bloc MP , Bahai al-Aaraji , said distorting Mr. Hassan Nasrallah, who is a symbol of Islamic resistance is unacceptable.

Certain media outlets reported that MP, Ahmed al-Alwani described in a televised interview yesterday, Hassan Nasrallah as a big liar .

(NINA)

- **Parliament rapporteur: electricity privatization law will greatly hit mafias responsible for the continued power crisis**

Baghdad , July 30 – Parliament repeater Muhammad Al-Khalidi said : “ Electricity privatization law will greatly hit corruption mafias responsible for the continued power after voting on formation of investment commission for electricity power needed to solve energy shortages.

He added in a press release today: "The formation of this body would inflect a blow to the corrupt mafias responsible for the continued crisis of electric power that benefit from in a hideous manner .

He added: "This will open for foreign investors to engage in investment and production of electricity filling the huge gaps in electricity demands.

The House of Representatives approved today on the establishment of an investment body, especially in the field of electric power, because of the Ministry of Electricity is unable to provide electricity.

(NINA)

- **Hindering dissemination of Iraqi army coincides with "terrorist" interests, MP**

KARBALA,30 July 2012- State of Law MP regarded the prevention of dissemination of Iraqi army by Kurdish Beishmarga along the Iraqi-Syrian borders as "pouring in the interests of terrorism", pointing that the withdrawal of Iraqi forces will "give wrong letter to the Kurdish region's forces".

MP Abdul Mehdi al-Khafaji told Aswat al-Iraq that "hindering the movement of the Iraqi army means obstructing the work of the federal powers", pointing that the presence of the army is "due to humanitarian crisis in Syria".

He added that "controlling the borders is the duty of the federal forces and any hindrance to this duty pours within terrorists' interests".

(Aswat al-Iraq)

- **More than \$200 million wasted on Iraq police training, audit says**

July 30, 2012 The United States wasted more than \$200 million on an Iraqi police-training program that has little backing on

the ground, a new U.S. government audit released Monday found.

Training the Iraqi police was originally envisioned as the biggest single program run by the U.S. Department of State in the world, spanning five years and costing billions of dollars. But the program has been gutted as Iraqi officials show dimming interest. The U.S. slashed the number of advisors from 85 to 36 this month; it had once planned to have 350.

As Iraqi enthusiasm for the idea has flagged, the program has been downsized so much that the Baghdad Police College Annex -- built at an \$108 million cost to help house the program -- will be closed. The U.S. also chipped in an additional \$98 million to a Basra facility where training will be halted, making the money a "de facto waste," the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction found.

Only seven police advisors used the \$98 million facility at the height of the training program. Government auditors questioned why millions were poured into costly construction projects without a written commitment to the program from the Iraqi Interior Ministry.

The inspector general “acknowledges that gaining Iraqi commitment to the police training program has been exceeding difficult. And the security situation has been worse than expected,” the report says. But the need for Iraqis to be firmly behind the projects had been emphasized over and over.

In a letter, Assistant Secretary of State Carol Z. Perez disputed the idea that the funds had been wasted, saying Iraqis will still use the Baghdad Police College Annex for training, the Associated Press reported. The U.S. had been assured that Iraq was committed to a streamlined version of the program, she said.

The report notes that State Department officials said they were surprised by the Iraqi disinterest because they had repeatedly met with Iraqi officials before the program began in October to share their ideas and ask for input. But as the training began, Iraqi officials and police questioned whether it was useful, faulting it as poorly organized and lacking leadership.

Some Iraqi officers were told not to go to trainings at the Baghdad Police College Annex or the U.S. Embassy for political reasons, the report says, as Iraqi officials tried to avoid being seen as overly dependent on the Americans. The results are “lukewarm relations between the Americans and the Iraqis,” the report says, citing an Iraqi official.

“I do believe that some of this was unpredictable,” said Michael O’Hanlon, senior fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution. As the U.S. scaled back its forces in a country trying to assert its own sovereignty, “the program began to stick out like a sore thumb.”

Iraqi officials flatly rejected more than a quarter of the meetings that police advisors requested and fewer than half happened. The report says Iraqi officials don’t want the sweeping training that the U.S. had envisioned but a much smaller program solely to hone technical and advanced policing skills.

The program has also been dogged by the worsening security in Baghdad. After American troops withdrew from Iraq in December, the advisors have had trouble

traveling to meet with Iraqi police. Meetings at the Baghdad Police College were all but suspended between January and March as bomb attacks targeted Iraqi police. Security costs have chewed up a growing share of the budget.

Because the program was downsized but its funding kept flowing, the crimped initiative may be able to survive on the unspent money left over from past years, auditors say. The report recommends that the secretary of State account for all available funding and that Congress might want to push the department to assure lawmakers in writing that Iraqis want the program before more money is committed.

The U.S. government has spent roughly \$8 billion to train, staff and equip Iraqi police since 2003, according to the report.

(Los Angeles Times)

- **Int. conference on Mujahidi Khalq in Baghdad tomorrow**

BAGHDAD, 30 July 2012- An international conference shall be held tomorrow on the presence of anti-Iranian Mujahidi Khalq on Iraqi soil.

The conference is organized by the Premiership Secretariat General, headed by National Security Advisor Falih al-Fayyadh, with the attendance of 8 European and Asian countries.

In a statement by the Premiership media center, it was announced that "the conference will tackle the situation in Ashraf Camp amid the new developments that will preserve Iraqi rights and interests."

The countries to be attended by their ambassadors will be USA, UK, European Union, Australia, Canada, Russia, China and Japan as well as the UNHCR, UNAMI and the Arab League representative in Baghdad.

The Iraqi government had agreed with the UN to evacuate Ashraf Camp in Diala province and move its anti-Iranian residents to an alternate camp in Baghdad, before moving to a third country.

Ashraf Camp was the center of the anti-Iranian opposition Mujahidi Khalq (The People) which regarded by the USA, Iraq and Iran as terrorist organization while the

EU lifted its name from the black list in 2009.

The 3400 residents of the camp lack any official status in Iraq, while the Iraqi government pledged to close the camp by the end of 2011.
(Aswat al-Iraq)

- **Tariq al-Hashimi gets residence permit in Turkey**

ERBIL, July 30– Iraq’s fugitive Vice-President Tariq al-Hashimi who is wanted by Iraqi criminal court for terror charges has been granted residence permit in Turkey, Turkish media reported.

The VP was given a permit after his 90-day visa expired.

Hashemi has been accused of running death squads in Iraq that mainly targeted Iraqi government officials and security forces, mainly Shiites. The Sunni VP was summoned to court in Baghdad, however, he fled trial to Kurdistan Region and from where he fled to Turkey. He has rejected the accusations and said he will not stand trial in Baghdad because courts have been politicized and that he is being prosecuted because he is a Sunni.

The Sunni officials in Iraq have accused the Shiite-led government of repression and discrimination against the Sunnis.

Mr Hashimi is also wanted by the Interpol following the Iraqi criminal courts issuing of an arrest warrant. Interpol issued, in may, a notice for Hashimi placing him on its most wanted.

Turkey has been proving sanctuary to Hashimi since April and shows no intention of turning him in to the Iraqi authorities.

Today’s Zaman reported Monday that the Turkish Interior Ministry has issued a residence permit to Hashimi so that he would not face legal troubles for staying in the country.

(AK News)

- **Turkey deploys troops to Syrian border following threats to target suspected PKK-affiliated groups controlling Kurdish areas**

ERBIL, July 30 – Turkey has deployed at least four convoys of vehicles with troops and misle batteries on them to the areas near the Syrian border amid threats that it

will intervene in Syria militarily to strike against Kurdish groups who have controlled the Kurdish areas.

Turkey is accusing one of the Kurdish armed groups, The Democratic Union Party (PYD) of having links with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) – a rebel group that has been fighting Turkey since 1984.

There is no indication, however, of the Turkish forces planning to cross the Syrian border into the Kurdish territories that have been under the control of the Kurdish groups lately as fighting in Aleppo and Damascus heightened forcing the Syrian army to withdraw from those areas to fight in the capital.

Source said two at least two convoys of about 30 military vehicles have headed towards Kilis from their Gaziantep base.

Turkish military sources within the convoys have said the deployment of the troops is an exercise and that the troops will remain off the Syrian border.

Two more convoys of nine and an unknown number of vehicles were also

deployed to the border areas. According to Anatolia news agency, the forces were moved from Islahiye town of Gaziantep.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan threatened last week that Turkey would take any measures against a Kurdish region in Syria that is controlled by PKK-affiliated groups, including intervention militarily.

Turkey is concerned that the establishment of a Kurdish region in Syria, following the fall of Bashar al-Asad, could open another front for the PKK fighters from where to attack Turkey.

Turkey has been locked in a fight with the PKK who fight for an autonomous region in Turkey, since 1984, and the fighting has claimed the lives of about 45,000 people.

Turkey lists PKK as a terrorist organization and has refused several PKK proposals for peaceful solutions on such grounds. The group is also recognized as a terrorist organization by the US and some EU countries as well.

(AK news)

- **Demonstrations in Sulaimaniya demanding Syrian Kurds' rights**

SULAIMANIYA, 30 July 2012- Tens of Kurdish people demonstrated today demanding the Syrian opposition and the National Council to guarantee full rights of the Kurdish people in Syria.

The demonstrators, including political representatives, called the Iraqi Kurdish region to support Syrian Kurds politically and logistically.

Aswat al-Iraq correspondent reported that leftist parties took place.

The demonstrators called to declare Kurdish commitment publically.

The demonstrators demanded Syria opposition to include Kurdish national demands in their agendas and recognize them officially.

They called the international community and the United Nations to stop the violations against the Syrian people.

Kurdistan region is receiving today chairman of the Syrian National Council Abdul Basit Sida to discuss the affairs of the Syrian opposition.

Syria is witnessing security chaos and clashes between the regular army and the opposition that resulted in tens of casualties daily.

Observers warn of future civil war that might be extended to neighboring countries.

The Kurdish areas in Syria (north east of the country) are witnessing relative stability with the Kurdish control on the areas, following the withdrawal of the Syrian regular army and security force last week.

Thousands of Syrians are trying to flee war zones into Iraqi territories, but local security forces prevented them, fearing the intrusion of terrorists among the refugees.

Iraqi local press reports said that the Iraqis suffered killing and assaults operations by "terrorist gangs" that led to their immigration back home.

(Aswat al-Iraq)

- **Iraq's cleric promotes peace, woos investors**

KUWAIT, 30 July 2012- A high ranking Iraqi official yesterday assured the business community in Kuwait that Iraq is a safe place for investors and that many of the disputes between the two neighboring countries have been solved. Amaar Al-Hakeem, the President of the Iraqi Higher Islamic Council was addressing a symposium hosted by the Kuwait Journalist Association (KJA) in Shuwaikh yesterday. This year's visit coincides with the anniversary of the Iraqi invasion, which he described as "a very sad memory."

Al-Hakeem provided a glowing assessment of the relationship between Kuwait and Iraq. "We should concentrate on the development of the economic ties between the two countries and on investments. In the past few years we have been focusing on the political and security issues," he said. According to him, the security in Iraq has an impact on the whole region. "If Iraq is more secure then this will have a positive impact on Kuwait and the region as a whole," he said. He further added that the visits of both Kuwaiti and Iraqi officials have had positive impacts for the two nations.

Al-Hakeem stressed that Iraq is marking serious improvements security-wise. "Compared to two years ago the situation today is much better. After 150,000 American soldiers withdrew from Iraq, our government has been working alone to insure security. As a result, the number of terrorist attacks has decreased," he said. To attest his words, he said that all delegations that visited Iraq "noticed the improvement". Al-Hakeem also noted that the Iraqi government is eager to solve all significant pending issues between the two countries.

He stressed that Iraq and Kuwait have settled some important issues. To illustrate his point, he mentioned the border dispute, the compensation of Kuwait Airways Corporation by the Iraqi Airways, the Kuwaiti properties in Iraq and other issues. "We also have good results in the negotiation on the Mubarak Port, especially the fourth phase of the project," stressed Al-Hakeem.

Regarding the Syrian refugees, Al-Hakeem said "In the beginning there were fears of letting the Syrians into Iraq – a status quo that has changed now. Iraq's borders have been opened for Syrians, he said –

elaborating that there are refugee camps built on the Iraqi-Syrian borders in cooperation with the Iraqi Red Crescent which accommodates refugees.

“Some Syrians have relatives in Iraq and we let them stay with them. We didn’t forget their help for the Iraqi people in the past 30 years,” he said. Finally he ensured the Kuwaiti business community that Iraq is safe for investments. “The new Foreign Investment Law provides good security for foreign investors in Iraq,” he said. He explained that some Kuwaiti property owners in Iraq won cases disputing properties in Basra other areas.
(Kuwait Times)

- **Iraq signs a MOU with Britain to dispose of its former chemical program**

Baghdad, July 30 – Minister of Science and Technology, Abdul Kareem al-Samara'e, signed with British Ambassador to Iraq, Simon Collis, a Memo of Understanding to dispose of the remains of Iraq's former chemical program.

A statement issued on Monday, July 30, by the Ministry of Science and Technology said, "The Agreement consists that

scientists of the British Ministry of Defence, with the help of Iraqi government, get rid of the remains of former Chemical program, and Britain trains Iraqi staff on how to safely dispose of the remains of these weapons.

It added, "Samara'e stressed the importance of this Memo between both sides, which affirms Iraq's keenness, through its constitution, to carry out its commitments in accordance with international agreements on not to spread chemical weapons and the government's desire to take a number of measures that help Iraq return to its normal position in the international community."

Samara'e praised British positive response to help training Iraqi experts to analyze chemical agents and cooperation that will have positive effect on developing bilateral relations.

For his part, Ambassador Collis praised Iraq's role, represented by the Ministry of Science and Technology, to get rid of its chemical weapons and its commitment toward international commitments and to help training Iraqi experts in this hard and dangerous task.

(NINA)

- **Iraq's Representative to EU discusses steps to implement Partnership Agreement**

Baghdad, July 30 – Iraq's Representative to the European Union, Ambassador Mohammed al-Homaimedi, discussed with the Head of Foreign Work at the European Union steps to implement the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Iraq and the EU.

A statement issued on Monday, July 30, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that in the meeting, Homaimedi discussed also the upcoming visit of the European Commission's delegation to Baghdad.

(NINA)

- **Official: Iraq will take a stand toward events in Burma**

Baghdad, July 30 – Official source said that Iraq will make a stand toward the massacres against Moslems in Burma.

In a statement to NINA on Monday, July 30, the source said that Iraq will demand the Arab League to make a stand toward events there.

It is noteworthy that web sites pointed out that hideous massacre by extremist groups are being made against Moslems in Burma resulted in the killing and disappearance of more than two thousand Moslems and burning down their homes.

(NINA)

- **Journalists killed in Mosul**

Mosul, July 30 – A journalist working at Sama Tv Channel killed on Monday evening, July 30, in an armed attack in Mosul.

Police source told NINA that gunmen stormed into the house of the journalist and television programs host at Sama Television Channel in Mosul, Ghazwan Anas, opened fire at him killing him instantly and fled.

(NINA)

- **3 Policemen wounded in Ramadi**

Ramadi, July 30 – Three policemen wounded when an improvised explosive device went off on Monday evening, July 30, against a police vehicle in Tameem neighborhood, western Ramadi.

Police source told NINA that three policemen wounded, one in critical conditions, when an improvised explosive device, emplaced in Tameem neighborhood, went off against their vehicle.

He added that the victims are taken to Ramadi General Hospital for treatment.

(NINA)

- **Diyala police foil attempt to blow car bomb in Baquba**

Baquba, July 30 – Police in Diyala province foiled on Monday evening, July 30, an attempt to blow a car bomb in downtown Baquba.

Spokesman for Diyala police, Colonel Ghalib Atiyah, told NINA that a security force was able to detonate a suicidal car bomb after chasing it and besieging it in Um al-Krafus area, northern Baquba.

He added that the operation was based on intelligence information stating that Qaeda organization is planning to destabilize security situation in the province.

(NINA)

- **Importing electricity from Iran affected province's economy, says Diyala Council**

DIYALA, July 30 - The energy committee in Diyala Provincial Council stated Wednesday that the import of electric energy affected the economy of the province due to its negative impact on the national network and home appliances.

The committee called on the Ministry of Electricity to increase Diyala's share of energy and address the problems of fluctuation in the electricity imported from Iran.

Committee chairman Ismail al-Jabbouri said: "The provinces share of electricity must be increased and energy projects must be supported especially in the electricity sector, which is very important for the citizens.

"The federal government must activate investment in the electricity sector and accelerate the completion of power plants to be built in Mansourieh and other areas of the province."

Iraq imports 1200 megawatts from Iran through four lines, three of which are

high-pressure 400kv. They are the lines of Kermanshah - Diyala, Karkha - Amara, Abadan - Sarra, and Serpil - Khanaqin. Iraq pays Iran about \$70m dollars per month for electricity imports.

Iraq has suffered a shortage of electric power since the beginning of 1990 due to the old age of a lot of power stations as well as sabotage attacks on facilities over the past years. The hours of power shortage increased to about twenty hours per day.

(AKnews)

2. IRAN

- **Ahmadinejad: Over \$7bln Invested in Iran's Oil Industry**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad underlined the world states' growing enthusiasm for investment in Iran's oil sector, and said investment in Iran's oil and gas industry has now surpassed \$7bln.

"At present, investment in the country's oil industry has amounted to \$7.1bln and the world is still eager to invest (in Iran)," Ahmadinejad said at a ceremony held on Tuesday to launch several optimization

units at Shahid Tondgouyan (Tehran) oil refinery to improve the quality of the refinery's products.

He downplayed the effects of the western sanctions on the country, and said, "Since the very day that investment in (Iran's) oil industry was sanctioned by the westerners, the trend of investment in the oil industry has actually doubled" in speed and capacity.

Figures of 2011 showed that foreign investment in Iran witnessed a 13.8% growth compared with 2010.



Addressing a conference on foreign investment earlier this month, Iranian Deputy Economy Minister Behrouz Alishiri said that Iran attracted \$4.3bln of foreign investment last Iranian year (March 21, 2011 - March 19, 2012), while the figure stood at \$3.8 a year earlier.

"The growing trend of foreign investment in Iran in 2011 has reach \$4.325 billion with a growth rate of 13.8%, while the average rate for global foreign investment was 16%," Alishiri underscored.

In May, Iranian Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Shamseddin Hosseini announced that the country plans to attract more foreign investment for several development projects this year.

The minister said that Iran have established investment service centers in 31 provinces to attract foreign investment.

Iran enjoys high capacity for attracting foreign investment in its oil and gas industries.

In April, Iranian First Vice-President Mohammad Reza Rahimi invited domestic and foreign capital holders to make investment in the country's oil and gas industries, and said Iran is among the most secure countries for investment in the energy sector.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252219>

- **Oil Minister: OPEC Favors \$100 Oil Price**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi said that members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries consider \$100 a fair price for crude oil, and thus an OPEC emergency meeting is no more necessary.

Speaking to FNA on Tuesday, Qassemi pointed to the present \$107 price for a barrel of crude in the global market, and stated, "As we expected the price of oil has gone beyond \$100 right now and the price is, thus, desirable for OPEC members."



"Therefore," he added "holding an OPEC emergency meeting seems to be no more necessary."

Earlier this month, Iran's Governor at the OPEC Mohammad Ali Khatibi had

announced that OPEC president Iran is in talks with other member states to hold an emergency meeting following the slide in oil prices.

Qassemi had said at the time that many OPEC members have voiced their agreement with Iran's call for holding an emergency meeting.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252217>

- **Iran to Set up Fund to Support Oil Equipment Producers**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran plans to establish a fund to provide the necessary financial support for those industries involved in the production of oil industry tools and equipments.



Addressing a gathering of oil tools and equipments producers, Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi said that his

ministry and the parliament are endeavoring to set up the fund to support domestic manufacturers.

Qassemi pointed to enemies' efforts to weaken the Iranian oil industry and create problems for Iran's oil supplies in the world markets, and cautioned that the market will lose its stability and tranquility when Iran's oil sector faces problems.

"We should go through this era of sanctions through coordination and endeavoring of the entire nation since we (the oil ministry personnel) are now soldiers in the foremost front of war and have a very effective role in gaining victory in this war."

In similar remarks late in June, Qassemi stressed Iran's self-sufficiency in producing the needed parts for its oil industry, and lauded the country's engineers and experts for their achievements and innovations in this field.

He reiterated that the Islamic Republic of Iran has achieved valuable victories in the field of oil and gas infrastructures and self-sufficiency in the past few years.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252215>

- **Commander: Iran to Close Strait of Hormuz Only if Interests Threatened**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces for Cultural Affairs and Defense Publicity Brigadier General Massoud Jazayeri rejected the speculations that Tehran intends to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz, and stressed that the measure will be on the table only if the country's interests are threatened.



Iran tries to let the Strait of Hormuz remain open for world nations until Iranian interests are respected, Jazayeri said on Monday.

He said that it is quite clear that a major part of world energy passes through Strait of Hormuz which falls into territorial waters of the Islamic Republic of Iran,

adding that military experts believe that no country can do a damn thing if Iran decided to close the Strait of Hormuz.

From early days of the Islamic revolution, Iran spared no efforts to restore peace and tranquility for all countries in the region, Jazayeri said.

Speaking to Alalam tv, he said Iran closely monitors all movements and developments in the region.

History indicated that Iran never triggered any conflict or aggression in the world, Jazayeri said.

Iran has threatened to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the entrance to the oil-rich Persian Gulf if its nuclear program is targeted by air strikes that Israel and the United States reserve as an option.

Situated between the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz is a passageway for 40% of the world's oil production, including much of the crude extracted in Saudi Arabia.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252135>

- **Senior Turkish Foreign Ministry Official to Visit Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's embassy in Turkey announced that Deputy Undersecretary of the Turkish Foreign Ministry Halit Cevik is scheduled to pay a visit to Iran this week in a bid meet with senior Iranian officials.



In a statement on Tuesday, the Iranian embassy said that Cevik plans to hold separate meetings with Iranian officials, adding that the meetings will take place in line with the two countries' regular meetings.

The statement said that Cevik is slated to meet with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi and Deputy Foreign Minister for Asian and Oceanic Affairs Abbas Araçchi and Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian.

Syria is among the main issues on the agenda of the talks between the Turkish official and the Iranian officials.

Iran and Turkey are determined to boost their trade exchanges to \$30bln in the near future.

Iran and Turkey have in recent years increased their cooperation in all the various fields of economy, security, trade, education, energy and culture.

The two sides have exchanged several politico-economic delegations during the last few months.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252195>

- **Beware of fixed intelligence on Iran: Ex-CIA analyst**

As we saw 10 years ago with respect to Iraq, if one intends to whip up support for war, one needs to find a casus belli - however thin a pretext it might be. How about juxtaposing "weapons of mass destruction" with terrorism. That worked to prepare for war on Iraq, and similar rhetorical groundwork for an attack on Iran is now being laid in Israel."

Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern

A former CIA analyst says the United States and Israel seek to come up with a pretext for attacking Iran by fabricating intelligence, a ploy similar to the one adopted by the United States for justifying the war on Iraq a decade ago.

“As we saw 10 years ago with respect to Iraq, if one intends to whip up support for war, one needs to find a casus belli - however thin a pretext it might be,” Ray McGovern wrote in an article.

“How about juxtaposing ‘weapons of mass destruction’ with terrorism. That worked to prepare for war on Iraq, and similar rhetorical groundwork for an attack on Iran is now being laid in Israel,” his article further read.

Referring to the recent attack on a number of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria, McGovern said, “Netanyahu broke all records for speed in blaming Iran and Hezbollah” for the bombing.

“On Fox News, Sunday on July 22, Mr. Netanyahu claimed Israel has ‘rock-solid evidence’ tying Iran to the attack in

Bulgaria. The same day on CBS's Face the Nation, Mr. Netanyahu said, ‘We have unquestionable, fully substantiated intelligence that this [terrorist attack] was done by Hezbollah backed by Iran,’ adding that Israel gives ‘specific details to ... responsible governments and agencies,’” McGovern went on to say.



The former CIA analyst added that Israel, however, has so far failed to provide any evidence for its claims of Iran's involvement.

“Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov has admitted that he was aware of no information concerning the terrorist or those who dispatched him,” he underlined.

McGovern then referred to the historical moment when British intelligence chief Sir Richard Dearlove admitted that intelligence on Iraq had been fixed.

"... Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove [executed Iraqi dictator] Saddam [Hussein], through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy," Dearlove said on July 23, 2005.

"The likelihood of hostilities with Iran before the [US] presidential election in November is increasing. Beware of "fixed" intelligence," McGovern concluded.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/31/253635/beware-of-fixed-intelligence-on-iran/>

- **Iranian deputy foreign minister to visit Baku**

TEHRAN, July 30 (MNA) - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Pacific Affairs Abbas Araqchi will travel to Baku next week to hold talks with Azerbaijani officials on various issues, a diplomat at the Iranian embassy in Baku told the Mehr News Agency.

Education Minister Hamid Reza Haji-Babaei traveled to Baku in mid-July to submit a message from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev inviting him to attend the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Tehran in late August.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1662009>

- **Pakistan's Senate chairman to travel to Tehran**

TEHRAN, July 31 (MNA) – The chairman of Pakistan's Senate will travel to Tehran on Thursday for a four-day visit.

Syed Nayyar Hussain Bukhari will meet President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi.

In these meetings Hussain Bukhari will discuss relations and regional issues with the top Iranian officials.

He also plans to travel to the shrine city of Mashhad where he will meet with the governor of Razavi Khorasan Province.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1662512>

- **'Bulgaria-Israel ties tense over Sofia's refusal to implicate Iran in terror case'**

A truck carries the wreckage of the bus targeted by a bomb blast while carrying a group of Israeli tourists at the airport in Bourgas, Bulgaria, July 19, 2012.

Bulgarian officials have been notably reluctant to join Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel in publicly pinning blame for the attack... on Hezbollah and Iran, a view privately shared by American officials.”

A major US daily says the refusal of Bulgarian officials to submit to the Israeli demands for blaming Iran in a recent bomb attack on an Israeli tour bus in Bulgaria has sparked tensions between Sofia and the Tel Aviv regime.

“Bulgarian officials have been notably reluctant to join Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel in publicly pinning blame for the attack... on Hezbollah and Iran, a view privately shared by American officials,” leading US daily the New York Times reported Tuesday.

At least seven people were killed and more than 30 others injured in an explosion on a bus carrying Israeli tourists in eastern Bulgaria on July 18.

Almost two weeks following the terrorist bombing of a bus carrying Israeli tourists, Bulgarian investigators are yet to officially identify the bomber despite early insistence by the Israeli regime and some officials in the US and the European countries to blame Iran and the Lebanese Islamic resistance movement of Hezbollah for the attack.

Bulgarian authorities have not publicly indicated who they believe was involved in the bombing, says the report.

Instead, the Bulgarian government has tried to avoid a hasty and inaccurate judgment “in a situation with global political and security implications.”

Iran, meanwhile, vehemently rejected the Israeli claim after the deadly bombing. Tehran has said that the Tel Aviv regime itself has been behind the terrorist attack, considering its extensive involvement in numerous terror acts beyond its borders.

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast condemned 'all terrorist activities anywhere in the world' and rejected the allegations of Iran's involvement in the Bulgaria attack.

"The Zionist regime (Israel), as the biggest sponsor of state and organized terrorism, which has the blood of innocent people in Lebanon, Palestinian, and other countries on its hands, and is responsible for the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists, engages in making baseless accusations against other countries to escape the attention of the people of the world."

"The Zionist regime is even ready to endanger lives within the occupied (Palestinian) territories or outside them to pursue its political scenarios," the senior Iranian official pointed out.

According to the Times report, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov asserted last week that the bombing was the work of an "exceptionally experienced" group of conspirators, something that Middle East observers believe fits the model of assassins working for the Israeli intelligence agency, the Mossad.



"For small Bulgaria to come out and openly name Hezbollah in such a way is as good as entering a minefield," said Valadimir Shopov, a political scientist at the New Bulgarian University in Sofia, quoted in the report. "There would have to be absolute certainty almost. You'd have to be really, really confident that your convincing evidence could stand up before all the other members of the EU."

Bulgaria's Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov has also been cited in the report as saying that investigators have learned more about the case than they could publicly discuss "without jeopardizing new leads."

The report further pointed to additional concerns among Bulgarian officials in averting the ramifications of a mistake in the case that would antagonize its sizable

indigenous Muslim population of over 10 percent.

“Bulgaria has a Muslim minority. We have many Arabs who came to the country and we don’t want them to feel stigmatized in any way or form because of this act,” said Bulgaria’s Foreign Minister Nickolay Mladenov. “This is a quiet country, and we would like to keep it quiet.”

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/07/31/253638/bulgariaisrael-ties-tense-over-iran/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Romney calling Jerusalem Israel's capital is 'unacceptable,' says Erekat**

In a speech in Jerusalem on Sunday evening that followed a day of meetings with Israel's leaders, Romney said it was a 'moving experience to be in Jerusalem,' which he described as, 'Israel's capital.'

Senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat. Senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat last year. Photo by Daniel Bar-On

Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat said on Monday that presumptive Republican

candidate Mitt Romney's assertion that Jerusalem is Israel's capital is "absolutely unacceptable."

In a speech in Jerusalem on Sunday evening that followed a day of meetings with Israel's leaders, Romney said it was a "moving experience to be in Jerusalem," and described the city as "Israel's capital." He suggested that he would move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem if he were elected president.

Palestinian officials have largely remained silent during Romney's Israel trip, and Saeb Erekat's comments Monday marked the strongest public criticism so far of the candidate.

Most of the world, including the U.S., does not recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The U.S. and others keep their embassies in Tel Aviv.

After arriving in Israel on Saturday afternoon, Romney met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Shimon Peres, and opposition leader Shaul Mofaz. His meeting with Labor Party head Shelly Yacimovich was cancelled at the last minute.

Romney ended his visit with a fundraiser in Jerusalem. He is due to continue his trip with a visit to Poland later on Monday.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/romney-calling-jerusalem-israel-capital-is-unacceptable-says-erekat-1.454662>

- **Analysis: Who's a better friend to Israel?**

Jerusalem could obtain something tangible from US Secretary of Defense Panetta's visit this week.

Like a kid at the circus, Israel just can't get enough of the different acts.

First it was Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who came to Israel earlier this month and in some of the harshest rhetoric yet by a senior member of the Obama administration, declared that the US would use "all elements of American power" to stop Iran.

Next were Thomas Donilon and John Brennan – US President Barack Obama's senior security and counter-terror advisers – who came to Israel to coordinate moves

on Iran and Syria. Their visits were followed up with Obama's signing into law the new United States-Israel Enhanced Security Cooperation Act last Friday.

Then came Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney whose aides told reporters in Jerusalem on Sunday that as president, the former governor would support Israel's decision to unilaterally attack Iran.

Wednesday will top off this round of "Who's a better friend to Israel?" with Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta's visit, which will include a tour of an Iron Dome counter-rocket defense battery the US is helping to finance.

Israel understands that it is being used as something of a pawn in a larger chess match that really doesn't have much to do with Israel.

But even if it is being used it doesn't really mind since in the meantime it is enjoying the show and is also reaping some benefits.

While the round of visits are clearly connected to the US presidential

elections, Panetta, Clinton and Donilon are also trying to get Israel to give the US and the international community more time to stop Iran with sanctions and diplomacy.

A new round of sanctions is expected to go into effect next week and the US hopes that it will contribute to Iran's growing isolation.

But this does not mean that Israel isn't looking to obtain something tangible from these visits. Last time Panetta visited Israel in October, he seemed to walk away with the impression that an Israeli strike against Iran would take place between April and June.

While that never happened, the publication of that prediction in The Washington Post helped create the panic Israel had been working to cultivate over the past couple of years, leading to the imposition of additional rounds of sanctions on the Iranian regime.

However, when he meets on Wednesday with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Panetta will most likely walk away without the

calming assurances he might otherwise have hoped for. Israel has an interest in remaining ambiguous about its intentions on Iran and if, when and how it will act.

In addition to discussions on regional issues, Israel is also likely to try and understand from Panetta the significance of the new bill Obama passed into law on Friday.

While some media have hyped up the bill's inclusion for example, of the potential sale of refueling tankers, Israel is not looking to buy new tankers – especially old and used American ones it does not have experience using.



Instead, the Air Force prefers to wait for Boeing to complete development of the US Air Force's future tanker and then buy some of those once they hit the market.

The bill also calls for increased support of the development of missile defense systems.

That has been going on for decades and according to some estimates, the US has poured over a billion dollars into systems like the Arrow, David's Sling and Iron Dome over the years.

In other words, the bill basically mentions everything that the Obama administration has been doing for Israel and vows to keep at it. One official from a US-based Jewish group nevertheless stressed that while the bill is an affirmation of what Congress would support, it will ultimately be up to the president to choose to do something.

For that reason, when hailing the bill on Friday, Barak specially mentioned the \$70m. the US recently pledged for the Iron Dome, but nothing else. That is because there is nothing yet tangible to speak of.

Panetta's trip might change that.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=279490>

- **Rivlin: PM should have gone to Sept. 4 election**

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu erred when he ended the process of initiating early elections and formed a short-lived national-unity government with Kadima, Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin said late Monday.

On May 7, the Knesset passed the first reading of a bill that would have initiated a September 4 election. But at 2am on May 8, Netanyahu and Kadima leader Shaul Mofaz announced that Kadima would join the coalition and the process of advancing the election was put on hold.



"The prime minister made a mistake when he did not go to elections," Rivlin said in an interview with the Knesset Channel." The mistake was ethical, moral, and [harmed] the public's trust in politics."

Rivlin said Netanyahu could have won the election easily but the prime minister put the interests of the state ahead of his own.

After Kadima left the coalition, Netanyahu tried unsuccessfully to split the party in a process led by former minister Tzahi Hanegbi.

Hanegbi denied a Channel 2 report that he was still actively trying to persuade Kadima MKs to join him in leaving for the Likud.

On Thursday in Ramat Gan, Hanegbi will hold what he called "a small meeting in a small room" to explain to the activists closest to him why he made the move. Many Kadima activists are expected to follow Hanegbi back to the Likud.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=279510>

- **Reconciliation hopes dashed as Fatah, Hamas make demands**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) – After optimistic remarks by Hamas and Fatah officials gave the people a false impression about a possible reconciliation deal, leaders of the

rival parties have started to pose demands and preconditions without which there will be no unity deal.

As Fatah announced there would be no unity government before elections take place, Hamas posed the issue of public freedoms in the West Bank as an obstacle to reconciliation and elections saying it would be impossible to carry out elections in light of absence of complete public freedom.

Commenting on the complicated situation, senior leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine Kayid al-Ghoul said Monday that both Hamas and Fatah make up pretexts from time to time "because both do not seriously want reconciliation."

"If that was not the case, both sides would have started to implement the Cairo agreement which was signed by all factions, and they would have accepted the recommendations of the sub-committees," he said.

Elections, says political analyst Mahmoud al-Ajrami, can only take place if there is complete public freedom. "Any citizen should enjoy the freedom to vote in any

institution fearing no consequences.” The Palestinian Authority should take the needed steps to create the right atmosphere for elections, he added.

He explained that preventing the general election commission from operating in Gaza was a procedural step which could be changed anytime. The real concern, he said, is to release political detainees, stop coordination with the Israelis on security issues, and to take real nationalistic stand against settlement expansion.

For his part, Mustafa as-Sawwaf, a political analyst asserted that elections can't be held in the West Bank because “the area suffers from oppression, absence of freedom of speech in addition to politically-motivated detentions.”

In the Gaza Strip, he said, certain changes and restructures are needed so as to create the right atmosphere for holding elections.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=508848>

- **Israel raids Hebron camp, 7 detained overnight**

HEBRON (Ma'an) -- Israeli forces raided several houses in a refugee camp south of Hebron and detained two Palestinians early Tuesday, local activists and the Israeli army said.



Soldiers detained 20-year-olds Islam Gameel Amer al-Titis and Thaer Mohammad Abed Rabbo Ghatasheh from the al-Fawwar refugee camp south of Hebron, the Palestinian prisoners society said.

An Israeli military spokeswoman confirmed the two arrests in al-Fawwar and said five more Palestinians were detained elsewhere across the occupied West Bank.

She reported one arrest in Beit Ummar, another in Qalqiliya, and three from a village near Jenin.

The prisoners society said that during the al-Fawwar arrests, Israeli forces raided the home of Bassam al-Najjar in an attempt to arrest his son, but did not find them there. They left the father instructions to bring his son to the investigation center in Etzion south of Bethlehem.

Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers erupted during the incursion and lasted until dawn. soldiers fired tear gas and stun grenades at the Palestinians.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=508774>

- **PA investigating mass food poisoning in Hebron area**

HEBRON (Ma'an) -- The mayor of Yatta, near Hebron, said Monday that a commission of inquiry would be formed to investigate over two dozen cases of food poisoning in the village and a nearby area.

Zahran Abu Qbith said 27 cases of food poisoning had been reported at emergency rooms in the Yatta and al-Samu villages. Patients ranged in age from 9 months to 55 years old, he said.

Medics at the Abu Hassan al-Qassim hospital told Ma'an that symptoms include diarrhea, dehydration and vomiting resulting from an outbreak of bacteria in the two villages.



Staff at the hospital are working under emergency regulations, they said.

It is believed that the outbreak is the result of meals provided to poor families in Yatta during Ramadan. They originated at one restaurant, officials believe. They did not name the restaurant.

"We must provide food of high quality for poor people, not poison them with infected food," the mayor said late Monday.

The commission of inquiry will be staffed by officials from the ministries of social affairs, national economy and religious affairs to investigate the outbreak.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=508724>

- **Committee Warns against Turning Al-Aqsa Yards into Public Park**

RAMALLAH, July 31, 2012 (Wafa) - The Islamic-Christian Committee for the Support of Jerusalem warned Tuesday of the implications of a decision by the Israeli municipality of West Jerusalem to turn the yards of al-Haram al-Sharif (the Holy Sanctuary), one of Islam's holiest sites, into a public park.

It accused in a statement the municipality of plotting to undermine the importance of al-Haram al-Sharif, which houses al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, to Muslims by opening it up for free entry to all people, but mainly to Jews.

Hanna Issa, who heads the committee, said al-Aqsa Mosque and al-Haram al-Sharif are part of occupied East Jerusalem and therefore international law and the Hague Convention that protects cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict applies to them.

The committee urged the Organization of Islamic Conference, the Arab League and

others to immediately intervene to put an end to what it described as "daily Israeli crimes against Jerusalem and al-Aqsa compound."

An Israeli lawmaker had earlier suggested destroying or removing al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock from their place and replacing them with a Jewish temple. Jews believe the site was the location of their temples destroyed 3000 years ago, a claim strongly rejected by Muslims.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20371>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Opinion: Nothing 'Accidental' in Mali – More Misery Awaits - by Ramzy Baroud**

Northern Mali promises to be the graveyard of scores of innocent people if African countries don't collectively challenge Western influence in the region.

The Republic of Mali is fast becoming the Afghanistan of Africa. The reference is being applied with growing enthusiasm by Western media. The tragic reality is that Mali, with massive size and relatively

sparse population - 1,240,000 km² and a population of nearly 15.5 million – was, until a few months ago, paraded as a model of stability and fledgling democracy in West Africa. What happened to make Mali a hotbed for terrorism, militancy, ethnic cleansing and a potentially destructive war that could destabilize the whole region?

On March 22, a US-trained Mali Army Capt. Amadou Sanogo led a coup against President Amadou Toumani Touré, accusing him of not doing enough to challenge the growing separatist and militant threats in northern Mali.

Despite the widespread condemnation of Sanogo’s coup, US media seemed more forgiving than their African counterparts, which saw the military takeover as a violent end to a two-decades-long democratization process. In an Associated Press (AP) article, it was claimed that the coup was a “surprise to Sanogo himself” (Fox News, July 7). AP conveniently interpreted the takeover as 'Mali's accidental coup', an inane conclusion that screams in the face of abundant evidence.

The barely harsh Western response to the coup had little to do with what was transpiring in southern Mali and much to do with the north. Expectedly, the coup led to a political vacuum needed for the Tuaregs' National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) to declare independence in the north merely two weeks later.

The declaration was the culmination of quick military victories by the MNLA and its militant allies, which led to the capture of Gao and other major towns. The successive developments further emboldened Islamic and other militant groups to seize cities across the country and hold them hostage to their agendas.

Within the power configuration that was quickly developing in the north, a conflict soon ensued, giving the upper hand to Ansar Dine ('Protectors of the Faith'), who ousted Tuaregs from various regions, including the historic city of Timbuktu.

The militants, alleging that Islamic history in Timbuktu is not consistent with their extreme interpretation of religion, began dismantling buildings, burning Islamic

manuscripts, and basically destroying a UNESCO-recognized world heritage site.

Another group quickly moved in, thickening the plot and raising even more questions. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a group that has topped the list of US enemies in Africa, has, to an extent, rationalized the need for the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM).

Headquartered in Germany, AFRICOM has been pushing for ‘alliances’ in a continent that was, for decades, mostly outside the US sphere of influence. The work of the relatively new command (activated in 2008) includes all of Africa, except Egypt. The declared motives of AFRICOM are intentionally conspicuous.

According to the US State Department, AFRICOM “will play a supportive role as Africans continue to build democratic institutions and establish good governance across the continent.” This surely fails to explain how helping African democracy will be enhanced by the creation US Special Operations Command, Africa (SOCAFRICA).

Media leaks and authoritative analysts have been linking AFRICOM to the mess in Mali. The security vacuum in the strategically located and large country is arguably the exact opening desperately sought by the US to establish lasting military presence in Africa. This has been especially needed after the forced reassessment of US military presence in other parts of the world.

Not only did AFRICOM have a notable presence in Mali, providing several training tours to the leader of the military coup, its head, General Carter Ham, is now articulating the kind of language that has been heard all too often in other conflict zones.

“We - the international community, the Malian government - missed an opportunity to deal with AQIM when they were weak. Now the situation is much more difficult and it will take greater effort by the international community and certainly by a new Malian government,” he told reporters in Senegal, as quoted in Reuters on July 26.

The nature of these ‘great efforts’ is still unknown, but US and France – a former

colonial power that still yields much influence and massive economic interests in Mali - are floating military options. Knowing that Western interventions often achieve the opposite of their declared purpose, some Western African countries are scrambling to prevent potentially grim scenarios.

On July 5, the Security Council endorsed the efforts of West African countries to end the unrest, and, despite pressure, didn't back military action. The African Union, which has had little success in past conflicts, is likely to concede leadership to The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), whose members are receptive to pressures due to their reliance on foreign aid.

Despite hyped Western media coverage, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is not the biggest concern in Northern Mali. Even by General Ham's estimations, foreign fighters in the north are numbering "dozens and perhaps in the low hundreds," according to Reuters.

The real crisis is humanitarian as well as political. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

(OCHA), 420,000 people have been made refugees in a region that is harsh even on those who aren't forced to flee across open deserts.

Nonetheless, discussions have already begun regarding the use of unmanned drones. The US media is now fomenting fears among Americans, perhaps in preparation for a military campaign led by the US and its Western allies, under an African umbrella. "Extremist Islamists have wrested control of a region the size of France in northern Mali and proclaimed an Islamic state," reported ABC News on July 23. Of course, little is being said about numerous other factors, including the fact that it was Western intervention in Libya in March 2011 that saturated a poor region with a massive amount weapons that are now being intercepted throughout Africa.

Mali is now ripe for another violent episode, the scope and nature of which are yet to be revealed. While Western powers and their regional allies are calculating their next move, hundreds of thousands of impoverished people are roaming the Sahara seeking water in one of the world's most unforgiving terrains.

The most tragic part of the story is that Mali's real hardships are only just beginning.

- Ramzy Baroud www.ramzybaroud.net is an internationally-syndicated columnist and the editor of PalestineChronicle.com. His latest book is My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story (Pluto Press, London).

<http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=5&i=8916>

- **Libya, Tunisia, Egypt Aiming for Visa-Free Travel Between Them**

Libyan Foreign Minister Ashour Bin Khayal (second right), in talks with Egypt's President Mohamed Mursi (extreme right) the Tunisian Foreign Minister Rafiq Abdul Salam and Egypt's Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr (left) at the presidential palace in Cairo

The three neighbourly countries in North Africa, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, who were mostly involved in the so-called Arab Spring last year, during which all three got rid of totalitarian regimes, are trying their best to improve their trade relations and

are considering changes to allow for visa-free travel between them.

Citing Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr, Egypt's state-run Middle East News Agency, Mena reported that the three neighbours believe that this could bolster trade and economic cooperation between them.

They have also agreed to put into effect a so-called Cairo Declaration that was announced Sunday, the agency said. The declaration aims to facilitate commerce, encourage investment, and fight terrorism, drug smuggling and illegal migration.

This comes after Egyptian, Tunisian and Libyan foreign ministers issued what they call the "Cairo Declaration" on Sunday. The declaration is an agreement towards political and economic cooperation. Through the Cairo Declaration they hope to facilitate commerce or encourage capital investments and working capital, which is considered to be the first step to achieve a cohesive Arabic economic market.

In the meeting Pan-Arab objectives were emphasised as well as the importance of good coordination to reach their objectives. The three ministers further welcomed any Arab country that is willing to participate in the consulting process.

The activation of joint economic cooperation would continue. The three neighbours are trying to get their economies back to full capacity after instabilities caused by their respective revolutions.

They stressed the importance of reinforcing cooperation in security, especially on the borders, in fighting terrorism, drug smuggling and illegal migration. The economy at the borders will be developed to address some of these security and migration issues.



On Syria, the ministers expressed their concern over human and living conditions

that Syrians are currently experiencing. They also verbalised their support for Arab League Council demands made at the Doha meeting, namely, that the Syrian government cease all violence immediately and start implementing Arabian and international initiatives to support a new transitional phase to a free, democratic system that serves the expectations of the Syrian people and protects Syria's unity.

Regarding Palestine, the foreign ministers stressed the importance of intra-Palestinian dialogue and unity. They offered all the support possible to establish a Palestinian state on lands occupied since June 1967 and further objected to all forms of occupation.

<http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=1&i=8908>

- **U.S. Secretary of Defense's Middle East Tour Reaches Tunisia**

U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta gives remarks in the North Africa American Cemetery in Carthage

U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta arrived in Tunisia today on the the second

day of a Middle East tour which began on Sunday. The trip – which will also include a tour of Egypt, Jordan, and Israel – marks the secretary’s first visit to Tunisia.

In a speech given this afternoon at the North Africa American Cemetery in Carthage, a suburb of the capital, Panetta lauded Tunisians’ overthrowing of their dictatorial president last year and stated that Tunisians’ efforts to combat oppression have inspired similar movements across the region and the world.

Panetta acknowledged that such movements have come at a human cost. Standing in the resting place for 2,841 U.S. military members killed in the World War II invasion and occupation of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, he stated, “Freedom is not free.”

“This memorial reminds all of us that the struggle to overcome tyranny and to secure a better life for our children comes with a heavy price,” the defense secretary continued.

According to Panetta, Tunisia has already “paid the price for freedom,” referring to

the Tunisians who gave their lives during the revolution. For that reason, he emphasized the United States’ continued commitment to work closely with Tunisia to ensure regional stability.

Concerning the continued presence of Al Qaeda in the region, Panetta “strongly urged” Tunisia to build a counter-terrorism operation to combat terrorist threats in nearby Somalia and Yemen, asserting that the United States has offered to help Tunisia to develop an operations and intelligence framework to “effectively deal with this trend.” He added that the Tunisian government thus far has been receptive to such a proposal.

Panetta takes a tour of the cemetery

After meeting this morning with Tunisian interim President Moncef Marzouki, Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, and Defense Minister Abdelkrim Zbidi, Panetta expressed his confidence in Tunisia’s current leadership, claiming that if Tunisia’s leaders can transform such discussion into action, Tunisia can become a regional leader.

“Tunisia really can be a model for the rest of the region as to how to accomplish a democratic transformation,” said Panetta.

Following Tunisia, the U.S. Secretary of Defense is expected to visit Egypt, Israel, and Jordan, with discussions concerning Syria and Iran topping the agenda.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/07/30/u-s-secretary-of-defenses-middle-east-tour-reaches-tunisia/>

- **Rafik Abdessalem Meets With Egyptian President Morsi and Libyan Foreign Minister**

Tunisian Foreign Affairs Minister Rafik Abdessalem attended a ministerial meeting in Cairo yesterday with Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, Egyptian Foreign Affairs Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr, and Libyan Foreign Affairs Minister Ashour Bin Khayal.

The meeting followed up on discussions at a similar summit that brought together representatives of the three countries in Tunis on March 16 of this year.

In a statement released by the Egyptian Foreign Affairs Ministry, Amr declared that the meeting aimed to coordinate the countries’ stances in the political, economic, security, and cultural fields.

The Syrian crisis and the developments of the Palestinian situation, as well as regional international issues of common concern were discussed at the meeting.

The removal of entry visa requirements for citizens of the three countries was also brought up. Morsi declared that such a project could see the light of day soon, contingent on the “security situation” in the countries. He stated that if the “experiment” proved successful, it could potentially be generalized to cover all Arab countries.

Abdessalem talked about the evolution of the political scene in Tunisia since the election of the National Constituent Assembly, highlighting the similarities in the paths of democratic transition in the three countries. He congratulated the Egyptian people for their recent presidential elections, which he described as reflective of the will of the people. He also congratulated the Libyan people for

their successful General National Congress elections.

www.tunisia-live.net/2012/07/30/rafik-abdessalem-meets-with-egyptian-president-morsi-and-libyan-foreign-minister/

- **Morsy has kept one promise out of 64, website says**

Egypt's new President Mohamed Morsy (C) speaks during his swearing-in ceremony at the Supreme Constitutional Court in Cairo June 30, 2012. Morsy said on Saturday the military that took charge when Hosni Mubarak was overthrown last year had kept its promise to hand over power, speaking at a ceremony to mark the formal transfer of authority. Judge Abdel-Moez Ibrahim, head of the High Elections Commission (R), and Farouk Sultan, head of the presidential election commission, are also pictured.

Photographed by other

The Morsy Meter, a website dedicated to tracking the performance of President Mohamed Morsy, reported Monday that the president has fulfilled one promise out of the 64 he pledged to carry out in the first 100 days of his rule.

The site said on Twitter that the only promise Morsy is working on is cleanliness, citing the Clean Homeland campaign. It posted news about the campaign, which began last Friday, and videos of people participating in it.

The meter monitors seven other promises under the banner of hygiene, 17 involving security, 21 for traffic, 13 involving food and five regarding fuel.

The site says that it aims to document Morsy's performance and what will be achieved under the 100-day plan.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-has-kept-one-promise-out-64-website-says>

- **US hits out at Europe, Egypt over religious freedoms**

WASHINGTON — The United States on Monday accused Egypt, China and European nations of harming religious freedom, citing a rising tide of anti-Semitism, laws banning Muslim veils and attacks on Coptic Christians.

In its first report on religious freedoms since the start of the Arab Spring uprisings, the State Department warned that: "In times of transition, the situation of religious minorities in these societies comes to the forefront."

"Some members of society who have long been oppressed seek greater freedom and respect for their rights while others fear change. Those differing aspirations can exacerbate existing tensions," it warned.

The report which details the situation in 2011 noted that in Egypt, although the Arab country's interim military leaders had made gestures towards greater inclusiveness, sectarian tensions and violence had increased.

It denounced "both the Egyptian government's failure to curb rising violence against Coptic Christians and its involvement in violent attacks."

Ambassador at large for religious freedom, Suzan Johnson Cook, acknowledged that places like Egypt were "still in transition" as new governments are installed following uprisings in 2011 against autocratic leaders.

"We're looking, as they form new constitutions, it's a wonderful opportunity to include... religious freedom," she told journalists presenting the report.

Governments should also hold accountable those carrying out violent attacks against religious minorities, she added.

The State Department also signaled "a marked deterioration during 2011 in the government's respect for and protection of religious freedom in China" and noted that religious freedom does not exist in any form in North Korea.

"In Burma, long-simmering tensions recently erupted in widespread violence against the marginalized Rohingya community," Johnson Cook added.

Myanmar or Burma, China and North Korea are among eight countries designated by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as countries of particular concern for their failure to recognize religious rights.

They are accompanied by Eritrea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Uzbekistan.

The report also warned that European nations undergoing major demographic shifts have seen "growing xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and intolerance toward people considered 'the other.'"

It complains of a "rising number of European countries, including Belgium and France, whose laws restricting dress adversely affected Muslims and others."

Ambassador at large for religious freedom, Suzan Johnson Cook, accused some governments of limiting "the right to wear or not to wear religious attire."

"This decision should be a personal choice," she insisted to journalists, presenting the report at the State Department.

Clinton, who was to comment on the report later Monday, met Egypt's new President Mohamed Morsy earlier this month to urge him to respect the rights of all Egyptians.

She also held two hours of private talks with Christian leaders to hear their concerns about life under the new Egyptian leadership, much of which is drawn like Morsy from the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

The report also documents "a global increase in anti-Semitism, manifested in Holocaust denial, glorification and relativism."

And it criticizes a law passed by the Hungarian parliament to regulate registration of religious organizations.

"The law went into effect on 1 January 2012, reducing the number of recognized religious groups from over 300 to fewer than 32," it noted.

Belgium and France have outraged many Muslims with laws against full veils, such as the niqab worn by many women in Saudi Arabia or the Afghan burqa, which went into force last year and in some places are punishable by fines.

US President Barack Obama fiercely criticized European moves to ban the veil

in a major speech to the Muslim world in Cairo in 2009.

But in Europe, where many voters feel large Muslim immigrant populations are not integrating well and that Islam poses a threat to women's rights, many see France and Belgium as leading the way on this issue.

The report also took aim at countries, such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, using blasphemy laws to "restrict religious liberty, constrain the rights of religious minorities and limit freedom of expression."

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/us-hits-out-europe-egypt-over-religious-freedoms>

- **Qandil: New cabinet to be announced Thursday**

The new cabinet should be announced and the ministers sworn in by Thursday, presidential spokesperson Yasser Ali said on Monday.

Ali said the presidential staff would be announced on the same day.



"It was normal for certain candidates to turn the offer down," he said, adding that the main criterion for choosing ministers in the cabinet is efficiency. He reaffirmed that the new government would include women and Copts, as well as representatives of various political forces.

"It will be a balanced government," he concluded.

Prime Minister Hesham Qandil continued to hold confidential meetings with the candidates, receiving them through the back door of the General Investment Authority in Nasr City so that reporters cannot identify them.

"I will complete 80 percent of the task by the end of Monday," Qandil said.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/qandil-new-cabinet-be-announced-thursday>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **UN-backed Lebanon court says has right to try Hariri suspects**

File photo of Rafik al-Hariri, Former Lebanese Prime Minister. Al-Hariri was assassinated on 14 February 2005.

A UN-backed international court in the Hague ruled on Monday that it has the right to try the alleged killers of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri.

The Special Tribunal for Lebanon was set up to investigate the 2005 seafront bombing that killed billionaire businessman Hariri and 21 others, and try the alleged killers.



Defense lawyers for the four suspects argued that the tribunal violated Lebanese sovereignty and could not guarantee them a fair trial.

But the tribunal's judges on Monday rejected those claims and ruled they had jurisdiction on the case.

Hariri's killing plunged Lebanon into years of political turmoil, culminating in sectarian violence in May 2008 that pushed the country to the brink of civil war.

The international court is controversial in Lebanon. Although it was set up with the support of the Lebanese government five years ago, it is opposed by Hezbollah, a political party and guerrilla group of which the four suspects are members.

The current Lebanese government, dominated by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah and its political allies, has told the court the suspects cannot be found. The court plans to try the suspects, all Lebanese nationals, in absentia and has set a provisional trial start date of 25 March next year.

Antoine Korkmaz, a defense lawyer appointed to represent one of the suspects, said the tribunal had been created illegally by the United Nations Security Council and was interfering with Lebanon's domestic affairs.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/un-backed-lebanon-court-says-has-right-try-hariri-suspects>

- **Bassil says he negotiated with EDL strikers**

Energy Minister Gebran Bassil denied on Tuesday “accusations” that he was avoiding talks with Electricite du Liban striking hourly-wage employees.

“Four comprehensive meetings were held with a large number of [EDL hourly-wage workers]; during which [I] listened to their demands. I also tried to convince them to backtrack [on their ongoing strike],” Bassil told Al-Jumhuriya newspaper.

The EDL hourly-wage employees have been at odds with the company and Bassil over improvement to their work conditions and have called for back pay and their appointment as permanent staff.

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

- **Future bloc MP says army doing Hezbollah’s dirty work**

Future bloc MP Mouin al-Merhebi said in remarks published on Tuesday that the Lebanese army was doing Hezbollah’s dirty work.

“There is complete control over the army by Hezbollah and [Free Patriotic Movement leader MP] Michel Aoun to the point where the army performs [both parties’] dirty work,” Merhebi told Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Jarida.

He added that Lebanese army commander General Jean Qahwaji “presents his credentials to Syria and Iran on a daily basis.”

Commenting on the army’s statement that considered Merhebi’s comments as “lies,” the MP said: “The army’s statement is very silly and full of lies as usual.”

“I am ready to resign and [go] with Qahwaji to trusted judges to determine who is using his position for personal

[gains],” he added in response to the army’s statement that he was using his parliamentary immunity to attack the army.

On Sunday, Merhebi said that Qahwaji was a “loser” and that he was “using the [military] institution to reach the presidency [position].”

The army then fired back, accusing Merhebi of making up lies about it “to gain popular support for the upcoming [parliamentary] elections.”

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

6. SYRIA

- **CNN: Syrian rebels shelling base north of Aleppo with captured tanks**

CNN reported on Tuesday that Syrian rebels were using tanks captured on Monday to shell a regime base outside of Aleppo.

The US news channel quoted a Free Syrian Army commander as saying that “rebels put the captured armor to work Monday by shelling an air base outside Azaz.”

Syrian rebels seized the strategic Anadan checkpoint northwest of Aleppo on Monday after a 10-hour battle, capturing seven tanks and armored vehicles.

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

- **Iran “will not allow enemy to advance” in Syria, military says**

Iran “will not allow the enemy to advance” in Syria, but does not yet see the need to directly intervene, the deputy chief of the Islamic republic's armed forces was quoted as saying in reports Tuesday.

“There is still no need for Syria's circle of friends to fully enter the arena, and our assessment is that there will be no need to do so,” Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri said, according to the Shargh daily.

“In special situations, we decide how to support the regional [anti-Israeli] resistance and our friends. We shall wait to see the future situation and conditions,” he said.

"We are very sensitive when it comes to our friends in the [anti-Israeli] resistance in the region, and we will not allow the enemy to advance," he said.

A senior commander in Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards, General Hamid Reza Moqadam-Far, was quoted in another newspaper, Kayhan, saying that Syrian civilians were now fighting rebels alongside the regime's troops.

He added that, if the rebellion was routed, it would "deliver an enormous blow to Saudi Arabia and Western countries," which Tehran sees as directly helping the insurgents.

Iran is one of the key allies of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, alongside Russia and China. It sees Syria as part of a regional anti-Israeli bloc that includes itself, the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, and the Palestinian group Hamas.

Tehran has been providing humanitarian aid and diplomatic support to Damascus, but denies reports it has already sent military assistance.

Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi held a telephone conversation late Monday with his Swedish counterpart, Carl Bildt, in which he said there was a need for a dialogue to be held between Syria's regime and opposition to resolve the conflict.

"Syria's friends and those who want peace and stability in the region must prepare the ground to permit dialogue between the regime and the opposition to facilitate an exit from the crisis," Salehi was quoted as saying by the official news agency IRNA.

On Monday, the Syrian regime sent helicopter gunships and artillery to pound rebel-held districts in Aleppo, the country's commercial capital.

The 16-month uprising in Syria, and Assad's crackdown on it, has cost more than 20,000 lives according to activists and sent hundreds of thousands of civilians fleeing their homes.

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

- **Ban: UN convoy attacked in Syria**

A convoy of unarmed UN observers came under attack in Syria, UN leader Ban Ki-moon said Monday as he expressed mounting concern at the spiraling onslaught by government forces.

The five-vehicle convoy which was carrying UN mission chief General Babacar Gaye came under small arms fire near the protest city of Homs, a UN peacekeeping spokesperson said.

"Fortunately there were no injuries," Ban told reporters as he announced the attack on Sunday.

The convoy was at the village of Talbisa, traveling from the protest city of Homs when one vehicle was hit by three bullets and another by one bullet, a UN peacekeeping spokesperson, Josephine Guerrero, told AFP.

"It was an convoy of five vehicles, which was carrying General Gaye, which came under small arms fire," she said.

UN officials said it was not known who had fired the shots.

Gaye told a press conference in Damascus that he had been on his first field visit since his arrival one week ago to take charge of the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS).

He did not mention the shooting incident but told reporters: "During my visit to Homs, I was personally able to witness heavy shelling, from artillery and mortars, ongoing in the neighborhoods of the city."

Ban made a new plea for President Bashar al-Assad to halt the "violent measures" of his forces in Homs and the city of Aleppo, which is the target of a major new assault.

"We are deeply concerned that they are using all sorts, all kinds of heavy equipment, including military airplanes and attack helicopters and heavy weaponry. This is an unacceptable situation," Ban said. "The situation is getting worse and worse."

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

- **Battle for Aleppo: rebels deny army advance in Salaheddin**

Syrian troops, rebels clash near Aleppo's intelligence HQ on fourth day of military offensive.

BEIRUT - Syrian troops and rebels fought pitched battles near an intelligence headquarters in Aleppo on Tuesday, a watchdog said, as a military offensive in Syria's commercial capital raged into a fourth day.

The fighting erupted when rebels launched an assault before dawn on the powerful air force intelligence branch in Aleppo's Zahraa district, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Fighting was continuing into the day.

Also Tuesday, rebels armed with rocket propelled grenades attacked Aleppo's main military court as well as a police station and a branch of the ruling Baath Party in the city's southern Salhin district, the Britain-based Observatory said.

Meanwhile, the neighbourhoods of Firdoss, Al-Mashhad and Ansari were bombarded through the night by government troops, the watchdog said.

Fighting also flared in the southwestern district of Salaheddin, the rebels' main bastion in Aleppo, which was strafed by government helicopter gunships, according to the Syrian Revolution General Committee, a network of activists on the ground.

A security official in Damascus said on Monday that the army had regained some of Salaheddin but it was facing "a very strong resistance." The rebels, however, denied that the army had advanced even "one metre" (yard).

The Observatory said violence across the country on Monday saw 93 people killed -- 41 civilians, 19 rebels and 33 soldiers.

Among Monday's death toll were at least five rebels and one civilian killed in Salaheddin, while eight bodies of unidentified men were found near the air force intelligence branch in Zahraa.



The Observatory says it cannot swiftly give an authoritative death toll for the fierce battles in Aleppo, which began when government troops launched an all-out assault against rebel-held districts in the northern city.

"In a war context, it takes more time to accurately document the death toll," Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Just outside Aleppo, rebels seized a strategic checkpoint after a 10-hour battle on Monday, an AFP correspondent witnessed.

By securing the checkpoint, some five kilometres (3.8 miles) northwest of Aleppo, the rebels now control a direct route between the Turkish border and the commercial capital.

The United Nations estimates that around 200,000 civilians have fled the fighting in Aleppo and that many more are trapped.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53649>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Kuwaiti MPs boycott revived parliament amid crisis

Kuwait parliament failed Tuesday to hold its first session after it was reinstated by a court ruling as a majority of MPs boycotted the meeting amid a lingering political crisis.

Speaker Jassem al-Khorafi adjourned the session for next week after only six MPs of the 50-member house and several cabinet ministers turned up for the meeting boycotted by both pro-government and opposition lawmakers.

Opposition MPs declined to attend saying the parliament was illegitimate while pro-government members stayed away because of the government's refusal to pledge that it will not dissolve the house again.

Elected in 2009, the pro-government parliament was dissolved in December following youth-led protests. New polls were held in February in which the Islamist-led opposition scored a massive victory.

In an unprecedented ruling on June 20, the constitutional court nullified the legislative polls, scrapped the elected parliament and reinstated the 2009 assembly.

Khorafi said he would invite MPs for another meeting next week and, if there was no quorum, he would refer the issue to Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah to take "appropriate action."

The emir is expected to dissolve the assembly again and call new elections, the fifth since June 2006, amid speculation the government was preparing to amend the electoral constituency and voting systems.

The government has not explicitly said it will change the electoral system, but Kuwaiti Information Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah al-Sabah said on Monday the cabinet would look into the matter, without giving a date or details.

The opposition, however, has threatened in a petition to would boycott any forthcoming election if the electoral system was changed.

Around 35 members of the scrapped 2012 parliament and thousands of people have signed the petition which also calls for dissolving the reinstated parliament soon.

Several opposition MPs have vowed to stage protests if the electoral system is changed.

Kuwait's opposition had also demanded deep political reforms including a multi-party system, a full parliament system and an elected government.

Since 1962, the government has been headed by a senior member of the Al-Sabah family, in power unchallenged for the past 250 years and whose members also normally hold the key posts of defense, interior and foreign affairs.

The OPEC member has been rocked by a series of political crises since 2006 during which the government resigned nine times and parliament was dissolved on five occasions.

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

- **Yemen arrests suspected Al-Qaeda leader**

Yemeni security services have arrested a suspected Al-Qaeda leader, Abdulrahman al-Baihani, wanted for plotting "terrorist" attacks in the capital, state news agency Saba said Tuesday.

The suspect is "one of the most dangerous wanted Al-Qaeda elements and among the prominent leaders plotting to carry out acts of terrorism and sabotage in the capital," Saba quoted a high-ranking security official as saying.

Baihani, who was arrested on Monday, "took part in fighting armed forces in Abyan province" from which Al-Qaeda militants were ousted in June following deadly battles with Yemeni forces.

He also "brought children whom he sent to fight alongside Al-Qaeda in Abyan and Shabwa provinces," the official said.

Earlier in July, Yemen announced it has placed its security services on high alert to prevent "terrorist" attacks after it uncovered a plot to launch assaults against security and military checkpoints.

Al-Qaeda militants have carried out several deadly attacks against Yemeni security services since President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, who has repeatedly vowed to battle extremists, came to power this year.

In May, a Yemeni soldier detonated explosives packed under his uniform in the middle of an army battalion in the capital Sanaa, killing 96 troops and wounding around 300.

The Yemen-based Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, believed to be the global network's most effective and lethal franchise, had claimed responsibility for the attack.

And on July 11, a suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance of a police academy in Sanaa, killing eight cadets and wounding several more. Officials had accused Al-Qaeda of carrying out the assault.

But the network has not claimed responsibility for this attack.

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

- **Sectarian politics to be debated in Manama**

International conference to review priorities for regional security, security in the Strait of Hormuz

Manama: The influence of sectarian politics in regional security will figure high on the agenda of the Manama Dialogue, a major security conference, to be held in Bahrain on December 7-9.

The issue is likely to receive wide attention amid concerns that countries in the Middle East have been badly affected by the seemingly inexorable rise of sectarianism while several analysts have noted it has become the “dominant dynamic in the region today.”

Other issues to be discussed at the Manama Dialogue in its eighth year include the US and the region, priorities for regional security, intervention and mediation, counter-terrorism, strategic reassurance and deterrence, demographics, political inclusion and stability and security in the Strait of Hormuz.

The changing dynamics of Middle East security relationships will be discussed at a plenary session.

Article continues below

The Manama Dialogue, co-organised by Bahrain’s foreign ministry and the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), an international authority on political-military conflict, has evolved into a pivotal regional gathering.

“The Manama Dialogue offers participating states unparalleled opportunities for security diplomacy,” the IISS said. “As usual there is the necessary blend of involvement from the foreign, defence and interior ministries as well as the national security councils, intelligence agencies and military establishments.”

The conference, in which participation is by invitation only, comprises “a carefully selected group of individuals who can inform, instruct and influence security policy in the region, and of the non-government delegates.”

The Manama Dialogue, an annual event hosted by Bahrain, did not take place last

year. In December 2010, King Abdullah of Jordan delivered the keynote address while US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton gave the opening speech.

A major issue at the opening dinner that brought together rulers, government heads and ministers was whether Clinton would trade words with then Iran's foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki.

Clinton tried twice to speak with him once inside the hotel hall and in the driveway, but each time Mottaki deliberately avoided contact with her.

However, the former Iranian minister later insisted that Islamic traditions demand responses to greetings.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/sectarian-politics-to-be-debated-in-manama-1.1055131>

- **Saudi Minister: Detained Shiite cleric's demands reflect mental deficiency**

Prince Ahmed says authorities do not discriminate against family of Nimr, but warn those affected by his 'deviation' should be stopped.

JEDDAH (Saudi Arabia) - Saudi Interior Minister Prince Ahmed bin Abdul Aziz on Monday described prominent Shiite cleric Nimr Nimr, detained in the kingdom's Eastern Province, as mentally ill.

"Nimr Nimr is someone who stirs sedition... The way he speaks reflects a mental deficiency and imbalance," Prince Ahmed said at a press conference, according to a report by state news agency SPA.

Prince Ahmed claimed that authorities do not discriminate against the family of Nimr, but warned that those affected by his "deviation" should be stopped.

"His wife works in immigration, and his sons and daughters have scholarships to study abroad. The government sent his wife to the United States for treatment when she suffered a malignant illness," he said.



"Everything is available for him, just like others," Prince Ahmed added.

Nimr remains in hospital as he was wounded during his arrest earlier this month in the Shiite district of Qatif in the Eastern Province.

Saudi police on Friday confronted Shiite demonstrators who marched in Qatif demanding the release of Nimr and other detainees, witnesses said, while the interior ministry announced arresting several people among "rioters."

Two Shiite protesters were killed earlier this month, triggering attacks on government buildings in Qatif.

The district witnessed a spate of protests after an outbreak of violence between Shiite pilgrims and religious police in the

Muslim holy city of Medina in February last year.

The protests escalated when the kingdom led a force of Gulf troops into neighbouring Bahrain the following month to help crush a Shiite-led uprising against the Sunni monarchy.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53645>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Report Questions Afghanistan Reconstruction Projects

Fern Robinson

VOA News

July 30, 2012

A U.S. government report says major reconstruction projects in Afghanistan that were originally pitched as a vital tool in the campaign against the Taliban are so far behind schedule that they will not yield any benefits until most U.S. combat forces have left the country.

The report by the special inspector-general for Afghanistan reconstruction

concludes the Afghan government will not have the money or skill to maintain many of the projects.

The Washington Post and The New York Times published stories on the report early Monday ahead of its official release planned for later in the day.

The newspapers say the report states the U.S. military and the U.S. Agency for International Development believe four electricity projects, costing more than \$300 million dollars, will have counterinsurgency benefits, yet the projects have still not been awarded to contractors.

The U.S. Congress has poured \$800 million into the Afghan reconstruction fund, while the State Department has committed about \$1 billion.

In a written response to the report, the U.S. embassy in Kabul said it was "speculative," and the top Defense Department official responsible for Afghanistan called the report "premature."

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

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

- **ISAF Calls Criticism From Pakistan 'Incorrect'**

By RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan

July 30, 2012

The International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) has denied a claim by Pakistan's military that ISAF is failing to help stop militants from crossing the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Pakistan's military says it has notified the NATO-led force in Afghanistan 52 times about crossborder movement from Pakistan into Afghanistan by militants, without any response from the ISAF.

In a statement, ISAF said that claim is "incorrect."

The NATO-led force says it immediately dispatches troops to deal with crossborder militants whenever Pakistan's military requests assistance.

The statement says ISAF has a mutual interest to coordinate action with Pakistan against crossborder attacks from North Waziristan by members of the Haqqani network.

It says ISAF is "committed to working together with Pakistan" for security, stability and efforts toward reconciliation.

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

- **US-led forces worried about rising attacks by Afghan soldiers**

Press TV
July 30, 2012

The US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is concerned about the growing attacks by Afghan soldiers on the US-led foreign forces in Afghanistan, an ISAF spokesman says, Press TV reports.

Brigadier General Gunter Katz said on Monday that the ISAF is in talks with the Afghan government on this issue and that "they are following it up very seriously."

He claimed that most of the foreign soldiers came under fire by Afghan

soldiers due "to stress, grievances and of course infiltration of militants."

The so-called "green-on-blue" attacks, which involve members of the Afghan national security forces targeting the NATO forces, have escalated this year.

The assailants have also targeted foreign civilian contractors who work for the US-led mission.

Earlier this month, an Afghan man wearing a security force uniform shot dead three foreign contractors at a military training center near the Herat Airport in southwestern Afghanistan.

At least 29 people have been killed in recent months in attacks by Afghan security forces on their allies from the US-led NATO forces, according to AFP.

Insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan despite the presence of thousands of US-led forces in the war-torn country.

The US-led war in Afghanistan, with civilian and military casualties at record

highs, has become the longest military conflict in the American history.

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

- **Afghan hospital abuse probe continues**

Press TV

July 30, 2012

An investigation is still underway to examine a top US general's efforts for delaying a probe into abuse and mismanagement at a US-funded hospital in the Afghan capital, Kabul.

Lieutenant General William Caldwell is accused of trying to block an investigation into allegations of corruption and patient mistreatment at Dawood National Military hospital until after 2010 US congressional elections.

In a testimony submitted to US Congress earlier last week, retired Colonel Gerald Carozza, who served as an adviser to the US campaign in Afghanistan, said that General Caldwell snubbed the probe until after the congressional election.

"The evidence is clear to me that General Caldwell had the request (for a probe into the hospital) withdrawn and postponed until after the (November 2010 US congressional) election and then, after the election, tried to intimidate his subordinates into a consensus that it need not move forward at all," Carozza said.

Dawood military hospital became the focus of US lawmakers' attention after a Wall Street Journal report elaborated the seriousness of the corruption and mistreatment of wounded Afghan soldiers last year.

On July 24, several recently retired US military officers and whistle blowers testified formally before the House Committee about what they knew about the miserable conditions of patients and corruption of Afghan doctors and nurses.

Pentagon has acknowledged the dire condition of patients at the hospital.

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

- **Afghan police kill 17 Taliban militants**

KABUL, July 30 (Xinhua) -- Afghan police have killed 17 Taliban militants and wounded five others across the country over the past 24 hours, Interior Ministry said in a statement on Monday.

"Afghan National Police backed by army and the NATO-led coalition forces launched seven operations in Nangarhar, Kandahar, Logar, Khost and Helmand provinces over the past 24 hours during which 17 Taliban were killed, five wounded and two others were arrested," the statement said.

However, it did not say if there were any casualties on security forces.

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

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