



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barıő Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dıő Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İliőkiler



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13 AUGUST 2012

NO: 1441

1. IRAQ.....	3
• Call to publish Reforms Paper publicly, MP	3
• Kurdistan positively interacts with National Alliance' reforms, Talabani	3
• Maliki's announcement about end of war on terrorism in Iraq is surprising, says parliamentary committee	4
• Security Directorate denies threats against Gorran.....	4
• Turkish FM's visit to Kirkuk comes to embarrass Central Government, says Musawi	5
• Iraqi deputy PM due in Tehran soon	6
• Turkish FM's visit to Kirkuk comes to embarrass Central Government, says Musawi	6
• Turkish FM meets representatives of Iraq's Shiite, Sunni Muslims	7
• Plans for joint Iraq-Kuwait airline due by year-end	7
• Arms smuggling to Syria turns into big business in Iraq.....	8
• Antiquities Department resumes digs in three Iraqi provinces	8
• New law says no place for smaller political parties in Iraq	9
• Suited to Terrorism: Iraqi tailors driven out of business by extremists	12
2. IRAN	16
• Iran to Attend Mecca Conference to Strengthen Solidarity in Muslim World.....	16
• Iran Renews Opposition to Foreign Intervention in Syria	17
• Supreme Leader: World Heading towards New Structure.....	18
• Death toll from Iran quakes rises to 300	19
• Ambassador denies Iran is selling cheap oil to China.....	20
• Pakistan wants to boost trade with Iran to \$10b.....	21
• 'Tehran has right to seek compensation from U.S. for mistreatment of Iranian prisoner'	22
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	23
• Gaza families visit relatives in Israeli jails.....	23
• PA official: 11 killed in car crash near Tulkarem.....	24
• Hamas 'ready to close tunnels' if Egypt reopens Rafah	25
• Israel to Allow Palestinians into Jerusalem on Tuesday.....	26
• Israeli Army Chief Orders Legalization of Settlement Outpost in Salfit	26
• Olmert: No reason to attack Iran now	27
• Handing Jerusalem to the Palestinians	28
• Israel-PA Conflict: The Ottoman path to peace / Rafael Castro	29
• 'Palestinian incitement continuing unabated'.....	31
• IDF signs injunction legalizing Bruchin outpost.....	34
• Soldier gets 45 days over unlawful use of firearm	36
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	38
• NGOs Agree to Follow Government Restrictions on Women's Day Protests	38
• Government and Religious Leaders Struggle for Control of Zitouna	39
• UGTT Announces Governmental Pay Raise in Public Sector	42
• Opinion: Egypt: Clean Sweep for the Civilians - by Gwynne Dyer.....	44



• Eight Prisoners Freed, One Killed in Armed Attack on Tripoli Jail	46
• UN Special Envoy Congratulates New Democratic Power in Libya	47
• Pro-military politicians slam Morsy's reshuffle	48
• Mohab Mamish: New head of the Suez Canal Authority	49
• Brotherhood leaders laud decision to retire SCAF heads	50
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	52
• Future bloc MPs welcome Patriarch in Akkar	52
• Maronite Patriarch calls for protecting Akkar from Syrian shells	53
• Jumblatt calls for letting army play its role	54
• Lebanon's FM leaves for Saudi Arabia to attend Islamic summit	54
6. SYRIA.....	55
• Syrian army shells Damascus and suburbs, says watchdog	55
• Battle for Aleppo: army presses ground offensive.....	56
• Iran seeks to save pivotal Syrian ally, sees conflict as part of broader threat	59
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	63
• Bahrain's Envoy Resumes Diplomatic Activity in Tehran	63
• Bahraini security forces attack anti-regime protesters in Sitra.....	64
• Kuwait may slip into political crisis if election law changes: analyst	64
• US Navy ship collides with oil tanker in Gulf.....	66
• Bahraini blogger sentenced for insulting Aisha.....	67
• Three Oman activists denied bail	68
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	70
• Reports Say Afghan Officials Met With Former Taliban Commander.....	70
• Obama Signs Law On Haqqani Network.....	70
• Security forces foil terror attack plot in Afghan capital Kabul	71
• Roadside bomb kills 4 including district governor in E. Afghan	71
• Humiliation of Afghan soldiers by Americans sparks violence: Afghan expert.....	72
• West will never tolerate an independent Afghanistan: Analyst	73

1. IRAQ

- **Call to publish Reforms Paper publicly, MP**

BAGHDAD, Aug 12/ Aswat al-Iraq: Middle Bloc MP Waleed al-Muhammadi called the political blocs who were informed about the Reforms Paper to publish its contents publically.

In a press statement, he questioned the types of the reforms and their timetable, or "just promises".

He added that "the Iraqi people are bored of promises to implement reforms, develop public services and create better security situation".

Iraq has been witnessing continued political crisis which culminated in some demands to demote Premier Maliki who was charged with "dictatorial" behavior.

Arbil-Najaf alliance (consisting of Iraqiya Bloc, Sadrist Trend and the Kurdish Alliance) tried to withdraw confidence from Maliki, charging him with "unilaterally ruling the state and violating the constitution."

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28ro0fr0553ljsyd451qp30h55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=149950&l=1

- **Kurdistan positively interacts with National Alliance' reforms, Talabani**

BAGHDAD, Aug 12/ Aswat al-Iraq: President Jalal Talabani expressed to Chairman of the National Alliance Ibraheem al-Jaffari the positive support of the Kurdish region to the reforms of the Alliance to pass through this crisis.

In a telephone call, as stated by Jaffari's office, both sides discussed the political situation in Iraq and the efforts made to solve current disputes among the political circles.

President Talabani left Iraq for Germany for medical reasons one month ago.

He submitted last May an 8-point initiative to solve the political crisis, including halting media wrangling and resorting to dialogue.

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http://en.aswatiliraq.info/%28S%28ro0fro553ljsyd451qp30h55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=149945&l=1

- **Maliki's announcement about end of war on terrorism in Iraq is surprising, says parliamentary committee**

BAGHDAD, Aug. 12 (AKnews) - The security and defense committee in the Iraqi Council of Representatives has expressed its surprise about Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's announcement about the "end of the war on terrorism in Iraq".

Maliki announced in a meeting held last week with a number of officers that fighting terrorism is over, adding that the remaining cells that are looking here and there for an opportunity or a gap are managed by some countries that are taking advantage of the circumstances happening in the region.

Committee member Chuan Mohammed Taha said that talking about the end of the threat of al-Qaeda is not true, wondering about those who broke into the biggest and most dangerous security institution in Baghdad, the Anti-Terrorism Directorate.

"The security institutions are frequently targeted, thus talking about the end of al-Qaeda must be based on a realistic study. Al-Qaeda still retains effective places especially in Diyala province."

The announcement of Maliki about the end of the battle against terrorism came amid increased fears about what could happen in Syria due to the increasing violence there. Also the entry of thousands of Syrian refugees into Iraqi territory after Baghdad refused to receive them at first for fear of the entrance of wanted people by the Iraqi judiciary who fled to Syria during the years of sectarian violence.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/3/321340/>

- **Security Directorate denies threats against Gorran**

ERBİL, August 12 (AKnews) – A Kurdish MP from the Gorran Movement announced that there are direct and indirect threats against members of the movement but the Security Directorate denies such claims.

Nariman Abdullah said: "Since the first day we came to the parliament we have felt the threats. Many times I have been attacked and injured. Many times a group of armed men have opened fire on me."

Abdullah added that after the February 17 rallies the threats increased. Then later the threats reduced.

They are still investigating to find rational evidence about the threats, added Abdullah.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/321387/>

- **Turkish FM's visit to Kirkuk comes to embarrass Central Government, says Musawi**

Baghdad, Aug 12 (AIN) –MP, Salman al-Musawi, of the State of Law Coalition pointed out "The reactions of the political figures towards the visit of the Turkish

Foreign Minister to Kirkuk proved that it is impossible to attach this province to Kurdistan Region as a part of it."

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmed Davutoglu, to Kirkuk came to embarrass the Central Government but in fact it was negatively reflected on the Presidency of KR."

"The attempt KR Presidency to undervalue the CG by violating the international norms failed because Iraq is still adherent to keep on its historical relations with Turkey," he added.

The relations between Iraq and Turkey witnessed tensions recently on the background of the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmed Davutoglu, last visit to Kirkuk which is conducted without notifying the Iraq Government.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16249:turkish-fms-visit-to-kirkuk-comes-to-embarrass-central-government-says-musawi&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Iraqi deputy PM due in Tehran soon**

Tehran, Aug 12, IRNA – Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq Nuri al-Shawish Rose, leading a high-ranking economic delegation, is to travel to Iran on Tuesday, the Iraqi ambassador to Tehran said.

Mohammad Majid al-Sheikh told IRNA that members of the Iraqi economic delegation are to hold talks with their Iranian counterparts on avenues to bolster economic cooperation and trade exchange between Tehran and Baghdad.

The envoy said that establishment of an Iraqi bank in Iran is among the main objectives of the visit, hoping that the problems of swap of money between the two countries resulted from imposing the unilateral sanctions on Iran would be solved.

Referring to over seven billion dollars worth of bilateral trade exchanges last year, he said the two countries are trying to increase the figure to dlrs 10 billion in the near future.

<http://www.irna.ir/News/Politic/Iraqi-deputy-PM-due-in-Tehran-soon/80272598>

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- **Turkish FM meets representatives of Iraq's Shiite, Sunni Muslims**

Davutoglu met with representatives of Iraq's Shiite and Sunni Muslims over a fast-breaking meal in Istanbul.

ISTANBUL, Aug 12 (AA) - August 12, 2012 - Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Saturday met with representatives of Iraq's Shiite and Sunni Muslims over a fast-breaking meal in Istanbul.

"We have agreed that Shiite and Sunni religious scholars take a joint position against sectarian tensions which are recently tried to be fueled in the Middle East," Davutoglu told reporters after his meeting with Chairman of the Sunni Endowment Sheik Ahmed Abdul Ghafoor, and Chairman of Shiite Endowment Salih Haidari.

Davutoglu said Iraq had suffered grievously in the past nine years due to sectarian conflicts, which he said killed

scores of people and damaged many holy places.

"And today we are making a call for the protection of holy places regardless of which religion or sect they belong to," Davutoglu said.

<http://www.aa.com.tr/en/rss/72353--s>

- **Plans for joint Iraq-Kuwait airline due by year-end**

By: Claire Valdini, Aug 12

Plans for a joint Kuwait and Iraq airline, part funded using the compensation paid to Kuwait Airways for aircraft taken during Saddam Hussein's invasion of the Gulf state, are expected to be finalised before the end of the year.

"A Kuwaiti-Iraqi technical team is currently working on preparing the formula, work mechanism and structure of the new company to be brought to life in the near future," sources told the Kuwait Times.

Iraq's Cabinet last month agreed to allocate US\$500m to end the long-running dispute with Kuwait over the debts of Iraqi Airways. Kuwait Airways has been seeking US\$1.2bn in compensation for ten aircraft

taken during Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Iraq in March said it had reached an agreement to pay Kuwait US\$300m in cash and invest US\$200m in a joint Iraqi-Kuwaiti airline venture. In return, Kuwait agreed to lift legal actions against Iraqi Airways.

<http://www.arabiansupplychain.com/article-7858-plans-for-joint-iraq-kuwait-airline-due-by-year-end/>

- **Arms smuggling to Syria turns into big business in Iraq**

By Zeena Sami

Azzaman, Aug 11

Prices of automatic rifles and pistols are soaring in Iraq as illegal traders try to smuggle them across the border for sale in strife-torn Syria.

Most of the roaring business is taking place in low-income neighborhoods in major Iraqi cities where the poor are selling their personal arms at what they see as very tempting prices.

But residents in these areas, speaking on the strict condition of anonymity, say the buying of arms in their neighborhoods is taking place openly, indicating that high-ranking government or party officials might be implicated.

The price of a Kalashnikov has soared to \$1500 from a couple of hundreds of dollars. More sophisticated machine guns can fetch up to \$3000.

The residents said the weapons were collected and then placed in vehicles like those driven by senior government and party officials and then taken across the border with Syria.

They said they had no idea about the prices the weapons were sold in neighboring Syria and the profits that went into the smugglers' profits and their protectors.

<http://www.azzaman.com/english/?p=262>

- **Antiquities Department resumes digs in three Iraqi provinces**

By Khayoon Saleh

Four archeological teams have begun excavations in the provinces of Basra, Dhiqar and Missan, according to the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Liwa Sumaism.

“The teams are led by highly qualified Iraqi experts and they have been provided with all the requirements to do a good job,” the minister said.

It is the first time since the 2003-U.S. invasion excavations on such a scale are conducted in Iraq. The dispatch of four teams to southern Iraq indicates that the region is relatively quiet and attacks by smugglers and illegal diggers on ancient Iraqi sites have diminished.

Sumaism said the teams will dig sites that have never been touch by scientists before, expecting “significant discoveries.”

“We place great hope and expectation on the new excavations and we are looking forward to fabulous finds,” he said.

<http://www.azzaman.com/english/?p=259>

- **New law says no place for smaller political parties in Iraq**

The Iraqi parliament recently passed an amended electoral law. Smaller political parties are outraged, saying the law dooms them to extinction. Not to mention that the law ignores a supreme court ruling calling it unconstitutional and undemocratic.

Last week, the Iraqi parliament approved a law that many, including the country’s highest court, say is unconstitutional.

What MPs did was approve amendments to a law regulating how provincial elections are decided. Provincial elections are due to be held in April 2013. They will be governed by the provincial election law 36, passed in 2008 and upon which the 2009 provincial elections were based.

But in 2009 there were conflicts about electoral districts and minority representation and this was what led to calls for a revision of the law. A parliamentary committee was formed to look into the matter.

“The law contains many violations and irregularities,” Ziad al-Thari, a member of the committee tasked with amending the law, says. “These affected the 2009

elections and that's why we needed to amend this law. However all the efforts made by the regions and provinces committee to introduce major amendments to the law over the last year have failed. And mainly this has been because of the conflicts between the different political blocs."

As a result, an amended version of the electoral law was only passed into law by the Iraqi parliament on August 2.

And what is causing conflict now is a part of the revised electoral law which says that if some parties don't get enough votes to make any difference to them, the votes they did get will be given to bigger parties. In 2009 this led to a lack of representation for many smaller Iraqi parties.

"The bigger parties were able to marginalize the smaller parties in the 2009 elections," former MP, judge and legal expert, Wael Abdul-Latif, told NIQASH. "They were like whales swallowing smaller fish and it is all because of this failed law."

Based on protests by one smaller party, a case was brought before Iraq's Federal

Supreme Court, the most senior judicial body in the country. In 2010 the court called the planned amendments would be unconstitutional.

"This is so because the revised law reportedly keeps the principle of allotting surplus seats to winning parties only, using the largest remainder principle. In 2010, the supreme court, based on a request from the small communist party, specifically ruled this arrangement "undemocratic" (and therefore unconstitutional), and demanded change to a more proportional allocation formula," Iraqi analyst Reidar Visser writes on his blog, Gulf Analysis.

In passing the revised law, Iraqi MPs have ignored that supreme court ruling. And this has angered Iraqi MPs from smaller political blocs and parties. It is they who will suffer, they say.

"By ignoring the [supreme] court's decision, Parliament has violated the Iraqi Constitution because the Constitution says that all the country's authorities should abide by their decisions," argues Amar Abdul-Abbas, an MP belonging to the Islamic Virtue Party (Fadhila Party). With

only five MPs in the Iraqi Parliament, the Islamic Virtue Party is one of the smaller parties that opposes the electoral law's revisions.

Article 94 of the Iraqi Constitution says that "decisions of the Federal Supreme Court are final and binding for all authorities".

Abdul-Abbas said that 50 MPs have now signed an objection to the law which would be submitted to Iraq's supreme court, in the hopes that the court would then prevent the law from being applied.

The Iraqi Communist Party also called for the launch of popular campaigns against the law before the next round of provincial elections, which had been delayed and were now scheduled for April 2013.

If the law was not revoked, says communist party member and former government minister, Mufid al-Jazairi, "thousands of votes will be lost and simply given to parties and political blocs that voters didn't actually vote for."

Even Faraj al-Haydari, head of the Independent High Electoral Commission (or IHEC), the independent body responsible for overseeing elections in Iraq, has admitted the newly revised law has problems.

"This law has been drafted in a way that serves the interests of big political blocs," al-Haydari told NIQASH.

As for IHEC's position in this, al-Haydari admitted that they had no right to interfere. "The role of the commission is limited to the preparation of a draft law," he explains. "We only give advice to the MPs on the best kinds of election laws. In the end, the MPs decide which election laws will rule in Iraq."

According to local analysts the revised election law was passed despite the deep rifts between the two largest political blocs in Baghdad.

The State of Law bloc, which is led by current Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, and his major rivals, the Iraqiya bloc "will both benefit from maintaining the current, largest-remainder for winning

blocs principle regarding the “surplus” seats,” analyst Visser writes on his blog.

A lot of the time, wrangling between these two major blocs has seen Iraqi legislation and political processes blocked. And, as Visser points out: “this is an ironic reminder, then, about how State of Law and Iraqiya could have got things done in parliament if their leaders could just hate each other a little less. Symptomatically, perhaps, when the two finally did vote together in parliament, it was on an issue that is likely to maximize their own powers in the crudest sense imaginable, at the expense of the smaller forces in Iraqi politics.”

“In its current form, this law will not allow smaller parties a part in the country’s politics,” independent MP, Sabah al-Saadi, also the former head of Iraq’s parliamentary integrity committee, says. “The big, aging parties, which have been ruling the country for years will just continue to monopolize power.”

However, as various members of smaller parties have stated, they will not stop in their efforts to get the electoral law

revised or revoked. After all, their existence is at stake, they say.

http://mawtani.al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/iii/features/2012/08/10/feature-01

- **Suited to Terrorism: Iraqi tailors driven out of business by extremists**

In Mosul, still one of the most dangerous cities in Iraq, wearing a suit makes you a target for kidnapping or murder. The unexpected result of extremist violence: the once thriving profession of tailoring is dying out here.

“It’s as if there is some kind of a law that bans tailors from having a shop in this city,” says Dirgham, a Mosul local who is busy searching the marketplaces here for a tailor.

Dirgham’s biggest problem is his size: he weighs 130 kilos and unlike in Europe or the US, he doesn’t have the option of simply visiting a “big and tall” menswear shop selling oversized clothing. He must find a tailor if he wants to dress nicely.

As he roams Mosul’s streets, a sweaty Dirgham carries with him a large piece of

black, English-made fabric, something of a luxury.

“I had been going to a tailor in the old market for ten years,” Dirgham says. “I was able to dress elegantly because of his scissors. But now,” he laments, “I have to find a new tailor because the one I used to go to has changed his profession. And it is very difficult to find anyone now.”

Before the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq that toppled the regime of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, there were more than 300 sewing workshops in Mosul. Now it’s estimated there are only about a hundred.

One of the oldest tailors in Mosul, who doesn’t give his full name, explains that this was because, after 2003, when economic sanctions that had been imposed on Hussein’s Iraq were lifted, the clothing market was flooded with cheap garments from Syria, Turkey and China.

For the average-sized consumer it was simply cheaper and less time consuming to buy the readymade items. “And there were no taxes on imported clothes, or other commodities,” Dirgham adds.

During a tour of Halab Street, which is lined with menswear stores, NIQASH met Samir Mohammed, who manages a tailor’s workroom here.

Mohammed is in his 60s and he’s spent most of his life working as a tailor, a profession he inherited from his father as well as the business. “This is the worst period for us,” he complains. “In the past, our shops in Ninawa were full of people. Weeks before any Islamic or Christian special occasions, people would come to us to get a tailored suit. But now our shops are almost empty,” he says.

Mohammed listed other reasons for the lack of tailors in Mosul now: “The bad security conditions in Mosul, which started after 2003 and which continue up to today, are another reason why people prefer readymade clothes,” he suggests; Mosul is still one of the most dangerous cities in Iraq due to the different ethnicities and sects that call it home.

“Bombings and killings have seen concrete barriers erected around here which means that people can’t even park their cars

nearby. All of these factors have meant less trade for tailors here.”

Mohammed says that his customers used to come from all walks of life, from the city’s wealthy to those on more limited incomes. “But none of my old customers come anymore,” he says. “Now most of my customers are those who need plus size clothes and who can’t find readymade clothing in their sizes. There are also some old people, as well as some businessmen, who prefer tailored clothing. But there’s very few of them.”

Right next to Mohammed’s workshop is the clothing business belonging to Mahmoud Amir. “I’ve decided to change my profession and to sell readymade clothes,” he explains as he takes measures up a customer. “This might be my very last customer,” he says, somewhat sadly.

“It’s just not worth it anymore,” Amir continues. “I need money to pay the rent and to pay my employees. I also need to pay for power, water and to cover the taxes. But the income from this shop barely covers all that,” he explains.

There’s a piece of brown cloth lying on the table in front of him and it inspires Amir to calculations. The price of a readymade suit sits between IQD75,000 and IQD100,000 (US\$63 – US\$84), he says, whereas a tailored one will cost around IQD240,000 (US\$203).

The fabrics used for tailoring in Iraq tend to come from Pakistan, Japan or Thailand and the price per meter used runs from IQD25,000 (about US\$20) to IQD50,000 (about US\$40) – which isn’t cheap, even in Western terms.

“Only wealthy people can afford to pay for the kinds of fabrics available on the Iraqi market,” Mahmoud continued. “And these people don’t want anyone to know how wealthy they are – not in this city anyway. No one is going to risk their lives, or risk being kidnapped, just so they can wear a tailored suit.”

Two roads away from Halab Street, on Khalid Bin Al Waleed Street, we find another Mosul tailor, Marwan Rajab, sitting in his shop; with nothing to do, he’s playing with his scissors and singing an Iraqi pop song.

“In the old days,” he says, “these walls were full of the suits I used to make for my customers before any religious occasion. Now they’re empty.”

True, the walls of his shop boast nothing but an old clock that seems to have stopped, a license to practice as a tailor and a picture of Rajab himself.

“This profession will soon disappear,” Rajab mourns. “Not only will the small shops cease to exist but the bigger ones will too. A decade ago, there were hundreds of tailors working here. Now there are only two or three.”

The situation is somewhat different for those who ply their tailoring trade with females. Women still go to tailors, who are almost exclusively female, because the sewers usually operate from inside their own homes – and their customers can easily go there without risking death or kidnapping. Menswear tailors are in the market place where it can be dangerous, as well as difficult to reach.

Local cloth merchant Abdullah al-Bazzaz also points out that readymade womenswear is still more expensive than

tailored female clothing, which is why many Mosul women still get their clothes made to measure. Although the tailoring trade for women has also changed over the years, this side of the profession is still thriving.

“Ninawa’s society is still conservative,” al-Bazzaz notes, “and women prefer to get their clothes made in private. You’re unlikely to find a male tailor sewing womenswear.”

But what does all this mean for Dirgham, who was still desperately seeking plus size suiting. We meet him again as he passes by the entrance to the Dawasa market. There’s a store here selling readymade clothes but it also has a sign outside it that says: “Apologies. We do not stock plus sizes”.

Dirgham says he feels sad when he sees that sign because he feels its speaking directly to him.

“I have been able to find a new tailor,” he says, “but I know that under the current circumstances, he probably won’t be around for long. He too will have to close his shop. I really need to find some stores

that stock plus size suits. Then again," Dirgham smiles, and pats his stomach, "maybe, to avoid future disappointments, I should start looking for fitness experts instead of tailors."

This story was prepared as part of the Media Academy Iraq's mentorship programme for young Iraqi journalists, together with NIQASH's regular correspondents around Iraq. The mentor for this story was journalist Nawzat Shamdeen and the Arabic editor was Mirvat Adwan.

<http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=3101>

2. IRAN

- **Iran to Attend Mecca Conference to Strengthen Solidarity in Muslim World**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian foreign ministry announced on Monday that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and other high-ranking Iranian officials will attend the meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Mecca to bolster solidarity among the Muslim states.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, with its look at Muslim world solidarity, will attend the Mecca meeting actively," Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian told FNA.

He said that President Ahmadinejad and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi will attend the Mecca meeting in Saudi Arabia to confer with the Muslim countries' officials on different issues related to the Muslim world.

Salehi had earlier confirmed that an Iranian delegation will take part in the emergency meeting of the OIC in Mecca later this month.

"By attending the summit, we will express our viewpoints and try to bridge the gaps and narrow the differences through dialog," the Iranian minister stated on Thursday.



"The Islamic Republic of Iran seeks to heal the rifts and reduce the differences, and focus more on joint issues through such talks."

He announced that the Iranian delegation will hold talks with Saudi officials on regional developments.

The summit will be held in the presence of top officials from Muslim countries in Mecca on August 14-15.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104253931>

- **Iran Renews Opposition to Foreign Intervention in Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast restated Tehran's support for reforms in Syria, and underlined that Iran is opposed to any foreign intervention in the country.

Mehman-Parast said that Iran supports reforms in Syria and is against any foreign intervention in the country.

He also criticized Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc for his recent allegations about Tehran.

Mehman-Parast said on Sunday that the Islamic Republic has been a supporter of the oppressed people in the region, such as the oppressed people of Palestine.

He added that Tehran and Ankara have different viewpoints regarding Syria, but divisive remarks should not be made over the issue.

Earlier this week, the Turkish deputy premier slammed Iran over its position on Syria.

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

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



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

In October 2011, calm was eventually restored in the Arab state after President Assad started a reform initiative in the country, but Israel, the US and its Arab allies are seeking hard to bring the country into chaos through any possible means. Tel Aviv, Washington and some Arab capitals have been staging various plots in the hope of increasing unrests in Syria.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104253923>

- **Supreme Leader: World Heading towards New Structure**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said the Islamic awakening in the region, the US failure in Iraq and Afghanistan, developments in Europe and the declining US prestige signify that the world is heading towards a new era and a new structure.

Addressing hundreds of Iranian university professors, instructors and researchers in Tehran on Sunday evening, Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to the wave of Islamic awakening throughout the world, and noted that the feeling of identity and awakening based on Islam among different Muslim nations is quite unprecedented which is harbinger of a change in the format and topography of the world in future.

He said that the prevailing conditions of the world in transiting to a new era are very similar to the developments of the post-WWI and post-colonial era of the Europe.

"The upcoming changes of the world unlike the post-WWI and post-colonial eras is in line with exchange of power and general capabilities between some nations with other nations," the Leader said.



Ayatollah Khamenei underscored that the failure of the US-led West in gaining dominance over the western Asia is another sign of the 'prevailing global changes'.

"The unsuccessful move by the US for gaining control over this important and sensitive region of the world (western Asia) which became evident in Iraq and Afghanistan is another sign of the deep changes that the world is currently facing," the Leader said.

The Supreme Leader referred to the prevailing developments in Europe and the ambiguous future of the powerful European countries as other evidences for proving that the world is heading toward a new structure.

The Leader further said that the declining prestige of the US throughout the world is the fourth sign which proves the world is transferring to a new era.

The supreme leader pointed out that the US as the first country of the world in terms of power, wealth, science, military technology and non-military technology had a good impression for several decades

among world's nations, but not only it has lost its previous status, it has also turned into the symbol of bullying, oppression and interference in the affairs of the nations and war-mongering.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104253921>

- **Death toll from Iran quakes rises to 300**

TABRIZ, Iran, Aug. 12 (MNA) – About 300 people have died and more than 2000 have been injured in two successive earthquakes that hit the northwestern province of East Azarbaijan on Saturday afternoon, local officials said on Sunday.

According to the Institute of Geophysics of the University of Tehran, a quake measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale hit the city of Ahar at 4:53 p.m. local time at a depth of 10 kilometers, and a 6 magnitude quake struck the city of Varzaqan at 5:04 p.m. local time at the same depth.



People in Tabriz, the capital of East Azarbaijan Province, stand in line to donate blood to those suffered injuries in the quakes.

Of the 538 villages in East Azerbaijan, 110 villages sustained about 40 to 100 percent damage.

And about 5000 buildings have been damaged.

Rescue teams were immediately dispatched to the quake-stricken areas, and the people affected by the earthquakes have been provided with temporary shelters and food supplies.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1671810>

- **Ambassador denies Iran is selling cheap oil to China**

BEIJING, Aug. 12 (MNA) – The Iranian ambassador to Beijing says that Iran and China plan to increase the value of their trade to \$70 billion in five years, dismissing claims that Iran is selling crude oil to China below the market price.

Speaking to a group of Iranian journalists visiting China, Mahdi Safari commented on Iran's opportunity to attract Chinese investors and said that over the past two years, the Chinese investment in Iran has risen from \$120 million to \$650 million.

He added that Chinese companies are keen to directly invest in Iran in various sectors, including mine industry.

The veteran diplomat also described China's fast-growing market as a good destination for Iranian goods and said Iran can export carpets, handicrafts, medicinal herbs, jewelry, and food items to the country.

He also emphasized that Iran should attach high significance to the export of carpets to China, saying if Iran does so the

market can saturate “all of our export markets”.

Safari also denied claims that Tehran is selling cheap oil to China and said Iran sells oil to the country at market price, adding any report claiming that Tehran sells cheap oil to Beijing is just a rumor.

The ambassador said China buys 10 to 12 percent of oil needs from Iran and now the two countries have signed five to seven-year contracts for oil purchase.

He also expressed hope that trade ties between the two countries would be cemented in the near future.

According to data from the Beijing-based General Administration of Customs, China’s oil imports from Iran increased by 17 percent to 2.6 million tons in June with the Asian country importing about 635,000 barrels of Iranian oil per day, Press TV reported.

On June 6, Iranian Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade and China’s Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) signed a memorandum of understanding to expand

industrial cooperation with the economic giant.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1671803>

- **Pakistan wants to boost trade with Iran to \$10b**

TEHRAN, Aug. 12 (MNA) - Pakistan’s Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf said that Islamabad will go ahead with its multibillion-dollar projects with Iran, calling for immediate steps to lift the ceiling of bilateral trade to \$10 billion.

According to a private Radio channel, in a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Islamabad Alireza Haqiqian, the Pakistani prime minister said the two neighboring countries should ensure the expeditious implementation of bilateral projects including the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project as well as electricity projects.

Tehran and Islamabad have repeatedly stressed the importance of constructing the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline despite pressure from the United States.

The multi-billion-dollar gas pipeline is aimed at exporting a daily amount of 21.5

million cubic meters of the Iranian natural gas to Pakistan.

Iran has already constructed more than 900 kilometers of the pipeline on its soil.

The Pakistani prime minister further said that his country's relations with Iran were deeply rooted in historical, cultural and religious levels, the Business Recorder reported.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1671028>

- **'Tehran has right to seek compensation from U.S. for mistreatment of Iranian prisoner'**

TEHRAN, August 11 (MNA) -- Iran's ambassador to Oman, Hossein Noushabadi, said on Friday that the Iranian government has the right to seek compensation from the United States for its mistreatment of Shahrzad Mir-Qolikhhan, an Iranian woman who was imprisoned in the U.S. for five years.

Several years ago, Mir-Qolikhhan and her former husband were arrested by the Austrian police on charges of purchasing dual-use equipment. She was released

from prison after completing her sentence and returned to Iran.

Mir-Qolikhhan told Press TV via telephone from inside prison on November 1, 2010 that she was duped into visiting the United States in 2007 by U.S. officials, who then tried to "make her a spy" and use her to find the whereabouts of her ex-husband.

She was then sentenced to five years in prison.

She was released from prison a few days ago and arrived in the Omani capital Muscat on Tuesday.

Ambassador Noushabadi said, "Unfortunately, Ms. Mir-Qolikhhan was imprisoned five years ago based on false and unfounded charges made by the government of the United States and its judicial authorities and was interrogated under the worst circumstances and was psychologically tortured."

"The (Iranian) government and Ms. Mir-Qolikhhan have the right to seek compensation and file a complaint with international legal and judicial authorities

and human rights institutions over the violated rights of an innocent Iranian citizen,” he added.

He also stated, “The U.S. government cannot regard the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Sultanate of Oman as indebted for the release of Mir-Qolikhan because she served her illegal sentence to the last day and left the country of the United States after serving her entire sentence. And given the fact that Omani officials have followed up her transfer to Iran from the United States, she is currently in Oman, and, God willing, will arrive in our beloved country, Islamic Iran, in the coming days.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Sultanate of Oman have been cooperating on humanitarian and human rights issues and hold consultations on regional and international developments. And the case of Ms. Mir-Qolikhan was one of the cases over which the Islamic Republic of Iran sought the mediation... of the Omani government and the country’s help, but the U.S. government did not take any measure to commute Ms. Mir-Qolikhan’s sentence or grant her amnesty or release her.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1670952>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

• Gaza families visit relatives in Israeli jails

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Relatives of Palestinians jailed in Israel left the Gaza Strip on Monday to visit detainees, a prisoners group said, in the fifth such visit since 2007.

As part of a deal to end mass hunger strikes in Israeli jails in May, Israeli authorities agreed to ease a ban on Gaza families visiting prisons.

Fifty-seven people left Gaza on Monday to visit 42 imprisoned relatives in Israel, Gaza-based prisoners group Husam said.

Group spokesman Muwaffaq Hmeid stressed that the visit came after the death of two parents of prisoners last week, before they were able to visit their imprisoned children.



- **PA official: 11 killed in car crash near Tulkarem**

TULKAREM (Ma'an) -- Eleven people were killed and several injured on Sunday when two vehicles crashed in the northern West Bank, a Palestinian Authority official said.

One, the mother of prisoner Imad Shehadah, died last Monday while on the bus while travelling to visit her son in Israeli jail.

In 2007, Israel started limiting what it considers privileges for Hamas and Gaza prisoners in a bid to put pressure on Hamas to release Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who was held in Gaza until last fall.

The visitors issue was one of the key demands of the hundreds of prisoners who went on a hunger strike in the spring.

In a deal to end the strike, Israeli authorities agreed to allow limited personal visits.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=512137>



Minister of Health Hani Abdin told Ma'an that 10 people died and five were injured when a service taxi collided with a private car at Bala junction east of Tulkarem. One of the injured people succumbed to his wounds later bringing the death toll to eleven.

Six of the victims' bodies were transferred to Thabet Thabet hospital and the injured were taken to al-Zakah hospital, both in Tulkarem.

Ambulances and civil defense crews arrived at the site to try and extract all the passengers, most of whom were from the Jenin town of Jaba.

Initial investigations show that the accident was caused when one of the vehicles tried to overtake another car, Abdin said.

The Ministry of Health is ready to offer medical assistance and treatment to all victims, he added.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=512035>

- **Hamas 'ready to close tunnels' if Egypt reopens Rafah**

Members of Hamas security forces and Egyptian soldiers stand guard on the Egypt-Gaza border on Aug. 6, 2012.

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Hamas is prepared to shut down smuggling tunnels under its shared border if Egypt opens the Rafah crossing permanently, a senior Hamas official said Sunday.

"The tunnels are a popular and compulsory way to lift the Israeli blockade

on the Gaza Strip," Salah Al-Bardawil told a press conference in Gaza.

"We are sure that the Egyptian leadership will work hard to support and help the Palestinian people," he added.

The Hamas official said Gaza has not received any direct accusations from Egypt concerning the Sinai attack, and repeated his party's denial that there was any Palestinian involvement.

Hamas is prepared to cooperate with Egyptian authorities to ensure that the perpetrators behind the attack are found, he said, adding that Israel is the only party to benefit from a deterioration in the relationship between Gaza and Egypt.

After gunmen killed 16 Egyptian border guards on Sunday, Egypt closed its border with the Gaza Strip and sealed smuggling tunnels that provide a lifeline to the besieged territory.



Egyptian officials have vaguely accused Palestinians of involvement in the attack in the Sinai but have yet to identify suspects. Gaza's leadership says it has not seen any proof that Palestinians from the territory were involved, and factions have roundly condemned the attack.

The Egyptian state newspaper al-Ahram said on Friday some 150 tunnels had been destroyed. The tunnels are believed to number some 1,000.

A senior Fatah official said Saturday that the Palestinian Authority supports Egypt's efforts to shut down a tunnel network under the border with the Gaza Strip.

Hamas leader Salah al-Bardawil immediately hit back decrying the PA position as "despicable opportunism which contradicts all values and ethics and national responsibilities."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=511962>

- **Israel to Allow Palestinians into Jerusalem on Tuesday**

RAMALLAH, August 12, 2012 (WAFA) – The Israeli authorities will allow Palestinians from the West Bank to enter Jerusalem on Tuesday to celebrate Lailat al Qadr , the holiest night in Ramadan that marks the night in which the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, Sunday said the chief Palestinian liaison officer, Jihad Jayyousi.

He said Palestinians will be allowed to cross the checkpoints into Jerusalem on Tuesday starting from 1:00 PM.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20452>

- **Israeli Army Chief Orders Legalization of Settlement Outpost in Salfit**

RAMALLAH, August 12, 2012 (WAFA) - The Israeli Central Command Chief, Nitzan Alon, signed an order to legalize the Israeli settlement outpost of 'Brukhin', built illegally on Burqin land, a village in the

northern West bank city of Salfit , Sunday reported the Israeli newspaper Yediot Ahronot.

The newspaper said that Alon is practically implementing the Israeli authorities' prior decision to legalize the three settlement outposts of Brukhin in Salfit, Rahlim southeast of Nablus, and Sansana south of Hebron.

Alan ordered the settlement of Brukhin to be under the jurisdiction of the Israeli Shomron Regional Council.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20451>

- **Olmert: No reason to attack Iran now**

Former prime minister says discussion surrounding military strike 'creating massive public damage,' notes that Israeli officials 'trying to stir up overblown drama'

Olmert v. Netanyahu – Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on Sunday leveled harsh criticism at PM Benjamin Netanyahu and the government's handling of the Iranian nuclear issue, claiming that Israeli

officials are busy "stirring up overblown drama."

During a meeting with students at Ono Academic College, Olmert said that "the current situation does not require Israeli military action – now or in the near future."

"The question is how we deal with it. Back in 2003 they said that in 2007 Iran will have a bomb. Now it's 2012 and there is no bomb. It didn't happen on its own," he noted.

Referring to the public discussion surrounding a potential military strike in Iran, the former PM admitted that he was very worried by recent newspaper headlines. "This issue inflicts massive public damage to Israel. I live among my people; I hear and see the anxiety on the faces of the citizens. This does not contribute anything to our ability to deal with the Iranian threat. (On the contrary) It only makes it harder."

Olmert noted that during his term in office, "we may have faced similar issues, but we dealt with them secretly, effectively, and without anyone saying a

work – not before me, during my time or after me.

"I suggest that we also deal with this challenge in a restrained, responsible and discrete manner, so that we don't sow panic or create a confrontational situation with elements that are essential for Israel's security," he added.

Addressing the timing of a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, Olmert said that "Iran is far from reaching the threshold from which there is no way back. Statements by which (a strike) is inevitable do not truthfully reflect the current situation from what is known to the security establishment."



The former prime minister also spoke about Israel's commitment to the United States and its interests in the region,

stating that "It would be incorrect and irresponsible to ignore other states.

"There are those who try to create the impression that the United State's position (on an Israeli strike in Iran) is somewhat vague. The attempt to create overblown drama over this matter is not wise or responsible and does not contribute to Israel's strategic security. The relations with the US are no less important," Olmert said.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4267658,00.html>

- **Handing Jerusalem to the Palestinians**

Op-ed: Blatant distortions of history, denial of Jewish Jerusalem have shifted from Palestinian arena to domain of NGOs, UN

In its desire to build a case for why Jerusalem should for the first time become a capital city for an Arab nation, the Palestinian Authority has consistently attacked the notion that, in the words of historian Sir Martin Gilbert, "the city holds the central spiritual and physical place in the history of the Jews as a people."

Central to this position has been a concerted attempt to deny the powerful Jewish connection to Jerusalem, instead casting it as a fundamentally Arab, Islamic and Christian city, and to characterize any Jewish presence as colonial, expansionist and a generally recent phenomenon.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,734,0,L-4267724,00.html>

- **Israel-PA Conflict: The Ottoman path to peace / Rafael Castro**

Op-ed: Any Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement will endure only if it accommodates legitimate historical claims
Full Story

Speaking on Palestinian Authority TV in August 2010, Palestinian Religious Affairs Minister Mahmoud Al-Habbash claimed that Jerusalem has been, "throughout history, the capital of the Palestinian state and the capital of the Palestinian people" despite the fact that no Palestinian state has ever existed and that the Jewish people have been the only people in history to call Jerusalem their capital.

The Palestinian Authority Mufti, Muhammad Hussein, took the distortion even further by stating that "there never was a Temple in any period, nor was there, at any time, any place of worship for the Jews or others at the Al-Aqsa Mosque site."

Such sentiments are not merely confined to the religious leaders of the Palestinian national movement.

In February of this year, advisor on Jerusalem affairs to the Palestinian President's Office, Ahmed Al-Ruweidi, accused Israel of creating an "artificial" Jewish heritage in Jerusalem "at the expense of its true and authentic (identity) as an Arab, Islamic and Christian city." A statement which not only denies the ancient Jewish connection to Jerusalem but which ignores the more recent aspects of Jerusalem's identity, notably the fact that the city has had a Jewish majority since the 1860s.

President Abbas himself has long referred to Jerusalem as the "eternal capital of Palestine," a statement which is fundamentally inconsistent with any recognition of Jewish claims to the city.

While many observers will quickly brush off such inflammatory falsehoods and policy statements as mere political gamesmanship by the Palestinians or the refrain of fringe elements, there is a very real concern that the concept of Jewish foreignness when it comes to Jerusalem is taking hold in the mainstream political discourse.

Unbroken Jewish connection

Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa director, Malcolm Smart, has described Jewish residential projects in the eastern parts of the city as taking place on "occupied Palestinian land" which "devastate the lives and livelihoods of the Palestinians." Characterizing east Jerusalem as "occupied Palestinian land" effectively intercedes in the dispute over the status of the city and hands it to the Palestinians. In the process, the impartiality of Amnesty International is spectacularly undermined.

Furthermore, Smart's objection to a Jewish presence in the east of the city and his assertion that the land is Palestinian and is "occupied" by Israel both ignores

the absence of a legal sovereign from which Israel could occupy the land and the Jewish connection to Jerusalem long before the resumption of Jewish life there following the end of the Jordanian hold on the city in 1967.

Smart's displacement of the Jewish connection to Jerusalem by casting Israeli construction as an injustice perpetrated by a mere occupier against an ostensibly indigenous population, constitutes a fundamental distortion of history.

More so, the subtle manner in which the Jewish people are severed from their ancient capital, in contrast with the patent falsehoods of the Palestinian Authority referred to earlier, is precisely what makes it so dangerous – cloaked as it is in the language of international law and human rights.

The UN special rapporteur on adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik, has taken things further still, employing language which bridges the gap between the rhetoric of the Palestinian Authority and of seemingly non-partisan, mainstream organizations.

Rolnik described Israeli government housing policy in Jerusalem, among other places, as “Judaization,” a slur which had previously been confined to the Palestinian Authority and radical sympathizers.

The use of the term “Judaization” (by a UN official no less) which, can be understood to denote a process by which something which is not Jewish is made so, is to deny the Jewish character of Jerusalem and to perpetuate a new and highly politicized history aimed at advancing Palestinian national aspirations, not in tandem with the development of the Jewish State, but in place of it.

Rolnik’s outrageous use of the term suggests that Jewish life in Jerusalem is somehow alien and cannot be tolerated.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of her comments is the implication that Palestinian interests can only be advanced by denying the long, unbroken Jewish connection to the land, an approach which seems fundamentally inconsistent with the idea of a mutual recognition of Jewish and Palestinian movements and a co-

existence of two states borne of such movements.

It is significant that blatant distortions of history and a denial of Jewish Jerusalem have gradually shifted from the arena of the Palestinian Authority to the domain of purportedly non-partisan NGOs and the UN. Ironically, such distortions, far from advancing Palestinian national aspirations, in fact undermine the notions of mutual recognition and understanding which are essential precursors to any negotiated peace.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4267724,00.html>

- **'Palestinian incitement continuing unabated'**

Strategic Affairs Ministry D-G Kuperwasser hints that US is opposed to recreating incitement monitoring c’tee.

The US is currently opposed to the reestablishment of the long defunct Israeli-US-American committee to monitor incitement, Strategic Affairs Ministry director-general Yossi Kuperwasser intimated on Sunday.

In a briefing to reporters following a cabinet meeting where he brought the most recent “incitement index” to the ministers’ attention, Kuperwasser said both Israel and the Palestinians expressed a willingness to set up the committee, though “we don’t hang much hope on it.” A “third party,” whom he did not identify, but which was clearly the Americans, was not interested, he said.

Diplomatic officials said that the US did not feel that at this time, with the diplomatic process at a stalemate, the establishment of a committee to look at cases of incitement would serve a constructive purpose.

A joint Israeli-Palestinian- American committee on incitement was set up in 1998 under US auspices. The Israeli team was led by the late journalist Uri Dan, who was a close confidant of Ariel Sharon, and the Palestinian side by Yasser Arafat’s spokesman Marwan Kanafani. Sharon was foreign minister when the committee was established.

The committee disbanded after about a year with little to show for its works, except for continuous arguments.

The bottom line, Kuperwasser said, is that Palestinian incitement is “going on all the time,” adding that the phenomenon is “worrying and disturbing.” He said that at an institutional level the Palestinian Authority was continuously driving three messages home: that the Palestinians would eventually be the sole sovereign on all the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea; that Jews, especially those who live in Israel, were not really human beings but rather “the scum of mankind”; and that all tools were legitimate in the struggle against Israel and the Jews, though the specific tool used at one time or another depended on a cost-benefit analysis.

Kuperwasser provided the ministers with abundant examples of Palestinian incitement culled – with the help of the Palestinian Media Watch and MEMRI – from Palestinian television, newspapers and textbooks.

Koby Michael, the deputy director-general at the Strategic Affairs Ministry, refuted claims that similar types of incitement could be found in the Israeli media or in

statements by various politicians against Palestinians.

He said the major difference was that in Israel the incitement was not institutionalized.

There is a need, Michael said, to distinguish between institutional incitement, which exists in the PA, and examples of incitement by individuals in Israel. Likewise, he said, there was a difference between incitement created by the media – which he said is the case in the PA – and acts of incitement reported by the media, as often happens in Israel.

Kuperwasser said that the incitement created an “ethos of conflict and encourages” continued hostility to Israel. Saying that east Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine is not incitement, Kuperwasser said, but saying that Israel is engaged in ethnic cleansing is, he said by way of illustration.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said at the cabinet meeting there were “two important things” in the incitement index.

First, he said, “the index constitutes an important clarification and reminder of where we live. Usually, we wait for crises in order to be reminded of our environment. The index sheds light and helps us prepare ourselves and avoid the mistake of not understanding whom we are dealing with, who cooperates with and initiates this awful incitement.”



The Palestinian leadership, Netanyahu said, “was bequeathing this incitement to the coming generations and is preventing them from holding a dialogue of peace, the result of which is that it is itself incapable of adopting a dialogue of peace.”

And secondly, Netanyahu said, the index shows that the root of the conflict is the refusal of the Palestinians to recognize the Jewish people’s right to a homeland in Israel. “We have seen horrific things here, which – inter alia – define Jews as those

who poison wells, and which lay the groundwork for harsh and brutal deeds.

We must bring this to the attention of the governments of the world, especially ahead of the upcoming UN General Assembly,” he said.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=281005>

- **IDF signs injunction legalizing Bruchin outpost**

Move marks latest step in legalization of three outpost, including Rehelim and Sansana, their conversion into settlements.

OC Central Command Maj.-Gen. Nitzan Alon on Sunday signed an order transforming the Bruchin outpost into a legal settlement under the auspices of the Samaria Regional Council.

Alon’s signature on the document was technical matter. It implemented a March decision reached by a small panel of cabinet ministers to change the status of three outposts – Bruchin, Rehelim and Sansana – to authorized settlements.

Alon has yet to sign on orders legalizing Sansana and Rehelim.

The panel pre-dated the Ministerial Settlements Committee, created in June, which now has the power to authorize new settlements.

Since Bruchin’s creation in 1999 on state land, some 30 km. east of Tel Aviv, it has sought legalization from the government. Those efforts intensified in the past four or five years, as the council organized visits to Bruchin by ministers, politicians and other supporters.

“This is a day of celebration for the State of Israel and for Zionism,” Samaria Regional Council head Gershon Mesika said. It corrects years of in which Bruchin residents were unjustly harmed by the fact that their community lacked the proper authorizations, he said.

Bruchin’s transformation into a legal settlement is a “triumph of common sense over the politics and convictions of the anti-Zionist Left,” Mesika said.

He credited Bruchin’s authorization to the work of left-wing organizations, such as

Peace Now, whose petitions to the High Court of Justice against West Bank outposts had backfired and pushed the government to legalize some of them.

On a note of irony, Mesika recalled that just two weeks ago, the Samaria Regional Council had issued honorary citizenship certificates to Peace Now executive director Yariv Oppenheimer and to attorney Michael Sfard, who often represents left-wing nongovernmental groups in court with regard to land issues in Area C of the West Bank. Under the Oslo Accords, Israel has full civil and military control over Area C.

Bruchin was built without the proper permits but with the support of NIS 6.6 million from the Construction and Housing Ministry, according to information from the 2005 outpost report for the government penned by attorney Talia Sasson.

It is home to more than 100 families, which made it one of the largest West Bank outposts, according to the Samaria Regional Council.

In March, the government said that the move to authorize the three outposts was simply an implementation of decisions taken by past governments that were never put in place.



Peace Now has charged that the move breaks Israel's pledge to the international community not to create new settlements.

On Sunday, Oppenheimer said that Alon's order was "more proof that this government is deepening the occupation, and legalizing things [settlements] that past governments never approved."

In March, the international community also condemned the initial decision by the cabinet panel to legalize three outposts, claiming that it harmed the peace process.

The Palestinians have insisted that they will not negotiate with Israel unless it

freezes settlement activity and Jewish building in east Jerusalem.

This year, in particular, the government has more vocally supported the legalization of unauthorized Jewish building in the West bank.

In July, however, a three-person legal panel presented the government-initiated Levy Report, which said that Israel has the right under international law to create authorized Jewish communities in the West Bank. It urged the government to legalize Jewish West Bank building, including all outposts located on state land.

The report has yet to be debated and voted upon by the Ministerial Settlements Committee.

The Samaria Regional Council is circulating an online petition in support of the Levy Report. It is based on a letter 65 American Jewish leaders sent to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, urging him to approve the report.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=280979>

- **Soldier gets 45 days over unlawful use of firearm**

IDF soldier reaches plea bargain after initial charges of killing mother, daughter during Cast Lead downgraded.

IDF soldiers walk to Gaza in Operation Cast Lead Photo: Ho New / Reuters

An IDF soldier will serve a jail sentence of 45 days for the unlawful use of his firearm during Operation Cast Lead in 2009, after reaching a plea bargain with military prosecutors.

The soldier – now a civilian – served in the Givati Brigade during the 2009 Gaza conflict, and was initially charged with the unlawful killing of two Palestinian women from the same family.

Related:

B'Tselem video: IDF soldier head butts Palestinian

Military prosecutors then downgraded the charges after major discrepancies were found in the case against the soldier.

The defendant's lawyer proved that the shooting and the killing of the two women happened at different times.



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Additionally, the prosecution said no bodies had been presented to the court to determine the women's cause of death, and said that there many soldiers shooting in the area at the time.

Finally, there were significant discrepancies between the Palestinian claims in the case and the IDF's charges.

The charges initially leveled against the soldier, known as "S.," were the most serious accusations against an Israeli soldier from Cast Lead, and the case appeared in the UN-commissioned Goldstone Report.

On January 4, 2009, Palestinian mother and daughter, Majda and Raya Abu Hajaj, were said to be part of a group of civilians waving a white sheet in order to show that they did not present a threat and

were seeking evacuation from their home near Gaza City due to the nearby fighting.

The Givati soldiers stationed nearby received a warning that terrorists may attempt to blend in to groups of fleeing civilians and launch attacks.

Evidence produced during the trial indicated that S.ignored orders and fired on the group.

The IDF investigated the incident and decided to bring the soldier to trial. "As we said when charges were filed, this case will begin with manslaughter and will end with a weak result," attorneys Meir Klinger and Oded Saburai, who represent the soldier, told Ma'ariv. "We welcome the prosecution's decision to back away from the charges, even though this happened following a significant delay," the attorneys added. The lawyers said it was a shame their client had to face such a severe and baseless charge for two years.

In response to the plea bargain, B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

called to reopen the investigation into the two deaths.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=280945>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **NGOs Agree to Follow Government Restrictions on Women’s Day Protests**

A photo posted on the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women’s Facebook page for the Women’s Day protests.

Human rights and women’s groups in Tunisia are gearing up for a peaceful demonstration in downtown Tunis on Women’s Day, August 13.

The NGOs have decided to adhere to the Ministry of the Interior’s controversial ban on evening protests on Avenue Habib Bourguiba, the main street of downtown Tunis. Previous reports said that the groups would fight the restrictions, yet in a statement posted this afternoon on the Facebook page of the Tunisian Association for Democratic Women, the groups announced that they will not march down Habib Bourguiba.

The decision was made after a meeting of the NGOs who originally applied for licenses to demonstrate on Women’s Day. Ahlem Belhaj, President of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, told Tunisia Live, “We decided to avoid problems and to preserve the celebration aspect of the day.”

The NGOs who filed for permission to protest and who will be marching with the Association of Democratic Women include: the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LDTH), the Association of Women and Leadership, the League of Tunisian Women Voters, and the Association of Tunisian Women for Development. They will be celebrating women, while demanding the government protect women’s rights.

Saida Rachid, Secretary General of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, said that despite Ennahdha’s original promises that women’s rights would be protected, “...now we are under serious threat after the drafting of article number 28 [in the Tunisian Constitution] that says that women are

‘complementary’ to men and not equal to him...Women in the Constituent Assembly are voting on the grounds of their political party affiliation, not knowing that they are being used as puppets to deprive [other] women of their rights.”

She continued, “We contributed in building our country, despite all the hardships, and now they want to take all of what we had achieved.”

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/08/11/ngos-agree-to-follow-government-restrictions-on-womens-day-protests/>

- **Government and Religious Leaders Struggle for Control of Zitouna**

Tensions have been mounting between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Scientific Board of Zitouna, as each claims to be the sole party qualified and entitled to run the recently reopened Zitouna University, housed in the historic mosque.

Established 14 centuries ago, Zitouna Mosque was considered one of the foremost institutions of Islamic thought, and played a pivotal role in the struggle for Tunisia’s independence. Following last

year’s revolution, Sheikh Houssine Abidi, the only surviving member of the last Scientific Board of Zitouna Mosque, went to court to petition for the reopening of the university. He was granted a decree and Islamic teaching at the mosque resumed in March of this year.

The tension is the outcome of recent attempts by the ministry to implement their decision to replace the current Imam of Zitouna Mosque and chairman of the Scientific Board, Houssine Abidi. The decision dates back to June, when Abidi was banned from preaching following his call to murder artists involved in the Printemps des Arts exhibition in Palais Abdellia. Events escalated last week when Sheik Abidi claimed he was kidnapped and assaulted by police on Friday August 3.

“Sheikh Abidi was arrested arbitrarily only to keep him from leading the Friday prayer. He was assaulted, and humiliated,” affirmed Mohamed Ben Othmen, the spokesman of the Scientific Board of Zitouna Mosque. The Scientific Board maintains that he was kept from Friday prayers so that the the government-appointed Imam could take over the mosque. But Ben Othmen said that people

prevented the new Imam from coming near the mosque, and Abidi's replacement Imam from the Scientific Board led Friday prayers.

According to TAP, both the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior deny the arrest and assault of Sheik Abidi. The Ministries claim that the Imam was brought to the police station to investigate an assault case. Abidi had changed the locks of the mosque, which the Ministry claims was illegal as they maintain control of Zitouna. The Ministry of Religious Affairs reported that when one of their officials came to document the lock change, Abidi verbally abused him, leading to his police visit.

In a press conference held Friday, August 8, the Scientific Board of Zitouna Mosque announced they would not allow any government-appointed Imam to ascend the pulpit of Zitouna.

During the same conference, Abidi briefed reporters on an official document of his, outlining the terms of his resuming Islamic teaching at Zaitouna. He stated, "Zitouna Mosque is a scientific educational institution which is independent, non-

affiliated." The document, dating back to May 12, 2012, also carries the signature of Sheikh Houssin Abidi as the "sheikh of the mosque" and the signatures of three ministers in the current government; the Minister of Religious Affairs, of Education, and of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

In a joint statement issued a day before the Zitouna press event, the aforementioned ministers stated that the Zitouna Mosque and its Scientific Board are under the direction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and "the organization of events and lessons as well as the appointment of Imams and other personnel is one of the ascriptions of the Ministry of Religious Affairs."

"The statement of the Ministries of Religious Affairs, Higher Education and Education does not oblige us to anything. We have a document that was signed by these ministers, a document that affirms that Zitouna Mosque is an independent institution. It has a legal status of its own, as mentioned in the first act of the first section of the document," added Ben Othmen.

He proceeded to enumerate the acts in the document that provide the Scientific Committee with the legitimacy to run the internal affairs of the mosque and the university. Act 4 of Section 3 states that the curriculum is designed only by the Scientific Board. Section 4 affirms that the responsibility of maintaining order within the mosque is that of the Scientific Board. Ben Othmen concluded that the Ministry of Religious Affairs should reconsider their statement, and let experts and scholars continue their work in the mosque.

“The fact that the Ministry of Religious Affairs retracted their decision to appoint another Imam instead of Abidi shows it is unstable in decision making. The minister and his cabinet must question and verify all of their decisions to avoid such situations,” said Ben Othmen. He accused other people of being responsible for the situation, trying to ruin the relationship between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Scientific Board of Zitouna.

“Some people are not happy about reopening the University of Zitouna. We only aim to educate the younger generation on Islam, especially given recent decades that witnessed attempts

to erase our religious identity. Our goal is to guide young people to a moderate version of religion, one that rejects extremism, marginalization, and exclusion,” stated Ben Othmen.

He explained that since they do not know much about their religion, people have been seeking religious knowledge in TV channels. Yet this has been problematic, as these Islamist channels sometimes advocate conflicting opinions and versions of Islam. Here, they say, lies the importance of Zitouna in providing religious stability and unity.

Adel Almi

On the same day that the Scientific Board of Zitouna held a press conference, the Moderate Association of Guidance and Reform and the organization of the Alumni of Zitouna and Supporters held a press conference to address the issue of resuming Islamic teaching at Zitouna Mosque. Speakers in the conference asserted their support of resuming Islamic teaching at the Zitouna, but also expressed their dissatisfaction with the current Scientific Board of the mosque.

“The current education offered by Zitouna does not aspire to our expectations. We demand a quality of education that surpasses the one offered by public schools. Yet, the current committee lacks the vision and the means to do so. It does not represent the real original Islamic teaching that Zitouna was known for,” stated Adel Almi, head of the Moderate Organization for Guidance and Reform.

“Zitouna University can be a way to restore unity to Tunisian society amidst growing friction. Yet, the current committee excludes everyone. They only want blind followers. We should not let this affect the history of the place. We want the mosque to be the way it used to be,” stated Mohamed Bel Haj Omar, head of the organization of the Alumni of Zitouna and Supporters.



The government will organize a national scientific congress by the end of 2012 to discuss new strategies for Zitouna. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, along with the ministries of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and the Ministry of Education have the task of organizing the conference. A preparatory conference will be held in September 2012.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/08/11/government-and-religious-leaders-struggle-for-control-of-zitouna/>

- **UGTT Announces Governmental Pay Raise in Public Sector**

Hfaiedh Hfaiedh, assistant to the Secretary General of the UGTT, announced yesterday that the government has agreed to increase salaries in the public sector.

In an interview with Mosaique FM, Hafaiedh stated that this new agreement follows a series of negotiations between representatives of the government and the UGTT. He explained that Article 2 would be revised to include the raise in salaries by providing a 70 dinar pay increase for public sector employees. In an interview with Tunisia Live today, Hfaiedh clarified that Article 2 is part of the legislation regulating the public sector, and that it specifically concerns protecting the rights of public sector employees.

He explained that the increase in wages would affect all employees in all ministries, and that negotiations for this law had been under way since February 13 of this year.

The public sector wage increases were first announced on June 20, when Minister of Social Affairs Khalil Zaouia declared that, following negotiations with the UGTT, public sector salaries would be increased by 70 dinars. According to the

agreement proposed in June, the pay raise would be split into two phases, one beginning in July and one taking place next year.

Hfaiedh was able to confirm that the current changes to Article 2 were part of the same plan and would follow the same format. He explained that the first dispersal of the increased wages already took place in July of this year, and announced that the next wage increase would take place next June.

Hfaiedh stated that the agreement finalizing these announcements was meant to be signed yesterday, however, it has been deferred to an unspecified date. At the same time, Hfaiedh emphasized to Tunisia Live that the agreement would be signed “very soon.”

Hfaiedh declined to explain why the decision to finalize the agreement had been delayed. However, when the plan was first announced in June, the UGTT had criticized the government’s plan for dividing the wage increase into two phases. At the time, representatives of the UGTT explained that next year’s elections would bring a new government and that,

therefore, there would be no guarantee that the current agreement would still be binding by next June.

Hfaiedh made no mention of such a concern today, assuring Tunisia Live that negotiations were underway to ensure the official conclusion of the agreement. He concluded by stating that 520,000 people working in the public sector would be affected by the proposed pay increase.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/08/11/ugtt-announces-governmental-pay-raise-in-public-sector/>

- **Opinion: Egypt: Clean Sweep for the Civilians - by Gwynne Dyer**

Egyptian President Muhammad Mursi's spokesman did not mince words. He said that the "retirement" of all the senior military commanders in the country represented the completion of the Egyptian revolution. And guess what? The rest of the officer corps accepted Mursi's decision.

Even as the spokesman was announcing that Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, the Defence Minister, and General Sami Enan, the army chief of staff, were being retired,

state television was showing other military officers, Generals Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi and Sidki Sobhi, being sworn in by President Mursi as their successors.

You could not ask for clearer evidence of the Egyptian officer corps' collective decision to accept the results of last year's popular revolution and the subsequent election that brought Muhammad Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood to power. Especially since the heads of the air force, air defence system and navy were removed from their posts at the same time.

Tantawi, 76 years old and defence minister for the past 20 years, was probably surprised to find himself practically alone in trying to sabotage the newly elected civilian government. He was chosen by former dictator Husni Mubarak to keep the military on top, and he worked hard for that goal. However, most Egyptian military officers are between thirty and fifty years younger than him, and they see the world differently.

Egyptian military officers are a privileged caste who enjoy a far better living standard than other government

employees of comparable education and skills, but nobody (at least for the moment) is trying to take that away from them. So if their lifestyle is secure, why risk it all by attacking an elected government and bringing the mobs back out into the streets?

Egyptian officers are also, in most cases, patriots who want to see their country become a prosperous, honestly run place. They knew very well that the old regime (whose remnants, like Tantawi, still controlled all the senior military posts) had failed dismally in that regard. Many were reluctant to let an Islamic party like Mursi's take full control of the country even though the voters chose it, but they now seem willing to take the chance.

Just two months ago it looked like game, set and match to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), led by Field Marshal Tantawi, which was essentially the old regime minus its former head, Hosni Mubarak.

Only 48 hours before the results of the presidential election were to be announced last June, the Supreme Constitutional Court (whose judges were

all appointed by the old regime) issued a decree dissolving the parliament that was elected eight months ago. They said the rules on the eligibility of candidates had been misinterpreted in some districts, but their real aim was to get rid of a parliament where the Islamic parties had won most of the seats.

Then, as the presidential votes were being counted and it was becoming clear that Mursi would win, the SCAF issued decrees that gave it the sole right to call a new parliamentary election and to write the constitution under which it would be held. It also stripped the incoming President of any right to control the armed forces, and in particular to appoint or dismiss military officers in senior jobs.

Mursi refused to recognise the legality of these decrees, but he did not openly confront the military either. He just waited for the military high command to make a really embarrassing mistake - which it duly did.

Islamist fanatics had taken advantage of Egypt's revolution, which distracted everybody's attention from keeping the militants under control, to create bases in

the Sinai peninsula, near the country's border with Israel. On August 5, they attacked an Egyptian border post and slaughtered sixteen guards.

In their own fevered imaginations, they were justly killing collaborators who were hindering true Muslims like themselves from making attacks on Israel. In the minds of most Egyptians, they had murdered sixteen innocent young Egyptian men whose only crime was serving their country. Mursi seized the opportunity to dismiss General Murad Mowafi, the head of military intelligence, for failing to forestall the atrocity.

Mowafi's post made him one of the most powerful men in the country, but nobody wanted to defend him after such an abject failure of intelligence. He went quietly - and by this action Mursi had successfully asserted his right to remove military commanders despite the SCAF's June decree to the contrary.

The most important political skill is remembering your ultimate objectives, but biding your time until some passing event creates an opening for getting what you want. When the officer corps did not

resist Mowafi's dismissal, Mursi knew that he could win a head-on confrontation with Tantawi and his cronies. They knew it too, and so they went quietly.

Egypt now has a democratically elected civilian government that exercises real control over both domestic and foreign policy for the first time in its history. What Mursi will do with that power remains to be seen, but he has certainly won the chance to use it.

<http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=5&i=9017>

- **Eight Prisoners Freed, One Killed in Armed Attack on Tripoli Jail**

Libya's deputy interior minister, Omar al-Khadrawi has said that eight prisoners who had been detained at the al-Fornaj prison and awaiting trial for crimes committed in the past few months escaped Friday following a gun battle. The riot has reportedly also left another prisoner dead, while three policemen and two prisoners were wounded.

The break-out appears to have been well planned. He said unknown assailants in a Land Cruiser opened fire on security

personnel guarding the facility late on Friday in what appeared to be a coordinated attempt to free some of the men inside.

It is the third riot at the Tripoli prison where detainees have continuously been complaining that they have been held for months without trial.

The prison break follows closely on an incident in the eastern city of Benghazi three days ago when unidentified gunmen reportedly shot dead Libyan army general and high-ranking defence ministry official Mohamed Hadia al-Feitouri.

The motive for the murder was not immediately clear, but it follows the latest spate of deadly attacks on security officials, particularly those who had served under the former dictator, Muammar Gaddafi.

<http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=1&i=9014>

- **UN Special Envoy Congratulates New Democratic Power in Libya**

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya (SRSG) Ian

Martin has welcomed the peaceful transfer of authority from the National Transitional Council, NTC, to the newly elected National Congress.

In a statement to The Tripoli Post Mr Martin congratulatede “the Libyans on this peaceful and democratic transfer of power, which is not only a first for this country but an inspiration for others.”

Mr Martin said this reflects the people's confidence in their political process. “It is a profound break with the past and a great leap forward on the road to a democratic and accountable state,” the SRSG said in his statement.

He added that in the coming period, the Libyans will consolidate their political gains by embarking on a process to draw up a new constitution.

The statement said that the United Nations was looking forward to working with the new members of the National Congress in whom the people have placed their trust, and with the new government the Congress will appoint.

He said that the UN remains ready to continue to assist the Libyans in their democratic transition as well as in building a security sector under democratic control and in protecting human rights through the rule of law.

"Much work lies ahead to consolidate and build on what has been accomplished. This requires all Libyans, political leaders and civil society, to join hands to chart the future of their country," Mr Martin said.

He ended his statement by saying: "At this moment of peaceful, democratic transition to new authorities, Libyans can take huge pride in what has been accomplished,"

<http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=1&i=9007>

- **Pro-military politicians slam Morsy's reshuffle**

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Mostafa Bakry, independent candidate running in Constituency One, Helwan, as he arrives at poll station to cast his vote, Helwan, November 28, 2010. Bakry runs against Sayyed Meshaal, State Minister for Military Production and NDP candidate in

same constituency. Both candidates have slammed each other over past weeks, sparking a whirlwind media interest.

Former MPs Mostafa Bakry and Mohamed Abou Hamed criticized the changes President Mohamed Morsy made to the Egyptian military on Sunday, with Bakry describing them as "an attempt by the Brotherhood to take control of the country."

Earlier in the day, Morsy replaced head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces Hussein Tantawi and Chief of Staff Sami Anan, and canceled the supplement to Constitutional Declaration, which was passed by the SCAF on 17 June and limited the president's powers.



Bakry told Al-Masry Al-Youm that Morsy's decisions were wrong because they

overthrew the leadership of the SCAF, which has maintained the integrity of the country since the beginning of the 25 January revolution.

“Sending them to retirement is an attempt by [Morsy] to avoid the wrath of the masses regarding the Rafah events,” he added, referring to a militant attack on a border station near the Egypt-Israel border on 5 August that left 16 Egyptian border guards dead.

Abou Hamed said he will stand against Morsy’s recent decisions. He confirmed his intention to continue to mobilize the public in mass demonstrations against the Muslim Brotherhood on 24 August.

“We will face the thuggery of the Brotherhood and Morsy,” Abou Hamed said, stressing that the recent decisions are an attempt by the Brotherhood to acquire control of “all state institutions, especially after sending Tantawi and Anan to retirement and controlling the media and press.”

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/pro-military-politicians-slam-morsy-s-reshuffle>

- **Mohab Mamish: New head of the Suez Canal Authority**

Navy commander Mohab Mamish retired Sunday on the order of President Mohamed Morsy and was handed control of the important Suez Canal Authority.



Mamish, 64, head of the navy since 2007 and member of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, will head the authority that generates the largest portion of Egypt’s national income and is the only route for the United States navy to its military bases in Iraq and the Gulf.

Since President Anwar Sadat reopened the Suez Canal in 1975, the authority has been chaired by retired naval commanders or deputy commanders. Mamish commanded the military unit responsible

for the security of ships navigating the canal.

He succeeds Ahmed Fadel, who was appointed by former President Hosni Mubarak to secure the passage of US troops through the canal during the American-led invasion of Iraq, a task he continued to perform when the SCAF took power following Mubarak's resignation early last year.

Mamish has in the past vowed to protect the neutrality of the canal.

US naval officials have told analysts that the Suez Canal is a major concern to the United States, especially amid Egypt's volatile transition.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/mohab-mamish-new-head-suez-canal-authority>

- **Brotherhood leaders laud decision to retire SCAF heads**

Muslim Brotherhood leaders reacted positively to President Mohamed Morsy's Sunday decision to send Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi and Chief of Staff Sami Anan to retirement and abolish the

supplement to the Constitutional Declaration.

Essam al-Erian, vice president of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, praised Morsy's decrees.

"It was brave of him," Erian said, calling the moves "the second wave of the revolution."

"He has foiled the counter-revolutionary plots and exposed the third party that works to obstruct the democratization process for the people of Egypt," Erian wrote on Twitter. "The revolutionaries must support him for exercising his sovereign duty and meeting the demands of the revolution."

On Sunday, the presidential spokesperson announced the decisions, which mark the most significant change to Egypt's military leadership since the 25 January revolution.

Morsy had appointed Judge Mahmoud Mekky as vice president and promoted SCAF members Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Sidqy Sobhy as defense minister and chief of staff, respectively. The appointment

leaves Sisi in control of the armed forces. Morsy's spokesperson also announced that SCAF member Mohamed al-Assar was appointed to be deputy defense minister.

Morsy also granted Tantawi the Nile Medal, Anan the State Medal, and appointed them as his advisers.

Muslim Brotherhood Shura Council member Karem Radwan asserted there was no secret deal behind Morsy's recent decisions, which he said were autonomous and reflected the power of his civilian office.

“Perhaps [the military's] failure to protect the border was the reason [for the moves],” Radwan said, referring to the latest attack by armed militants in Sinai that left 16 Egyptian soldiers dead.

“The army protected the revolution, but made a mistake by engaging in politics and issuing a Constitutional Declaration without justification,” he added.

“Being the president, Morsy has the right to send the army back to the barracks,” Radwan said, contending that the

revolutionaries would approve of his decision as they want to end military rule.

Morsy also abolished the supplement to the Constitutional Declaration, which was put in place by the SCAF in June and limited the president's powers.

Figures from outside the group also commended the decision.

“You cannot cleanse Sinai before you cleanse the armed forces,” journalist Hamdy Qandil wrote on Twitter Sunday. On 5 August, gunmen attacked a checkpoint near the Egypt-Israel border, killing 16 Egyptian border guards amid increasing concerns about declining security in Sinai. “I think there was some concern that the military might exploit the Sinai campaign and make maneuvers to pave the way for a coup against the president.

“I think the president made a coup in anticipation of another by the military that might have been scheduled for 24 August,” Qandil continued, in reference to calls for protests against the Brotherhood on 25 August by those sympathetic to the military and Mubarak regime.

“Mubarak’s men may get fiercer, with clandestine sabotage attempts to create possible disturbances, but they will be more cowardly in public now,” he said. “And the military must resume its core mission of protecting Egypt's borders and national security.”

Poet Abdel Rahman Youssef also praised Morsy’s decrees. “Today, the Mubarak state finally came to an end,” he wrote on Twitter. “And no medal can save you from history’s call to account.”

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/brotherhood-leaders-laud-decision-retire-scaf-heads>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Future bloc MPs welcome Patriarch in Akkar

Future bloc MP Khaled Daher welcomed Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rai, who on Monday morning kicked off his four-day visit to the district of Akkar.

“There are some people who want to cause a strife between Muslims and Christians, but their plot was discovered

and the hypocrisy of those who pretend to care about Christians was revealed,” Daher said during a ceremony held in Rai’s honor, in a reference to former Minister Michel Samaha who was arrested on Thursday in a case linked to explosives.

“Your visit is a slap in the face of those who wanted to separate the Lebanese people,” Daher said addressing the patriarch.

He also commended the efforts of the army and security forces in protecting Lebanon.

Following the arrest of Samaha, who is considered close to the Syrian regime, several media reports said that he confessed under interrogation that he had transferred “explosives from Syria to Lebanon in order to carry out bombings in North Lebanon, particularly in the area of Akkar.”

On Saturday, Judge Sami Sader charged Samaha and two Syrian army officers with setting up an armed group to incite sectarian strife through “terror attacks.”

Future bloc MP Hadi Hobeish also welcomed Rai and said that “had it not been for God’s protection, [Rai] would not have been able to visit Akkar.”

“We thank God who protected Rai and his parish,” Hobeish said, in a reference to media reports that Samaha was planning to plant bombs in Akkar during Rai’s tour to the district.

Hobeish also voiced the affection of all sects in Akkar toward the patriarch.

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

- **Maronite Patriarch calls for protecting Akkar from Syrian shells**

Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rai called on Monday for protecting the district of Akkar from the Syrian shells landing on its territory.

“The Syrian shells are harming the region of Akkar, and it must be protected,” Rai said during a reception ceremony held in his honor in the Akkar town of Al-Abdeh.

On Monday morning, Rai kicked off his four-day visit to the Akkar district.

The patriarch also commented on reported plots to target Akkar with explosions.

“God protected this region from explosions that were plotted by the hands of evil and dead consciences,” the patriarch said.

He also commended the hospitality of the residents of Akkar, “who receive all people, especially Syrian refugees.”

On Thursday, Lebanese security forces arrested former Information Minister Michel Samaha, who has close ties with Syria's embattled regime, in a case linked to explosives.

Following his arrest, several media reports said that Samaha confessed under interrogation that he had transferred “explosives from Syria to Lebanon in order to carry out bombings in North Lebanon, particularly in the area of Akkar.”

On Saturday, Judge Sami Sader charged Samaha and two Syrian army officers with setting up an armed group to incite sectarian strife through “terror attacks.”

Meanwhile, Lebanon's borders with Syria have seen frequent violence, with regular exchanges of fire, some of them deadly, as well as shelling from Syria into Lebanon, stoking fears of a spillover of the Syrian crisis.

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

- **Jumblatt calls for letting army play its role**

Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) leader MP Walid Jumblatt said in remarks published Monday that “it was about time the Lebanese army played its role.”

“Never in history has a country adopted the formula of [unity of] army, people and resistance, which we invented in Lebanon; therefore it is no more acceptable to continue with such mystery and manner,” Jumblatt told As-Safir newspaper.

Jumblatt also said that weapons and war and peace decisions should be exclusively in the hands of the state.

“We have been discussing this issue for years, it is time we decided on it,” Jumblatt added.

The PSP leader also said that “the army can be reinforced by gradually integrating [Hezbollah’s] capacities and competencies among its ranks.”

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

- **Lebanon’s FM leaves for Saudi Arabia to attend Islamic summit**

Minister of Foreign Affairs Adnan Mansour left Lebanon on Sunday for Saudi Arabia where is scheduled to attend an extraordinary summit of Muslim leaders on August 15.

According to the National News Agency, Mansour said he was going to discuss on the sidelines of the summit the issue pertaining to the 11 Lebanese Shiite pilgrims, who were abducted in May in Syria, with the “relevant ministers, or [officials]” attending the summit.

In May, 11 Shiite pilgrims were abducted in Syria’s Aleppo while returning from a pilgrimage in Iran.

Following the abduction, a previously unknown armed group calling itself the "Syrian Revolutionaries—Aleppo Province" said that it was holding the Shiite men, while the Free Syrian Army had repeatedly denied its involvement in the abduction.

The families of the kidnapped men have repeatedly accused the Lebanese government of inaction toward the case. On Monday, they shortly blocked Beirut's airport road and later on Tuesday they protested in front of the Turkish embassy in Beirut.

Turning to the detention of former Information Minister Michel Samaha, Mansour said that the case was in the hands of the Lebanese judiciary.

"We need to respect the judicial authority and not surpass it through statements... or interpretations," the NNA quoted the foreign minister as saying.

On Thursday, Lebanese security forces arrested Samaha, who has close ties with Syria's embattled regime, in a case linked to explosives.

Following his arrest, several media reports said that Samaha confessed under interrogation that he had transferred "explosives from Syria to Lebanon in order to carry out bombings in North Lebanon, particularly in the area of Akkar, with Syria's knowledge."

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

6. SYRIA

• Syrian army shells Damascus and suburbs, says watchdog

The Syrian army on Monday sent shells slamming into rebel strongholds in Damascus province, where more than 45 people, including 36 civilians, have been killed in the past 48 hours, a watchdog said.

The shelling began before dawn and targeted Assali, Nahar Aisha and Qadam – all southern districts of Damascus – as well Irbin, Al-Tal and New Artuz outside the capital, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Meanwhile, clashes broke out in the rebel bastion of Harasta, northeast of Damascus.

In the capital, security forces carried out raids and arrests in the neighborhoods of Qaimreya, Qashla and Shaghur, the Observatory said.

The Local Coordination Committees, a network of activists on the ground, meanwhile said raids had taken place in Shaghur, where they reported "security sweeps of stores and security forces breaking down the doors of shops which had been closed."

In the Old City of Damascus, the LLC reported "a campaign of raids and arrests by the armed forces."

On Sunday, 150 people died across Syria, according to the Observatory. The majority were in Damascus province, where 26 civilians and seven rebels were killed.

The Observatory reported another 10 civilians and two rebels killed in Damascus province on Monday, plus four civilians in the southern city of Daraa.

In central Homs city, 16 civilians were killed by army gunfire in the neighborhood of Shamas alone on Sunday, the Observatory said.

The opposition Syrian National Council and activist groups on Sunday charged that pro-government militia summarily executed 10 civilians during a round-up in the Shamas neighborhood.

The Observatory confirmed that pro-government forces carried out a round-up in the district, but made no mention of any executions.

More than 21,000 people have been killed across Syria since the anti-regime revolt broke out 17 months ago, according to the watchdog. The toll is impossible to verify, and the United Nations has stopped maintaining an independent count.

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

- **Battle for Aleppo: army presses ground offensive**

Rebels target Syrian state media as UN chief Ban calls for flexible UN presence in Syria.

ALEPPO, Syria - The Syrian army pressed its assault on rebels in commercial capital Aleppo on Sunday, while both sides reported atrocities and Arab foreign ministers postponed a planned meeting on the 17-month conflict.

The exiled opposition said pro-government militia had executed 10 civilians in a roundup in the flashpoint central city of Homs, while the official SANA news agency reported the murder of one of its staff, in the latest case of a pro-government journalist being killed.

The Arab League gave no reason for the indefinite postponement of its planned meeting in Saudi Arabia that had been due to discuss a replacement for international envoy Kofi Annan who announced his resignation earlier this month.

On Tuesday, Saudi Arabia is to host an Islamic summit focused on Syria to drum up support for the anti-regime revolt. Arab foreign ministers of the Gulf held

talks late Sunday in the Saudi city of Jeddah to prepare for the summit.

In Aleppo, troops shelled rebel-held districts as fighting flared anew around a southwestern neighbourhood that rebel fighters had quit last week, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The Shaar, Tariq al-Bab, Sakhur, Hanano and Bustan al-Qasr neighbourhoods all came under bombardment, as the army pressed a ground offensive it launched on Wednesday to recapture areas seized by rebels since July 20, the group said.

The Britain-based monitoring group also said that "communications of all forms have been cut off in the city of Aleppo as well as large areas of the province since the morning."

In the city of Homs, three children on a minibus were killed as they tried to flee with their parents from the Shamas district, where a military operation took place, it said.

The Observatory said 150 people were killed across the country on Sunday,

including 49 civilians, 56 rebels and 45 regular soldiers.

In Damascus, gunfire was reported in the Qadam neighbourhood. Outside the capital, machinegun fire was heard in the town of Al-Tal, where 15 civilians were killed in shelling and clashes the previous day.

They were among 148 people -- 85 civilians, 43 soldiers and 20 rebels -- killed across Syria on Saturday, according to the Observatory.

On the situation in the capital, the pro-government Al-Watan newspaper spoke of "foiled bids to break the calm in Damascus, which was cleansed of terrorist groups who terrified residents."

In Aleppo, the paper said that the army was poised to assault the Sukari neighbourhood in the south of the city, after its recapture of the nearby Salaheddin district on Thursday.

Activist groups said 10 civilians were executed in a roundup of military-aged men in the Shamas district of Homs.

"Militiamen detained nearly 350 people from the Shamas district, assembled them in a courtyard and executed 10 of them," activist group, the Syrian Revolution General Council, said.

"The fate of the nearly 340 others is unknown and we fear greatly that they have met the same fate as the 10 martyrs," the group added.

State media targeted

The official SANA news agency said the head of its home news department, Abbas Ali, was assassinated by an "armed terrorist group" at his home in Jdaidet Artuz outside the capital on Saturday evening.

On Friday, rebels abducted three state television journalists as they accompanied government troops operating near Damascus, the Syrian Observatory said.

It came after a bomb attack on state television headquarters wounded several people last week and after an Al-Qaeda linked group claimed the abduction and murder earlier this month of state television presenter Mohammed al-Saeed.

As speculation mounted over who will succeed Annan when he steps down as international envoy later this month, UN chief Ban Ki-moon called for a "flexible UN presence in Syria" even after the mandate of the troubled observer mission he set up expires.

"A continued UN presence in Syria that goes beyond our important humanitarian work would allow systematic and meaningful engagement with the Syrian stakeholders, inside the country," the UN chief said.

The observer mission mandate is set to expire on August 19, after the Security Council voted last month to extend it for a "final" 30 days.

The mission -- originally 300 military observers and now reduced by half -- was deployed in April to oversee a peace plan, which should have begun with a ceasefire that never took hold.

In mid-June, the observers suspended patrols as fighting intensified.

The Security Council is scheduled to debate the future of the UN mission on Thursday, but so far there is little consensus on the conflict which the Observatory says has cost more than 21,000 lives since it began 17 months ago.

Diplomats in New York say veteran Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi, a former top Arab League official, has been tipped to replace Annan.

In the desert of northern Jordan, French military medics started on Sunday to set up a field hospital at the neighbouring country's main camp for Syrian refugees, outside the city of Mafraq.

Jordan is hosting more than 150,000 Syrian refugees.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53871>

- **Iran seeks to save pivotal Syrian ally, sees conflict as part of broader threat**

Next week President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will attend an extraordinary meeting of the Organization of Islamic Countries set to focus on the Syrian crisis.

Iran, dismayed at the plight of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, is seeking to shore him up and counter a perceived drive by Western and U.S.-aligned Sunni Muslim nations to roll back its own power in the Middle East.

A hastily-convened conference in Tehran on Thursday looked like an attempt by the Islamic Republic to forge a coalition of friendly countries opposed to Western and Arab support for rebels determined to end four decades of Assad family rule.

Iran, handed geostrategic windfalls in the past decade by Washington's elimination of two of its main enemies, Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan, now fears the pendulum of regional influence could swing the other way.

Success for the Sunni-led uprising in Syria could have grave implications for the Shi'ite rulers in Tehran and their vaunted "axis of resistance" against Israel and the United States.

The axis has already lost one cog, Hamas, a Palestinian Sunni Islamist group which turned against Assad months ago for his

bloody repression of foes including the Muslim Brotherhood.

Assad's fall would weaken a pivotal component, Lebanon's Hezbollah, for which Syria has provided arms, support and a route for weapons from Iran, the Shi'ite group's main patron.

It would also complicate life for Syria's eastern neighbor Iraq, whose Iran-friendly Shi'ite-led government fears that a mainly Sunni leadership could take power in Damascus in place of one dominated by Assad's Shi'ite-rooted Alawite minority.

Western officials have accused Iran of providing funds, weapons and intelligence support to Assad in his struggle to crush opposition. Syrian rebels also says Tehran has sent Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah fighters against them.

How far Iran will go in backing Assad, widely perceived across the Arab world as a tyrant killing his own people, is an open question - and one sometimes debated openly in Tehran.

"Religious polarization"

“There are rational views versus radical ones, but this is Iran. It’s very difficult to be more flexible, to argue for change,” said one Tehran-based diplomat.

The political and military hardliners in control say Syria stood by Iran in its hour of need, the only Arab nation on its side in the 1980-88 war with Iraq, and deserves loyalty now.

They also view the conflict in Syria as an extension of a sectarian power struggle with Iran’s regional rival Saudi Arabia, as well as a U.S.-led campaign to shackle its nuclear ambitions by sanctions or if necessary by military force.

“Iran doesn’t accept this is about opening Syria up to democracy. It’s not at all democratic,” said Mohammad Marandi of Tehran University. “Saudi advocates Wahhabi Islam and Iran believes it’s pushing for religious polarization.”

Iran said it had won support at Thursday’s conference for its call for a halt to violence in Syria and dialogue between Assad and his foes on the Syrian leader’s “reform” program.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said outside interference was worsening the crisis. “It will be a mistake to think that with the continuation of pressure and unwise moves, the Syrian leadership would finally collapse,” he added.

Iranian officials have in recent weeks offered to host talks between Syria’s government and opposition, although Assad’s foes have shown no interest in such a dialogue with the man they want to topple, let alone one organized by Tehran.

Iran may be seeking a diplomatic role after the failure of Kofi Annan’s U.N.-backed peace plan, but its chances of success appear doomed from the start, as perhaps its authors know, since Tehran’s policy is predicated on keeping Assad in power.

“Iran is trying to take control of and redirect a failed diplomatic process, even though these endeavors will likely fail,” said Anthony Skinner of the Maplecroft risks consultancy.

“Tehran is attempting to offset pressure from allies of the armed and unarmed opposition in Syria. It might also show that

Iran is running out of ideas on what to do.”

Honest broker

Salehi, in an opinion piece in the Washington Post on the eve of the Tehran meeting, presented Iran as “part of the solution, not the problem” - as the United States contends.

“As the world has witnessed during the past decade, we have acted as a stabilising force in Iraq and Afghanistan, two other Muslim countries thrown into turmoil,” he wrote, alluding to U.S.-led military interventions in both states.

Salehi also said Syrians should decide their own destiny through a forthcoming presidential election, decreed by Assad.

Tehran has resisted any negotiated transition requiring Assad’s exit and the loss of a partner who has helped Iran flex its muscles in Lebanon and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Earlier this week, senior Iranian envoy Saeed Jalili was in Damascus for talks with Assad, declaring that his country wouldn’t

allow “the axis of resistance, of which it considers Syria to be an essential part, to be broken in any way”.

Next week President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will attend an extraordinary meeting of the Organization of Islamic Countries set to focus on the Syrian crisis. Iran will want to prevent any attempt to suspend Syria’s membership of the Jeddah-based OIC.

While Iran has repeatedly denounced Turkey and Qatar, alongside Saudi Arabia, for supporting Syrian rebels, it has been forced to seek their help in securing the release of 48 Iranians kidnapped by the insurgents last week.

Syrian rebels accuse them of being elite Revolutionary Guards sent to assist Assad’s forces in crushing the opposition.

Salehi has acknowledged that some are retired Guards or soldiers, but said they were religious pilgrims, not fighters.

Maplecroft’s Skinner said concern over the captives might in part have motivated Iran’s flurry of diplomacy.

“If they are serving members of the Guards, then Iran’s diplomatic initiatives may be linked to the hostage-taking because of the sensitive information they may have,” he said.

For Iran, “losing” Syria would be a damaging blow, but prolonged post-Assad instability might offer opportunities to a country adept at pursuing its interests in a conflict-ridden region, as it has shown in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

“Assad is far from gone and even when he is, things are going to be chaotic for a while,” said Dina Esfandiary of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. “

“And Iran thrives in that kind of context.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/13/231978.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Bahrain's Envoy Resumes Diplomatic Activity in Tehran

TEHRAN (FNA)- Manama's Ambassador to Tehran Rashed bin Sa'as al-Dosari

returned to Iran to resume his diplomatic mission.



He will start work on Tuesday after more than one-year suspension of his activities in Iran.

Manama had summoned its envoy after Iran criticized Bahraini regime over brutal suppression of Bahraini protesters.

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

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104253917>

- **Bahraini security forces attack anti-regime protesters in Sitra**

Bahraini security forces have attacked the protesters, holding an anti-regime demonstration in the northeastern island of Sitra.



The demonstrators took to the streets in Sitra on Sunday.

Meanwhile, protesters in Manama torched tires and blocked the roads near the Bahrain International Airport.

Bahrainis continue peaceful demonstrations against the ruling monarchy, despite the regime's violent crackdown on the protests. The police frequently use teargas canisters, rubber

bullets, and sound grenades to disperse the protesters.

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

Bahrain hosts the US Navy Fifth Fleet and is among the Persian Gulf countries such as Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates that receive military equipment from the United States.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/08/13/255984/bahraini-forces-attack-sitra-protesters/>

- **Kuwait may slip into political crisis if election law changes: analyst**

Kuwait could slip into a political crisis if Emir Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah granted a government request to change its electoral law, a political analyst warned Sunday.

"I don't think that the parliament, reinstated by the Constitutional Court will agree to convene. This will lead to disbanding it again," Kuwaiti political

analyst Dahem al-Qahtani told Al Arabiya in a Sunday interview.

Qahtani expected speaker Jassem al-Kharafi to call for parliament to convene more than once, but that it would fail to do so due to absence of most members. That would offer a pretext for the government to ask the Emir to disband the body and hold elections in October, he said.

The Kuwaiti parliament was dissolved in December 2011 to be reinstated in June 2012 by the Constitutional Court, to the chagrin of the opposition.

Speaker Kharafi has adjourned the parliament indefinitely after failing to secure the required quorum, and has said he would refer the matter to the Emir, who is expected to dissolve the parliament and call for new elections or to change the electoral law altogether.

“What remains to be seen is whether al-Sabah will change electoral law,” Qahtani said. “But if he does, Kuwait will be facing the first political crisis of its kind.”

Qahtani said that the problem did not solely lie in the parliament, but was also caused by the government.

“Had the government been stable, the parliament would be the cause of the problem. But the government has resigned nine times, compared to the parliament being dissolved five times,” he said.

Despite the current political instability, Qahtani ruled out the possibility of a coup taking place in Kuwait.



“The political system in Kuwait is one of the most stable in the Arab world and the problems happening now do not amount to the unrest that took place in Yemen or Tunisia, for example,” he said.

Qahtani noted said the main reason for political stability in Kuwait was the presence of a parliament that struck a

balance with the regime and maintained transparency in discussing all issues.

In addition to the parliamentary standstill, Qahtani said that Kuwait was facing a more general political problem due to the current struggle for power.

“There is a power struggle between the factions represented in the parliament and others outside -- especially those with tribal affiliations -- which has been ongoing since 2006,” he said.

The fact that the Constitutional Court has become part of the crisis, Qahtani pointed out, has further complicated the matter, especially since the last ruling to reinstate the parliament came as a surprise and in contradiction to other rulings the court had issued in similar cases.

“This is similar to the problem that happened in Turkey when Erdogan had to restructure the Constitutional Court,” Qahtani said. “At the time he was accused of interfering in judicial matters, but he argued that he was returning the court to its original role after it had for a long time been the mouthpiece of the military.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/12/231903.html>

- **US Navy ship collides with oil tanker in Gulf**

Guided-missile destroyer suffers minor damage

The damaged US guided-missile destroyer USS Porter

A handout picture released by the US navy shows the damaged US guided-missile destroyer USS Porter following a collision with the Japanese-owned bulk oil tanker M/V Otowasan in the Strait of Hormuz on August 12, 2012.

Fujairah: A US Navy guided-missile destroyer suffered minor damage when it collided with an oil tanker early on Sunday just outside the Strait of Hormuz.

The collision left a gaping hole in the starboard side of the USS Porter. No one was injured on either vessel, the US Navy said in a statement.

The collision with the Panamanian-flagged bulk oil tanker M/V Otowasan occurred at

approximately 1am local time., officials said.

“Both vessels are okay and the Strait of Hormuz is not closed, and business is as usual there,” a Fujairah coast guard official who preferred not to be named told Gulf News .

The cause of the incident is under investigation, the official said, adding that there were no reports of spills or leakages from either the USS Porter or the Otowasan in the Gulf.

The official said they had been alerted about the incident at about 1am.

Tensions have risen in the Gulf this year as Iran has threatened to close the strait to international shipping if its dispute with the United States over its nuclear programme escalates.

Washington says it maintains naval forces in the Gulf to ensure security in the region.

The oil tanker, owned by Japan’s Mitsui OSK, was bound for Fujairah from

Mesaieed in Qatar, according to ship tracking websites.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/emergencies/us-navy-ship-collides-with-oil-tanker-in-gulf-1.1061154>

- **Bahraini blogger sentenced for insulting Aisha**

19-year-old gets two years in prison for ‘insulting a religious icon’

Manama: A Bahraini court on Sunday sentenced a blogger to two years in prison for disparaging Aisha, Prophet Mohammad’s (PBUH) wife.

Public Prosecution Chief Abdul Rahman Al Sayyed said that they ordered the arrest of the defendant after he was reported to have used websites to abuse Aisha and level highly derogatory insults against her character.

“The defendant was identified as a 19-year-old who admitted that he often entered specific sites to insult Prophet Mohammad’s (PBUH) companions and wife,” Al Sayyed said.

He was charged with insulting a religious icon and eventually sentenced to two years, he said in a statement.

Bahrain's lawmakers have been pushing for the adoption of stricter laws against people who insult religious figures in a bid to maintain harmony between the various sects.

Kuwait's parliament pushed for a law that would put to death people who insulted Allah or post remarks or publish statements or articles deemed derogatory of other sects.

However, the law has not been ratified by the emir.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahraini-blogger-sentenced-for-insulting-aisha-1.1061142>

- **Three Oman activists denied bail**

Nine co-accused released pending appeal in higher court

Muscat: Nine off the 12 individuals convicted for one year by the Muscat Primary court on charges of wrongful

gathering on Wednesday were granted bail on Saturday pending appeal in the higher court on October 17.

Poet Saeed Al Hashmi, journalist Baasma Rajhi, lawyer Basma Al Kiyumi, Nasser Al Gailani, Mahmoud Al Rawahi, Badar Al Jabri, Mohammad Al Janadi and Abdullah Al Gilani were all sentenced to a year in prison and fined 200 Omani riyals (Dh1,901) for wrongful gathering. All eight were released on bail after paying 1000 riyals for the appeal. Osama Al Thuwaiya, who was also given one-year sentence for violating cyber law and defaming the country's Ruler, was also granted bail pending appeal on October 17. He also had to pay 1,000 riyals for filing his appeal.

Three others — Mukhtar Al Hinai, Khalid Al Nofli and Mohammad Al Fazari — who were also given one-year prison terms and 200-riyal fines for wrongful gathering were denied bail as there are other pending cases against them. Hearing in the cases of 12 other detainees, including leading activists like Esmail Al Muqbal, Sultan Al Sa'adi and Nabhan Hanashi were also deferred to August 26. All of them face charges of wrongful gathering and inciting others with provocative speeches.

So far, the Muscat Primary Court has sentenced 29 people for either allegedly defaming Sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed or committing cybercrime or for wrongful gatherings. After a lull in demonstrations and protests in the country for almost over six months, a group of Omani employees of contractors hired by oil companies launched a strike. Former international volleyball player Habiba Al Hinai, Sohar activist Esmail Al Muqbali and Yaqoub Al Kharusi even visited an oil field and openly expressed solidarity with striking workers. All the three were arrested.

The arrests triggered further protests in Muscat and a flurry of angry posts on social media websites.

The security agencies then cracked down on protesters as well as those violating cyber laws of the country. Over 40 people were held but some were later released and the remaining are facing trial.

Following protests in Tunisia and Egypt, Oman also witnessed peaceful demonstrations last year, starting with a Green March on January 17. The largely

peaceful demonstrations were mainly confined to Sohar, Muscat, Salalah, Sur, Ibri and some other places.

However, towards the end of February last year, the protests in Sohar turned violent and saw about six people killed in police action. The protesters were mainly demanding jobs, better pay and working conditions and the removal of some alleged corrupt officials.

Sultan Qaboos took prompt action by ordering the creation of 50,000 new jobs, instituted unemployment allowances and replaced ministers resented by protesters with elected members of the Shura. The Sultan also granted more powers to the 84-member elected Shura council.

The protests have since died down, except for sporadic slogan-shouting by private sector employees for better wages and working conditions.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/thr-ee-oman-activists-denied-bail-1.1060770>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Reports Say Afghan Officials Met With Former Taliban Commander**

August 12, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

According to media reports on August 12, Afghan government officials have held secret talks with detained former high-ranking Taliban commander Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar.

Reuters news agency cited Afghan national security adviser Rangin Spanta as saying the talks were held in Pakistan two months ago.

Baradar has been detained since he was captured in Karachi by U.S. and Pakistani forces in 2010.

Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik confirmed the meeting took place.

Baradar was a close associate of Taliban leader Mullah Muhammed Omar, and Afghan officials have expressed the hope he could play an important role in facilitating possible peace talks between the government and the Taliban.

Based on reporting by Reuters and the "Jerusalem Post"

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

- **Obama Signs Law On Haqqani Network**

August 12, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

U.S. President Barack Obama has signed into law the Haqqani Network Terrorist Designation Act of 2012.

Under the law, which Obama signed on August 10, the secretary of state will have one month to report on whether the Haqqani Network should be categorized as a terrorist organization.

The Haqqani Network, which operates on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, has been accused of carrying out numerous attacks against U.S. interests in Afghanistan.

The United States has already applied sanctions to some key Haqqani Network leaders, but has so far resisted designating the entire network as a foreign terrorist

organization, despite calls from both houses of the U.S. Congress to do so.

With reporting by AP

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

- **Security forces foil terror attack plot in Afghan capital Kabul**

Press TV

August 12, 2012

Afghan forces have thwarted a set of terror attacks on the capital Kabul as they captured five militants in connection with the scheme, officials say.

The attacks were reportedly aimed at targeting the parliament building and the residence of second vice president Mohammad Karim Khalili, Afghanistan's intelligence agency said.

According to Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security, one of the five was a Pakistani national and the group was in possession of Afghan army uniforms and Pakistani identity documents.

"The evidence indicates they had connections with the terrorists beyond

the border with Pakistan," the agency said.

A large cache of explosives and ammunition was also seized from them in the overnight operation.

Meanwhile, a roadside bomb earlier on Sunday, in the eastern Laghman Province has left a district governor and three of his guards dead.

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

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

- **Roadside bomb kills 4 including district governor in E. Afghan**

MEHTERLAM, Afghanistan, Aug. 12 (Xinhua) -- Four people including the governor of Ali Shing district in Laghman province, 90 km east of Kabul, lost his life as a roadside bomb struck his vehicle on Sunday, spokesman for provincial administration, Sarhadi Zawak said. "In the bloody incident happened this morning the district governor of Ali Shing along with three of his bodyguards was

martyred," Zawak told Xinhua without giving more details.

Meantime, another official who declined to give his name said that the district governor Faridullah Niazi was going from Ali Shing district to the provincial capital Mehterlam city when a mine struck his vehicle killing him and three others on the spot.

He also blamed Taliban militants for organizing the deadly attack. However, the outfit fighting the government is yet to comment.

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

- **Humiliation of Afghan soldiers by Americans sparks violence: Afghan expert**

Press TV

August 12, 2012

A political analyst says the disrespectful treatment of afghan soldiers by the US-led forces in Afghanistan is one of the main reasons behind the rise in the so-called green-on-blue attacks in the war-torn country, Press TV reports.

"...Afghan officers, even high-ranking officers are being treated with a great deal of contempt by low-ranking American officers, or low-ranking NATO officers, in fact I have first hand observations on several occasions that Afghan colonels have been treated like dirt if you will by an American captain," said Afghan author and expert, Mohammed Daoud Miraki in an interview with Press TV.

He made the remarks after several NATO-led soldiers were killed by their local colleagues in the so-called green-on-blue attacks in southern Afghanistan.

Inspector general police of Helmand Province, Abdul Nabi Ilham said on Saturday that the attacks "have left eight foreign soldiers dead over the past three days."

Referring to the fact that the US-led foreign troops, who are still in Afghanistan in order to train the afghan army, do not work with them on an equal basis, the analyst added that "When high-ranking [Afghan] officers are treated in such manner the low-ranking soldiers they say what is this nonsense? We get salary for

this but we are not here to compromise our dignity.”

On Tuesday, an American soldier died in the east when two men in Afghan army uniform opened fire, and on Thursday an Afghan soldier was killed after turning his weapon on NATO troops, also in the east.

The shootings are reflective of the increase in ‘green-on-blue’ attacks in Afghanistan.

According to a NATO count, Green-on-blue attacks, in which Afghans turn their weapons against their foreign allies, have killed a total of 34 foreign soldiers this year.

Thousands of NATO troops, due to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014, are still in the country under the pretext of ‘training and working alongside Afghan soldiers’ for the anti-insurgency campaign.

The 2001-present US-led war in Afghanistan, which has caused record-high civilian and military casualties, has become the longest military conflict in the American history.

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

- **West will never tolerate an independent Afghanistan: Analyst**

Press TV

August 12, 2012

A political analyst says that the US and its Western allies want Afghanistan to remain a nation highly dependent on foreign powers in order to achieve their objectives in the region.

“Afghanistan is a geo-strategically important place but otherwise for them [Western powers], I’m afraid, it’s not very important,” Jim Brann of Stop the War Coalition said during an interview with Press TV.

“The answer is that they do have geo-strategic ambitions, and any sense of Afghan independence must and can only fall within that,” Brann added.

The analyst went on to say that over past decade, Afghanistan has increasingly become an “extremely foreign-dependent country and a country, more than that, dependent on foreign military.”

Brann added that the US-led NATO mission in Afghanistan certainly does not support the independent development of Afghanistan's economy which is one "almost entirely composed of foreign military spending".

He referred to a World Health Organization report released earlier this year, which suggests that Afghanistan, despite heavy foreign intervention, has one of the highest rates of child malnutrition in the world.

"It's rather strange, NATO stands for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. You look how far the Hindu Kush is from the North Atlantic and it gives you some idea that something very strange is going on."

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

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

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Nebahat Tanrıverdi O and Selen Tonkuş. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

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