



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

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1. IRAQ

- **KBC considers Saleh's visit to Baghdad as attempt to find prospects for future dealing**

BAGHDAD, Aug. 14 (AKnews) - The Kurdish Blocs Coalition (KBC) stated Tuesday that the visit of the vice secretary general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Barham Salih to Baghdad is an attempt to find prospects for dealing during the next phase between Baghdad and Erbil.

Saleh, who arrived in Baghdad the day before yesterday, met Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and other officials in the executive and legislative branches.

The vice chairman of the bloc Mohsen al-Saadoun said that Saleh's visit is a positive step in the current political stage.

An official Kurdish source in Baghdad said Salih's visit to Baghdad comes within a partisan framework and will not discuss the current crisis between Baghdad and Erbil.

The source, who preferred to remain anonymous, said: "Barham Salih arrived [yesterday] at the head of a delegation of

members of the political office of the PUK to Baghdad to strengthen the relationship between the union and the Iraqi political parties and will not discuss the current crisis between Erbil and Baghdad.

"The visit represents the PUK and the accompanying delegation of Barham Salih will not include members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party."

The relationship between the KRG and the federal government in Baghdad deteriorated recently due to several issues, most notably the KBC's desire to withdraw confidence from Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and question him in the Council of Representatives.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/321830/>

- **National Alliance's reform package must include quick solution for article 140, says Ihsan**



ERBIL, August 14 (AKnews) – The Kurdistan Region's representative in Baghdad said officials must know whether the National Alliance's reform package includes article 140 or not because Kurds are waiting for a practical move to implement the article.

mohammed ihsan Mohammed Ihsan said: "Our efforts in the supreme committee for implementing article 140 will continue for executing article 140.

"Kurds demand that the reform package includes implementing article 140 and we are not happy with less than that.

"We blame the Iraqi government for working slowly in executing the article."

All parties in Iraq call for implementing the constitution but when it comes to article 140 all seem to evade it, added Ihsan. If the government supports the

implementation of constitution then why does the government not implement article 140, he questioned.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/321723/>

- **Barzani meets Kurdistan Region's governors**

ERBIL, August 14 (AKnews) - The Kurdistan Region's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani headed a meeting of the Council of Ministers' presidency along with the region's governors and deputy PM Imad Ahmed.

Nechirvan Barzani The aim of the meeting was to look closely at the problems in the region and discuss solutions.

In the meeting, members discussed decentralization in the Kurdistan Region and ways to give more power to governorates over red tape in residents' affairs, ownership of lands disputes, public services, implementation of master plans and partnership between governorates and directorates.



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Barzani decided to have more meetings like this in the future.

A committee was formed recently for decentralizing governorates in the region. The meeting's participants asked the committee to complete its work as soon as possible.

In the meeting the ministers were asked to follow up the decisions made in the gathering and to prepare their agenda for the next meeting.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/321720/>

- **Salih's visit is partisan and not related to Erbil and Baghdad disputes, says source**

ERBIL, August 14 (AKnews) – A Kurdish official in Bagdad said that Barham Salih's visit, as the former PM of the Kurdistan Regional Government and current deputy of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) President Jalal Talabani, is a partisan visit and not related to the Bagdad and Erbil disputes.



maliki and barham salhThe anonymous source added: "Salih as a head of the PUK delegation visited Bagdad along with a number of members of the party's politburo.

"The aim of the visit is to improve the relation between the PUK and Iraqi parties."

The source also said: "As part of the relations between the PUK and the al-Dawa Party, Salih will meet Iraq's Prime

Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the delegation will meet other Iraqi parties."

The Baghdad and Erbil dispute will not be discussed in this visit because it is PUK's visit, confirmed the official.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/321595/>

- **Christian MP: the political arena is perfect and ready to solve crisis.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Christian MP, Luis Caro said that the atmosphere prevailing in the current political arena is perfect and ready to resolve the political crisis.

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / " the bilateral meetings between leaders and some political figures in the last few days have found a clear optimism that the atmosphere has become ready to resolve the political crisis experienced by the country."

Caro added that "any bilateral meetings between the various parties will give a positive vision and a step ahead of approaching the solution and work to unite the political attitudes towards various internal and external issues."

The past few days have seen bilateral meetings between leaders of the political blocs in order to get out of the political crisis.

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

- **Iraqiya MP calls politicians to dialogue and close doors to neighboring countries interventions.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, for the Iraqiya coalition, Yassin al-Obeidi called on the political forces to dialogue and to close the doors to neighboring countries interventions and problems .

Obeidi said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "the political process in the country is fragile and has much gaps due to the severe dispute between the political parties and different views among them," indicating that "this vulnerability in the political process makes it an easy bit to foreign intervention."

He added "the Arab arena is witnessing a wide conflict and, especially in Syria that might have a negative impact on the

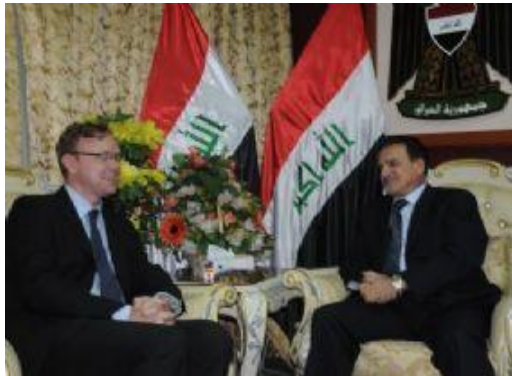
security situation and the political process in Iraq."

He called on political parties to give priority to the public interest on the personal and factional interests to help achieving security and stability in the country and keep it a way from foreign interference. "

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

- **Asadi affirms to Swedish Ambassador Iraq's desire to be open, develop its relations with all friendly countries**

Baghdad (NINA) – Senior Interior Undersecretary, Adnan al-Asadi, affirmed that Iraq desires to be open toward all friendly countries and develop its relations with them on the base of respect and mutual understanding.



The Interior Ministry's Media Bureau quoted Assadi saying on Tuesday, Aug. 14, during receiving the Ambassador of Sweden to Iraq, Carl Magnus Nesser, saying that Iraq's Interior Ministry seeks to develop security relations between Iraq and Sweden on all levels for the good of both countries' security agencies to combat terrorism.

For his part, Sweden's Ambassador asserted his country's readiness to cooperate with Iraq and develop bilateral relations.

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

- **Sadrist delegation, Barham Saleh discuss political situation, means to get out of the crisis**

Baghdad (NINA) – Lawmaker from Ahrar bloc, Jawad al-Shihaily, said that a delegation from the Sadrism Trend, consisted of lawmakers and ministers, headed by Baha' al-Araji, discussed on Tuesday, Aug. 14, with the Assistant Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Barham Saleh, bilateral relations and latest political developments

and means to get Iraq out of the crisis it is witnessing.

Shihaily told NINA that the Sadrist Trend's Politburo discussed with Barham Saleh means to consolidate relations between the Kurds and the Sadrist Trend and that Saleh affirmed that the relations between the Kurds and the Sadrist Trend are at their best.

Barham Saleh arrived in Baghdad two days ago and has met with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and with leaders of a number of Iraqi political forces.

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

- **Shimmari: Committee to be formed to set legal amendment to increase board of Commissioners**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Kadhim al-Shimmari, of the White bloc stated that a committee will be formed to discuss the suggestion of increasing the number of the Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission.

Speaking to All Iraqi News Agency (AIN), he said "The committee will be formed

after the holiday of Eid al-Fitr," pointing out "There are different views among the political blocs over the increase of the number of the commissioners of the IHEC to be fifteen rather than nine."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16489:shimmari-committee-to-be-formed-to-set-legal-amendment-to-increase-board-of-commissioners&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Great response to Reforms Paper - Nat'l Alliance MP**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: The Reforms Paper presented by al-Iraqiya Bloc and Kurdish Alliance has received a great response, National Alliance MP Ali Shubbar disclosed today, pointing out that is "a real desire to solve the current crisis by all components."

Shubbar told Aswat al-Iraq that many meetings have been held over the past period among the political circles and the Reforms Committee, particularly with Ibraheem al-Jaffari.

He added that special authorization was given to the head of the committee, Jaffari, to help in bringing differing views closer together.

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

Arbil-Najaf alliance (consisting of al-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."

President Talabani refused to respond to the powers demanding Maliki's demotion, noting that the demand bore less than 164 signatories, stressing that dialogue and the National Conference are the best ways to overcome political crises.

Talabani's stance stirred criticism from Iraqiya Bloc, the Sadrist Trend and some Kurdish MPs who described his opinion as "unexpected."

A number of meetings were held in Arbil, Najaf and Sulaimaniya over the last few

weeks among the blocs that demanded Maliki's demotion to determine their final stand on the political crisis.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28vsneg_yn504yksfzu1haoe3b5%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=149973&l=1

- **Investigation committee on Oglu's visit to Kirkuk presents reports to cabinet**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: The investigation committee looking into the visit of Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to Kirkuk will present its report to the Council of Ministers on Tuesday, an official spokesperson said.

"The committee, chaired by Energy Minister Hussein al-Shahrestani, to investigate the visit of Turkish foreign minister to Kirkuk without coordination with the federal government will present its report to the Council of Ministers on Tuesday," Faisal Abdullah said.

"The report includes a number of recommendations," he added.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's visit to Kirkuk on August 2

drew a furious reaction from Baghdad and brought already-chilly relations between the two countries to a new low.

The cabinet decided to form a committee headed by Deputy Prime Minister Hussein al-Shahrestani "to investigate the circumstances of the Turkish foreign minister's visit to Kirkuk and present recommendations to the cabinet," he said.

Iraq's Foreign Ministry responded to the visit with a statement saying "it is not in the interest of Turkey or any other party to underestimate the national sovereignty and violate the rules of international relations."

But Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan defended the visit, saying it is only normal for "a minister bearing a red passport to visit the regional administration (in Kurdistan in north Iraq) and then travel to Kirkuk, 40 kilometers from (Arbil) to meet with his kinsmen."

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28vsneg_yn504yksfzu1haoe3b5%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=149969&l=1

- **Kurdistan PM welcomes opening Chinese consulate**

ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq: Prime Minister of Kurdistan region, Nechirvan Barzani, welcomed China's initiative to open a consulate in the region, describing it as an important step toward boosting bilateral relations.

This came during his meeting on Sunday with Chinese Ambassador to Iraq Ni Jian.

The Chinese diplomat reiterated his country's readiness to establish strong relations with Kurdistan region, expressing admire of the progress in the region in various domains.

The premier underlined that his government is ready to expand relations with China, mainly in industrial, agricultural and tourism sectors.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28vsneg_yn504yksfzu1haoe3b5%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=149967&l=1

- **Delay in EC Law delays coming provincial elections**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Chairman of Iraqi Election Commission (EC) Faraj al-Haidari disclosed that the delay in endorsing the EC Law will lead to the delay of the coming provincial elections, due next year.

Haidari told Aswat al-Iraq that the Commission needs six months after the law endorsement and other procedures to take the necessary logistic preparations for the elections.

It was supposed that the provincial elections will be implemented in the first month of 2013

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28vsnegyn504yksfzu1haoe3b5%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=149962&l=1

- **Diplomatic sources reveal Iraq's lack of commitment with international sanctions on Iran**

Shafaq News / An informed source revealed on Wednesday, the "lack of commitment " of the Iraqi government on the imposed international sanctions on Iran , stressing that the United States of America and a number of countries are concerned from the approach being

followed by Iraq of not applying the international resolutions.



The source who is a senior diplomat who asked not to be named to the sensitivity of the information for "Shafaq News" that "Iraq didn't comply with international sanctions imposed on Iran, which sparked resentment by a number of countries including the United States."

"Iraq is a country that is still stepping towards freedom from the terms of Chapter VII and not applying the international resolutions will affect these steps negatively."

"Iraq will lose a lot by continuing to support Iran and the international resolutions," the source added.

The Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari has urged on 14th of this month, with the acting U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Robert

Beecroft, the imposed sanctions on Iran, but the foreign ministry statement did not give details of this subject.

The EU countries and the United States have passed a law to impose economic and banking sanctions on Iran that also included stop importing Iranian oil.

The economic embargo on Iran aims to force it to halt its nuclear activities and prevent them from making nuclear weapons, while Iran says that it will not stop its nuclear program because it was originally intended for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3277-diplomatic-sources-reveal-iraqs-lack-of-commitment-with-international-sanctions-on-iran.html>

- **Hashemi: Iran controls Iraq**

Shafaq News / Vice President, Tareq al-Hashemi accused Iran of controlling Iraq, describing at the same time Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki as Iran's doll in Iraq."

Hashemi said in a statement briefed by "Shafaq News", that "the attempt to

target me and my reputation is not for sectarian reasons."



"This matter comes from Iran's insistence to control Iraq and as a result of my position based on Iraq's national interest at the expense of any other."

Hashemi has launched a sharp attack on what he called "Iran's doll in Iraq" referring to the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki.

He said that Maliki "does not hesitate to do anything in order to stay in power even at the expense of the dignity and the blood of Iraqis."

Tareq al-Hashemi lives in Turkey after the Iraqi judiciary has issued charges against him related to supporting the activities of armed groups and the involvement of his bodyguards of killings Iraqi officials.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3276-hashemi-iran-controls-iraq-.html>

- **Defense ministry reveals smuggling of weapons to Kurdistan**

Shafaq News / The parliamentary security and defense committee revealed on Wednesday, the existence of "organized smuggling" of weapons from the central and southern provinces to Kurdistan Syria, accusing the neighboring countries of being behind that by supporting with huge amount of money.

The member of the committee, Hakem al-Zamili told "Shafaq News" that there is an organized movement in central and southern areas of Iraq and Baghdad is collecting weapons and transferring it to Kurdistan, Diyala (northeast) Anbar (west) and Saladin (North West)."

Zamili did not name the party responsible for the smuggling, but he said that "a portion of these weapons are smuggled into Syria, without specifying who receive it.



"one of the neighboring countries is paying large sums to money to buy these weapons and he did not specify that State also".

He called on security agencies to "be vigilant against weapons traffickers so that Iraq won't be a root for weapons to the neighboring countries."

Zamili added that "This process will offload some of the provinces from weapons and arm other provinces."

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3275-defense-ministry-reveals-smuggling-of-weapons-to-kurdistan.html>

- **Kurdish MPs Struggle for Influence in Iraqi Parliament**

SULAIMANI, Kurdistan Region—A lawmaker from the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) admits that Kurdish MPs have not been very active in Iraqi Parliament.

“The MPs before us were inactive, however we are worse,” Bakir Sidiq said, adding that the unresolved issues between Baghdad and Erbil are likely to blame.

Many issues, including the implementation of Article 140 addressing the disputed territories, oil and gas legislation, the Peshmerga and annual budget still remain unresolved between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the central government.

The only thing that all Kurdish MPs in Iraqi Parliament seem to agree on is their lack of effort toward resolving the issues.

Sheikh Latif, an MP from the Change Movement (Gorran) in Iraqi Parliament, maintains that Kurdish MPs have not achieved anything for the Kurdish people.

“We have done better this round,” he said. “Although we have not passed any laws significant to Kurdish interests, we also haven’t allowed any law to be passed that is against Kurdish interests.”

The only achievement Kurdish MPs from the previous round can be proud of is finalizing the budget issue so that the Kurdistan Region receives a 17 percent share of Iraq’s total budget.

Muyad Taib, the spokesperson for the Kurdistan Alliance, believes current Kurdish MPs are more active in pushing issues to discussion.

“Currently, all the issues we are dealing with were inherited from the previous round. Since then, the issues have gotten worse, which led to escalating tensions between Baghdad and Erbil,” he said.

Taib added, “The only change in parliament is that the divisions among the Iraqiya bloc have allowed the Shia factions to become stronger and more united.”

Sidiq said that, unlike the Shia factions, the Kurdish blocs have become more distant. “The relationship between the Kurdish factions is poor and this has led to failure on our part.”

He added, “Kurdish MPs must unite their voice in order to compel Baghdad to resolve its issues with the KRG.”

Mahmood Osman, an independent Kurdish MP who has served in both parliamentary terms, believes that, following the establishment of the Kurdistan Negotiation Assembly, the relationship between the Kurdish factions in Iraqi Parliament will become stronger.

However, Osman added, “The drafted laws backed by Kurds have been facing tough opposition in this parliamentary term.”

A committee that would follow up the implementation of Article 140 was hoped to be established in this parliamentary round.

Osman says, “The committee has not yet been established as the Iraqiya bloc opposes the appointment of a Kurd as chair of the committee. There is no point in establishing such a committee without having a Kurd at the head of it.”



Latif said that only two laws were passed in the previous round and they were not in the interest of the Kurds. The first was Article 23 of the provincial councils, which reverses Article 140 and stipulates each ethnicity in Kirkuk must have 23 percent representation. The second was the farmland law for the disputed territories, which cost the Kurds and Turkmen a million acres of land.

He added, “At least we didn’t allow something like that to happen in this round.”

Azad Hussein, an MP from the Kurdistan Alliance in Iraqi Parliament, believes Kurdish MPs from the previous term were more united in addressing issues.

“The domestic issues in the Kurdistan Region have now affected the relationships between Kurdish MPs in Baghdad,” he said.

Hussein added, “In addition, the balance of power has changed in parliament now; the Shia factions are stronger and the Sunnis are attempting to gain more power.”

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/5093.html>

2. IRAN

- **Iran, Tunisia Review Latest Regional Developments**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian and Tunisian officials in a meeting in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, discussed the latest developments in the region and the Muslim world, specially in Syria.



Ahmadinejad and his Tunisian counterpart Muhammad Moncef al-Marzouki, who are both in Mecca to attend the 4th extraordinary summit of member states of

Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), met on the sidelines of the meeting.

After the victory of Tunisian revolution in July 14, 2011, this is the most important meeting between the highest officials of both countries.

Tunisian official news agency said that the two presidents discussed bilateral ties, unity among Islamic world nations in defending Muslims and their sanctities as well as issue of 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.

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

The US and its western and regional allies have long sought to topple Bashar al-Assad and his ruling system. Media reports said that the Syrian rebels and terrorist groups have received significantly more and better weapons in recent weeks, a crime paid for by the Persian Gulf Arab states and coordinated by the United States.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104254185>

- **Diplomat Raps UNSC for Biased Attitude towards Iran's N. Dossier**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior Iranian diplomat lashed out at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for referring Iran's nuclear dossier to the UN Security Council, and criticized the council's biased attitude in approving anti-Iran resolutions.

In an article on Tuesday, Tehran's Ambassador to Paris Ali Ahani underlined Iran's rights to develop and use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes as an independent country which is committed to and fully observes the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).



Iran strongly believes that the resolutions issued by the IAEA Board of Governors and referring Iran's nuclear case to the UNSC were "erroneous, illegal and unjustifiable", Ahani underscored.

The diplomat said the UN Security Council has been issuing anti-Iran resolutions since 2006 which are politically-motivated, illegal and irrational.

He added that referring Iran's nuclear case to the UN Security Council was done through violation of the charter of the IAEA.

He said the numerous IAEA reports on Iran's nuclear program never mentioned any cases of "violations" or "deviations" by Tehran. Therefore, the interference of the UNSC in the issue is absolutely against the IAEA charter and regulations.

The Iranian ambassador noted that the resolutions issued by the UNSC against

Iran violate a number of basic rights of the Iranian nation including the right for development, to natural resources and determining its own destiny.

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104254163>

- **Commander: Sanctions Boost Iranian Nation's Resistance**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The West's sanctions scenario against Iran has backfired since it has enhanced the Iranian nation's resistance against enemies, a senior Iranian military commander stressed on Tuesday.

"Despite the high hopes of the hegemonic states, the US in particular, the scenario of sanctions and exertion of pressure on Iran has not only failed to yield a result but also acted as a factor which has boosted the Iranian nation's resistance and persistence against the enemies of the revolution and the Islamic ruling system," Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces for Basij and Defense Culture Brigadier General Massoud Jazayeri said.

He said the Iranian nation's resistance against enemies has turned threats against the country to opportunities.

Jazayeri further called for nationwide vigilance and preparedness against enemy plots, and cautioned "today, the US and its European and non-European allies' confrontation against Iran has entered the phase of all-out economic war" on Iran, which he said aims to make the Iranian nation disparate through increasing pressures.

In July, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei played down the western allegations about the impacts of the recent embargos on Iranian economy, and said long years of

western pressures have vaccinated Iranians against sanctions.

Addressing a group of Muslim women here in Tehran at the time, Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to the West's non-stop plots against Iran all throughout the last 33 years after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, and stressed despite all animosities and such hostile moves, enemies of Islam and Iran have failed in their conspiracies.

"These days, the westerners are making hues and cries about sanctions but they do not understand that they themselves have vaccinated the Iranian nation against any sanction with the embargos (that they have imposed) in the last 30 years," the Leader underscored.



"In the last three decades, the Iranian nation has stood against all plots and sanctions... and made progress in a way

that today we are 100 times stronger than 30 years ago," the Leader stressed.

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

Political observers believe that the United States has remained at loggerheads with Iran mainly over the independent and home-grown nature of Tehran's nuclear technology, which gives the Islamic Republic the potential to turn into a world power and a role model for the other third-world countries. Washington has laid much pressure on Iran to make it give up the most sensitive and advanced part of the technology, which is uranium enrichment, a process used for producing nuclear fuel for power plants.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104254141>

- **Participation in OIC Meeting Shows Iran's Serious Intention to Settle Regional Crises**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior Iranian diplomat reiterated on Tuesday that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's participation in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) conference in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, displays that Tehran is seriously resolved to help settle the regional crises.

"President Ahmadinejad's presence at the conference shows our serious will and intention to solve the regional crises peacefully," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast told reporters in Tehran today.



He further cited "the need gravely felt for unity in the Muslim world, the close views of the regional countries, the enemy plots

in the region which are aimed at destroying and weakening the Islamic countries, and the Muslim nations' ability to move independently as well as resistance against the Zionist regime's aggressions as the most important motivations which can make this conference successful".

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.

"By attending the summit, we will express our viewpoints and try to bridge the gaps and narrow the differences through dialog," the Iranian foreign 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 would also 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=9104254139>

- **Minister: Iran's Reliance on Oil Income Declining**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade Mehdi Qazanfari hailed the country's decreasing reliance on oil revenues, saying that Iran is now paying for a major part of its imports by using non-oil sources of revenue.

"Based on the statistics of the custom office ... during the first 4 months of the current (Iranian) year (started on March 20-July 20), 70% of payments for imports have been made by the foreign currency earned through non-oil exports," Qazanfari stated on Tuesday, adding that the figure will stand at 60% if gas condensate revenues are excluded.

"That means less reliance on the financial resources gained through crude sales for imports," the minister noted.

In July, Iranian First Vice-President Mohammad Reza Rahimi downplayed the impacts of the West's oil embargo against Iran, and stressed that the country's economy is large enough to withstand and digest pressures.

Speaking at a ceremony to officially announce the volume of foreign investment in Iran, Rahimi pointed to the recent ban on Iranian oil supplies by the European Union, and stated, "The size of Iran's economy has increased up to more than one thousand billion dollars and only 10% of Iran's economy relies on oil."

"At a time when only 10 percent of our economy depends on oil revenues, sanctions against oil would cause self-sufficiency and growth in our domestic production capacity, if they happen at all," Rahimi underscored.



Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every

member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104254137>

- **Russia calls new U.S. sanctions on Iran 'overt blackmail'**

Russia sharply criticized new U.S. sanctions against Iran on Monday, saying the measures to punish banks, insurance companies and shippers assisting Iran's oil

sales would harm Moscow's ties with Washington if Russian firms are affected.

Russia, which has long opposed sanctions beyond those approved by the UN Security Council to pressure Tehran over its nuclear program, called the measures "overt blackmail" and a "crude contradiction of international law."

The United States ceased most trade with Iran in 1996, when Congress passed The Iran and Libya Sanctions Act, after heavy lobbying by AIPAC. Since then it has put increasing pressure on other countries to reduce their business with the Islamic Republic.

"We are talking about restrictive measures not only against Iran but also affecting foreign companies and individuals working with it, including in the hydrocarbon extraction and transport, petrochemicals, finance and insurance industries," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

"We consider efforts to ... impose internal American legislation on the entire world completely unacceptable," it said. "We reject methods of overt blackmail that the

United States resorts to in relation to the companies and banks of other countries."

"Those in Washington should take into account that our bilateral relations will suffer seriously if Russian operators ... come under the effects of the American restrictions," the ministry said.

The West has put unprecedented pressure on Iran for its nuclear program.

However, Iran, as a signatory for the Non-Proliferation Treaty, has the right to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Iran's enrichment processes are monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1673608>

- **Iran opposes suspending Syria from OIC**

TEHRAN, Aug. 14 (MNA) – Tehran opposes a suspension of Syria's membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said on Monday.

The remarks by Salehi came one day before the OIC leaders hold an emergency meeting in Mecca to discuss issues facing the Islamic world.

"I'm openly against the suspension of the membership of any country, any organization," Salehi told reporters in Jeddah.

"By suspending the membership, this does not mean you are moving towards resolving an issue. By this, you are erasing the issue," Salehi said in reference to the 17-month conflict in Syria.

"Every country, especially OIC countries must join hands to resolve this issue in such a way that will help the peace, security and stability in the region," AFP quoted Salehi as saying.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1673248>

- **Iraq ready to host next Iran-P5 +1 talks: Ambassador**

Representatives of the P5+1 group of six major world powers and the Iranian negotiating team attend a meeting in the

Russian capital city of Moscow on June 18, 2012.

Representatives of the P5+1 group of six major world powers and the Iranian negotiating team attend a meeting in the Russian capital city of Moscow on June 18, 2012. Iraqi Ambassador to Tehran Mohammed Majeed al-Sheikh

Representatives of the P5+1 group of six major world powers and the Iranian negotiating team attend a meeting in the Russian capital city of Moscow on June 18, 2012.

Iraqi Ambassador to Tehran Mohammed Majeed al-Sheikh says Baghdad is ready to host the next round of multifaceted talks between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany.

Sheikh said negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group -- China, Russia, Britain, France, the US and Germany - were among the topics recently discussed between Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili and senior Iraqi officials in Baghdad.



He described Iraq as a pacific state, adding that Baghdad has voiced its full preparedness to host Iran-P5+1 talks ever since Tehran expressed willingness to have Iraq as a venue for negotiations between the two sides.

Sheikh highlighted that Baghdad did it utmost to ensure the success of May talks even though certain countries were opposed to such progress.

In a telephone conversation with EU foreign policy Chief Catherine Ashton on August 2, Jalili called on the P5+1 group to provide a clear response to the ideas put forward by Tehran in the negotiations.

The meeting between Ali Baqeri and Helga Schmid was held three weeks after Iran and the P5+1 had an expert-level meeting in the Turkish city of Istanbul on July 3 with the participation of representatives and experts from both sides.

The two sides had agreed to hold the expert-level talks during their negotiations in the Russian capital, Moscow, in June.

The Moscow meetings came after three sessions of plenary talks in Baghdad in May and an earlier round of negotiations in Istanbul in mid-April.

The two sides had, prior to the Istanbul talks, held two rounds of negotiations, one in Geneva, Switzerland, in December 2010, and another again in Istanbul in January 2012.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/08/14/256248/iraq-ready-to-host-next-iran51-talks/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Panetta: No Israeli decision yet on attacking Iran**

US defense secretary says there is still time for sanctions; Lipkin-Shahak adds his voice to choir against military action.

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said on Tuesday that he did not believe that Israel had made a decision on whether to

attack Iran over its nuclear program, and added that he thought there was still time for a stronger sanctions push.

Panetta's comments came at a Pentagon briefing against the background of the very loud and public debate in Israel about whether to attack Iran.

Panetta held a round of talks in Israel two weeks ago, and met with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

Just a few days before his arrival, Netanyahu said in a television interview that he had not yet decided whether to attack Iran. He did make clear, however, that neither diplomacy nor sanctions were working.

Asked about comments by Israeli officials, Panetta said, "I don't believe they've made a decision as to whether or not they will go in and attack Iran at this time."

"With regards to the issue of where we're at from a diplomatic point of view, the reality is that we still think there is room to continue to negotiate," he said.

Tehran says its nuclear ambitions are peaceful and has threatened wide-ranging reprisals if attacked. A muscular response from Tehran would increase the likelihood that the United States would be drawn into any conflict.

Israel's financial markets fell sharply on Monday in response to the intensifying debate on the prospect of going to war with Iran, although some of those losses were recovered on Tuesday.

Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the US military's Joint Chiefs of Staff, cautioned that any Israeli strike would not destroy Iran's nuclear program, only delay its work.

"I may not know about all of their capabilities but I think that it's a fair characterization to say that they could delay but not destroy Iran's nuclear capabilities," he said.

Regardless, the media has been awash over the last week in a public debate over the issue, reaching the point where analysts have begun speculating about the conclusions from a future committee of inquiry into the attack and ensuing war.

This debate – as well as the well-publicized disagreement between Israel and the US over whether military action should be taken before Tehran has all the ingredients for a bomb, or whether it should be held off until the Islamic Republic actually makes the decision to assemble the bomb – has not been lost on Iran.

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

The conclusions the Iranians have drawn from the debates, at least judging from remarks made Tuesday by Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast, is that no attack is imminent.

"Even if some officials in the illegitimate regime [Israel] want to carry out such a stupid action, there are those inside [the Israeli government] who won't allow it because they know they would suffer very severe consequences from such an act," he was quoted by the AFP as telling reporters at a weekly briefing on Tuesday.

“In our calculations, we aren’t taking these claims very seriously because we see them as hollow and baseless,” he said.

He also reportedly said that Israel is only talking about an attack because of domestic problems, such as the economic protests. Israel Radio reported that Iranian leaders are convinced that Israel will not act without US backing, and that as long as Washington is indicating that they do not currently support such a move, there is no reason for undue concern.

Netanyahu, in a statement he made alongside Panetta earlier this month, foresaw this attitude, and said that despite forceful statements by the US and Israel, Iran is not convinced “that we are serious about stopping them.”



“Right now, the Iranian regime believes that the international community does not have the will to stop its nuclear program.

This must change and it must change quickly, because time to resolve this issue peacefully is running out,” Netanyahu continued.

Meanwhile, former chief of staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak added his voice to the numerous former security heads openly discussing the matter and advising against an attack.

“I assume that the decision-makers have the same information that is in the hands of the heads of the security establishment,” he said.

“I ask myself how the security officials and the politicians can arrive at such different conclusions. I completely trust the security establishment officials and give a great deal of weight to their opinions.”

Lipkin-Shahak, speaking at a ceremony marking 20 years since the beginning of the second Rabin government, also said he believes the Americans when they say that they will not let Iran get a nuclear weapon. He decried what he said was the failure of the political echelon to have the same intimacy now with Washington enjoyed by the military and intelligence

communities. He also said there was no rush to attack Iran, as some in the media have speculated, before the November elections in the US.

“It is not right to present this as something that has to happen in the autumn,” he said.

<http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=281254>

- **IEC may cut W. Bank power over Palestinian debt**

The Israel Electric Corporation has warned that it may perform intermittent West Bank power supply cuts due to NIS 662-million worth of unpaid debts from Palestinian electricity users.

Hisham Omari, CEO of the Jerusalem District Electricity Company (JDECO), said he received a letter from the IEC early on Tuesday afternoon, noting that his company alone owes the Israeli firm NIS 423 million.

Should the Palestinian energy supplier not comply, the IEC would implement scattered, temporary outages in areas within JDECO’s jurisdiction – such as east

Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Jericho – as well as freeze the company’s assets in Jerusalem, Omari told The Jerusalem Post on Tuesday.

In addition, if the areas need an increased electricity supply or new, expanded transmission lines, the IEC would reject any such request, he explained, quoting the letter.

“Every year, we have an increase in consumption of 5- 10 percent, so we ask the Israeli company to increase its connections with us,” Omari said.

While NIS 432 million of the total NIS 662 million in debt comes from within JDECO’s supply region, the remaining NIS 239 million is from a combination of the Gaza Strip and areas in the northern and southern West Bank that fall outside JDECO’s realm and should come directly from the Palestinian Authority, an IEC spokeswoman told the Post.

For his company’s enormous debt, Omari largely blames both refugee camp residents who refuse to pay their electricity bills and government bodies that have likewise faltered on payments.

Within JDECO's jurisdiction, there are about 12 refugee camps. Only about 5% of the residents of these camps actually pay their electricity bills, however, and "there is a big amount of electricity theft there and also in the villages," according to Omari.

Electricity theft is particularly rampant in villages within Area C, where no Palestinian police force exists to patrol burglar activity, he explained.

Meanwhile, the PA itself owes JDECO NIS 120 million for electricity bills in various government buildings, schools, hospitals and water-pumping stations that it has failed to pay.

"They suffer financially – they are not in good shape," Omari said. "Even this month, they are only paying 60% of the salaries to their employees. This means that all employees might not be able to pay electricity bills."

Not only are the government bodies themselves not able to fulfill their financial obligations to JDECO, but the employees who work for them – now receiving fewer

funds themselves – are also struggling to pay the bills in their own homes.

Aiming to solve the escalating financial quandary, on Monday night Palestinian Energy Authority chairman Omar Kittaneh spoke with IEC CEO Eli Glickman, who agreed to postpone all legal procedures surrounding the situation for two weeks, according to Omari. During this time period, however, the PA must figure out how a certain sum of money will be transferred to the IEC. After the two weeks, the parties will meet to determine exactly how to go about fixing the monthly payments in the future, Omari said.

The NIS 239-million debt that is outside JEDCO's jurisdiction presents perhaps an even more complex challenge.

According to economic agreements between Israel and the PA, any income tax that Israel collects each month on behalf of the PA is supposed to be transferred to the authority at the end of that month, Omari explained.

Before transferring the total, though, Israel deducts allocations for electricity,

water, treatment in Israeli hospitals and other Israeli services from the total it provides to the PA each month.

Monthly, the Israeli government transfers approximately NIS 55 million of this deduction to the IEC for Gazan and northern and southern West Bank electricity allowances, Omari said. Therefore, the residents themselves in these regions are never actually directly paying for their electricity use. In Gaza, while the Hamas government does also collect electricity bill fees from its citizens, the government uses the money for its own purposes rather than sending it to the PA Energy Authority, he explained. The entire Gaza Strip therefore essentially receives electricity “free of charge,” he said.

The JDECO region is exempt from these tax rules because the company – established by the Greek in 1914 – officially resides in both Jerusalem and Ramallah, Omari said, and therefore falls in both PA and Israeli jurisdictions. While JDECO cannot legally expand its jurisdiction, the PA has already begun creating new electricity companies to

operate in the northern and southern West Bank, he added.



As far as bridging the financial gaps with the IEC goes, Omari said he holds the PA government predominantly responsible.

“If the Palestinian Authority will not transfer money, [the IEC is] serious in its letter, and maybe after two weeks we will see the electricity cut,” Omari said. “Hopefully, the PA will take the matter seriously.”

In response to the situation, the IEC reiterated to the Post that the combined debt of JDECO and the PA stands at over NIS 600 million.

“Regarding the financial condition of IEC, it cannot ignore such debts and therefore the company’s CEO has requested to examine all options in order to collect the debt,” an IEC spokeswoman said.

“So far no decision was made on the disconnections, but this is one of the options being considered.”

Numerous attempts by the Post throughout the day to reach the Palestinian Energy Authority chairman for comment went unanswered.

<http://www.ipost.com/Sci-Tech/Article.aspx?id=281267>

- **Palestinians being drawn into Syria fight**

BERLIN (IRIN) -- When mortar shells slammed into Yarmouk, Syria's largest Palestinian camp, in early August, killing at least 20 people, many Palestinians in Syria saw it as a wake-up call.

"It was the third time Yarmouk was attacked, but the casualty number has never been so high," said a Palestinian activist who gave his name as Moh Abu Eyad. "The problem is that Yarmouk is so crowded. If you fire one bullet, you'll hit three people."

As fighting in Syria intensifies, those trying to stay out of the conflict are increasingly

getting caught in the crossfire. Many of the country's half-million Palestinians say they may not be able to keep their camps from getting engulfed in the violence.

Seen as collective punishment

Yarmouk, a poor, dense area in the Syrian capital Damascus, is home to 150,000 Palestinians. It is wedged between the districts Tadamon, Yalda, Hajar al-Aswad and Kadam, all of which have seen heavy clashes since the rebel Free Syrian Army advanced into the capital about a month ago. As the conflict drew closer and thousands of displaced families took shelter in Yarmouk, fighting began spilling into the camp.

The FSA has repeatedly infiltrated Yarmouk to ambush checkpoints, and regime forces shelled the Palestine Hospital twice in the week preceding the mortar assault, residents and activists in Yarmouk said.

The number of Palestinians killed has been rising dramatically, said Ammar Hassan, who runs a Palestinian human rights organization in Yarmouk. "250 Palestinians have died during the uprising, half of them

in the last four weeks," he said. "I think the mortar attack was a message from the regime: 'You have to keep quiet because we can shell you any time.'"

The regime and rebels blame each other for the mortar attack, but many Palestinians see it as collective punishment by the regime for providing humanitarian aid to rebel sympathizers. The number of the displaced accommodated in the camp's schools and homes has reached 20,000, according to local activists, and wounded Syrians from nearby rebel strongholds have been brought to the Palestine Hospital for medical treatment.

"We opened our camp to those trying to escape the violence," said Jafra, an activist who fled Yarmouk to an Arab Gulf country a month ago. "This has made the authorities very angry with us."

Struggle to remain neutral

Since the start of the uprising against the government of Bashar Assad last year, the Palestinians have struggled to remain neutral - a stance that is far from unanimous. "Most young people support

the revolution," said the activist Abu Eyad, "but the older generation, which dominates the political parties, says we should not take sides because we may end up getting killed or become refugees again."

The Palestinians in Syria are descendants of those displaced during the 1948 creation of Israel or during later wars in the Middle East. The mortar attack has highlighted the precarious situation of their community, which has more civil rights in Syria than in other Arab countries. For example, they can hold government jobs, own property and attend state universities for free.

As the protests against the government morphed into violent clashes, impartiality became harder to maintain. There are signs that the military violence has pushed Palestinian allegiances further toward the rebels, with demonstrations in Yarmouk increasing since 10 protesters were killed by regime forces on 13 July, Palestinian activists say. "Since that day, we have understood very well that staying on the sidelines is no longer an option," Hassan said.



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"By taking a neutral position, Palestinians have not found safety," said Hilal Khashan, a political science professor at the American University of Beirut. "Instead, they have drawn the wrath of the regime and of the opposition."

The issue is particularly sensitive because the Assad regime has portrayed itself as a champion for Palestinian rights.

"There is very little doubt that Assad has lost the hearts and minds of the Palestinians," said Jonathan Schanzer, political analyst at the US-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies and author of the book Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine. There are reports that some Palestinian have joined the FSA, but their numbers and motivations are unclear, Schanzer said.

Meanwhile, the Palestinians face growing hostility from the regime and rebels alike. In February, Hamas broke its alliance with the Syrian regime, endorsing the uprising. In late June, the body of Hamas operative Kamal Ghanaja was found in his Damascus home, bearing marks of torture. In mid-July, 16 conscripts in the Palestine Liberation Army, the Palestinian unit of the state army, were reportedly kidnapped and killed near the city of Aleppo. The details of both incidents remain murky.

Support for the regime

Not all the Palestinian parties have shifted their alliances. The PLO, the official representative of the Palestinian people, has condemned the attack on Yarmouk but insists that the Palestinian position is to not interfere in Syria. Other parties, especially the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, the largest Palestinian organization in Syria, which is listed as a terror group in the US, support the regime.

"The PFLP-GC has given out machine guns to guys who are now patrolling the streets," said Hassan. "They help the

Syrian security forces to suppress demonstrations. They carry out raids and arrest people, handing them over to intelligence branches afterwards."

By siding with the regime, the PFLP-GC is increasing tensions within the camp. "The youth of Yarmouk want to fight the regime alongside with the Syrians, but our political leadership refuses to take a position," said Jafra, the activist from Yarmouk. "They say they are there to protect the camp, but in reality, everybody knows they are executing the orders of the regime. They are using our own parties against us."

The impact of heightened Palestinian involvement could reach well beyond the camps in Syria. "In all likelihood, the Palestinians will remain divided, with some joining the fight, some on the other hand not joining, and we will see many of them run for the borders," Schanzer said.

An exodus of refugees, he argued, could cause spill-over instability in neighboring Jordan and Lebanon. Lebanon's Palestinian camps are considered notoriously volatile, and Jordanians are already resentful of Palestinians, who

make up 80 percent of the population. "The Jordanians and the Lebanese are nervous," he said. "It looked worrying from their perspective to begin with, and now the situation is becoming more and more complicated."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=512595>

- **Egypt Opens Rafah Border Crossing with Gaza**

CAIRO, August 14, 2012 (Wafa) – Egypt Tuesday opened Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip allowing people to travel in and out of Gaza, according to a border official.

He said the border was open to patients, Palestinians returning to the Gaza Strip after performing the Umra ritual, a mini-pilgrimage to Mecca performed by Muslims and can be undertaken at anytime of the year, and others.

Egypt closed Rafah crossing after an attack on an Egyptian border security checkpoint in Sinai that killed 16 Egyptian soldiers earlier this month.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20465>

- **Israel Singlehandedly Destroying Two-State Solution, says PLO Official**

JERUSALEM, August 14, 2012 (Wafa) – Israel is singlehandedly destroying the two-state solution with its expansionist settlement policy in and around Jerusalem, Monday said Hanan Ashrawi, a lawmaker and member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Speaking to diplomatic representatives and journalists at an iftar (end of fast meal) held in Jerusalem, Ashrawi lashed out at Israel's policy in occupied East Jerusalem saying it contravenes international law.

"With its legislation of illegal laws that contravene international law, Israel is alienating Jerusalem, the center of Palestinian life, from its environs and indigenous people," she said.

"The evacuation and transformation of the occupied city's geography, culture, heritage and institutions are taking place internally and externally, and the

extremist Israeli government is carrying out a policy of ethnic cleansing, not just with the confiscation of IDs but also with its racist marriage and reunion laws, whereby families are divided and unable to live together in Jerusalem," she added.

"Israel is singlehandedly destroying the two-state solution with the continuation of its expansionist settlement policies in and around Jerusalem, the confiscation of Palestinian land, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the eviction of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, and the closure of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem," she said.

"All of these illegal actions are in direct violation of signed agreements and international conventions."

The PLO official said that "without Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, there will be no Palestinian state, and without a Palestinian state, there will be no peace or stability in the region."

She appealed to the international community to support the Palestinian bid for statehood and to intervene in Israeli

measures that are destroying all chances for peace and stability.

“In light of the failed peace process and the inability of the international community to hold Israel accountable for its illegal occupation of Palestine and its countless unilateral violations of international and humanitarian law, Palestinians will persist in their efforts to seek state status, whether in the UN Security Council or in the UN General Assembly,” she said.

“We reserve the right to undertake diplomatic and nonviolent means to approach UN agencies and organizations for membership, and such efforts, consistent with the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination and freedom, are a test of global consensus and rule of law. Even though the timing has yet to be determined, we are coordinating our efforts with Arab and Muslim countries, as well as with the international community,” she added.

“It is of the utmost importance for the international community to rescue Palestine from the jaws of Israeli unilateralism and to possess the political

will to adopt tangible measures to put an immediate end to the military occupation of Palestine and the Palestinian people,” concluded Ashrawi.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20464>

- **Obama aide: US must take Israeli threat very seriously**

Colin Kahl who once served as US deputy assistant secretary of defense says he does not believe Netanyahu, Barak bluffing adds they are preparing Israeli public for military strike

Until the end of 2011, Colin Kahl served as US deputy assistant secretary of defense, visiting Israel 13 times during the two years of his term. Now he serves as US President Barack Obama's campaign advisor and no longer takes part in Pentagon defense meetings yet he still believes the US needs to take Israel's threat to carry out a military strike against Iran "very seriously."

In an interview to Al-Monitor Kahl, a Georgetown University professor, said he did not believe that Netanyahu and Barak were bluffing in order to make the

"international community act — meaning pressuring us and the Europeans to increase sanctions, the Russians and Chinese to push Tehran; and or force a near-term US attack."

"I think the threat should be taken very seriously," he said.

Kahl went on to explain his stance: "First, US and European sanctions have nearly maxed out. So what additional benefit does the saber-rattling produce here?

"Second, the P5+1 process is on hold for the moment and a major breakthrough on the accelerated timeline envisioned by the Israelis is unlikely. Not to mention the fact that some Israeli decision-makers seem skeptical of the benefits of diplomacy, period.

"Third, despite the saber-rattling, the Iranians don't fear an Israeli strike (although they might fear a US strike). So Tehran isn't likely to make a concession in the near-term just because of an Israeli threat."

Kahl added "Finally, the Israelis would seem to know that the prospect of a US

strike before the (US presidential) election is very low, regardless of their posture.

"This is not primarily for political reasons, as some suggest, but because Iran is not likely to cross US red lines this year. So the prospect of an Israeli attack is unlikely to drive Obama to war before November."

Kahl stressed that he believed it was more likely that "Israeli leaders are preparing the Israeli public for a strike, and creating a narrative for the international community that diplomacy and sanctions have failed and thus Israel has no choice."

'Netanyahu, Barak on an Island'

Kahl then told the AI-Monitor why he believed the Iranians were not taking the Israeli threat seriously, noting that it stemmed from the 'Chicken Little' problem: "Viewed from Tehran, the Israelis have said the sky is falling so many times that even if it really is falling this time, nobody believes them.

"The threat has been made so many times, the Iranians are probably inoculated. Second, I think that there is likely a view among the Iranian leadership

that an Israeli strike may not be that bad. They think it will not hurt them that badly.

"And they probably think it would allow them to play the victim, shatter international consensus holding sanctions together, rally the Iranian public behind the regime, and provide them with an excuse to accelerate their weaponization program."

Kahl also analyzed the balance of power in the upper echelons of Israeli politics claiming that reporting of the situation was consistent in two respects: "It suggests that Netanyahu and Barak are kind of on an island arguing for a strike in the near term.

"At the same time, the conventional wisdom is that their views are the only two that matter. If they decide to move forward, the rest of the government and military will likely line up behind them."

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4268745,00.html>

- **Mimicking al-Qaeda, militant threat grows in Sinai**

Terrorists gain foothold in troubled peninsula, employing toxic mix of smuggling, gun-running and human trafficking

They came in Toyota pick-up trucks, dozens of heavily armed masked men, firing machine guns and waving the black flag of al-Qaeda as terrified residents and police huddled indoors, and then disappeared again, melting away into the mountains and remote villages of Egypt's Sinai desert.

The raid on the town of al-Arish in July 2011 was the first warning Egypt had of the strength of the jihadis in north Sinai. It was a warning largely unheeded until suspected Islamist militants killed 16 Egyptian border guards this month and drove a stolen armored car across the Israeli border before it was destroyed by the IDF.

Egypt is now pouring in troops to try to restore stability, and the sophistication of the border attack has finally set alarm bells ringing about the militant threat in the Sinai.

"Sinai is ideal and fertile ground for al-Qaeda," said Khalil al-Anani, a Middle East specialist at Durham University in England. "It could become a new front for al-Qaeda in the Arab world."

Diplomats and analysts say there is no evidence as yet of formal links between al-Qaeda and the Sinai militants – made up of Bedouin aggrieved at their treatment by Cairo, Egyptians who escaped prisons during last year's uprising against Hosni Mubarak, and Palestinians from neighboring Gaza.

They blend a toxic mix of smuggling, gun-running and human trafficking with the "takfiri" ideology of al-Qaeda – which declares all Muslims who do not follow their purist, Salafist interpretation of Islam as "kafirs" – infidels. Crime and religion are soldered by ferocious opposition to Israel.

"The Sinai has become a base for all kinds of extremist groups," Yitzhak Levanon, former Israeli ambassador to Egypt, told Reuters. "Their overarching objective is to hurt us, to expel us, to set up a caliphate and shock the Middle East."

And they pose a serious threat not just to Israel, but, perhaps more importantly, to Egypt.

Any attack on Israel that provoked Israeli retaliation could upset a peace treaty signed with Egypt in 1979 and put huge pressure on new Islamist President Mohammed Morsi. Or militants could turn west to attack the Suez Canal.

"It is much easier for these fundamentalist Bedouin groups inspired by extreme Salafi/Qaeda-like doctrine to attack ships in the Suez Canal than to mount an operation on the Israeli border," said Ehud Yaari, an Israel-based fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

The Sinai region, handed over to Egypt by Israel under the terms of their US-brokered peace accord, has long been neglected by Cairo, leaving room for crime to flourish.

But residents in al-Arish, the administrative center of north Sinai on the Mediterranean coast, said they realised the threat had become much more serious when their town was raided on July 29 last year.

"They looked like trained groups, not the normal thugs we see," said one shopkeeper, who like other residents was afraid to be named for fear of retribution.

Waving copies of the Koran and the flag of al-Qaeda – recognizable by the white Arabic lettering declaring faith in Islam superimposed on black to signify jihad – they spread out across the town and took up positions on rooftops.

At the police station nearby, terrified security forces barricaded themselves inside, while the gunmen shot at anyone who ventured outside. "They had all kinds of weapons, including rocket-propelled-grenades," said another resident.

One had a Palestinian accent, said the shopkeeper, saying he heard him speaking over the phone saying that, "Our ammo is over and we don't know where we are."

Six died, including one of the gunmen, before Egyptian reinforcements arrived. "They ran away in all directions and nobody knows where they went," said the shopkeeper.

Pinning hopes on Morsi

The newly launched army operation – billed as the biggest offensive in the region since the 1973 war with Israel – has yet to make much of an impact, and may make things worse if heavy-handed tactics drive more youth into the arms of the militants.

"Sinai needs a comprehensive strategy: social, economic and political," said Durham University's Anani.

Some residents even expressed cautious optimism that Morsi – who sacked army chief Hussein Tantawi on Sunday might improve the situation by reining in the military, whose past crackdowns have helped militants attract fresh recruits.

It was unclear whether Tantawi's sidelining was linked to the attack on the border, although the deaths of the 16 Egyptian guards caused widespread public anger.

"There are some extremist ideas in Sinai but in my view, they don't require all this military mobilisation; there should have been a round of dialogue and tribal work," said Abdel Rahman al-Shorbagy, a

member of parliament for north Sinai representing the Freedom and Justice Party of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood allies. He estimated the numbers of militants in the sparsely populated desert region at between 1,000 and 1,500.

Mubarak built up tourist resorts in South Sinai that locals say mostly benefited Egyptians from the Nile Valley, and tried to impose an Egyptian administrative structure on north Sinai which undermined the authority of local Bedouin tribal elders.

Economic neglect forced people to seek work in the Gulf, and after Israel and Egypt imposed a blockade on Gaza in 2007, many made money smuggling arms and other supplies through tunnels into the enclave ruled by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas.

The situation worsened during the uprising when security forces often abandoned their posts; the fall of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi later that year brought an influx of weapons.

For Sinai youth, struggling to make a living, it was easy to be drawn into the

simple message of al-Qaeda – that only if Muslims return to the purist lifestyle of the Prophet Mohammed can they challenge the economic and political clout of the West.

"What brought this ideology is the marginalisation," says one resident. "If someone can't earn a living, he thinks the alternative is to be strict in worship."

In every village, three or four youths have disappeared to join the militants, sometimes inspired by al-Qaeda propaganda over the Internet, and sometimes by preachers in local mosques.

They often sever contact with their relatives, not even returning during the month of Ramadan when families gather together for the "iftar" meal which ends the day-long fast.

"We always have iftar together but they never come," said one villager who had two cousins who had joined the militants.

With a lack of roads, development and state control, the mountains and villages of north Sinai's vast desert hinterland are

nearly impenetrable, making it easy for militants to hide.

In the Jabal al-Halah mountain in central Sinai, they are believed to be so well dug in that nobody can touch them.

"The Bedouins call this place the Tora Bora of Sinai. The Egyptian authorities are extremely reluctant to go there," said Yaari, in a reference to the Afghan mountain hideout used by al-Qaeda after the United States overthrew the Taliban in 2001.

He said, without explaining how he knew, that the men behind the attack on the border had spent some time encamped there.

North Sinai is in some ways similar to the tribal areas of Pakistan, where al-Qaeda has dug deep roots. Both have been neglected by central government; both lie in the middle of wider political conflicts.

And the authority of tribal leaders in both has been diminished as money - from crime, Gulf remittances and state patronage - filtered into other hands -

making it easier for militants to promote unity in Islam over tribal loyalty.

"We are witnessing today the rise of these new Bedouin fundamentalists," said Yaari. "They are destroying the old tribal structures. They allow marriages between rival tribes and force women to wear the veil. This never happened before."

A particular fear is that militant Salafists in Gaza and Sinai are joining forces, creating an environment ripe for al-Qaeda were it to seek a base for use against Israel or the more moderate political Islam of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.



Already, according to one Arab diplomat in Islamabad, Egyptian members of al-Qaeda have begun to move back from Pakistan to take advantage of political changes at home.

As yet, however, the Sinai militants appear to be mimicking al-Qaeda rather than trying to establish formal links with the group whose leader Ayman al-Zawahri – who took over after Osama bin Laden was killed last year – is himself Egyptian.

Diplomats and experts in Gaza say Salafist leaders there speak of admiration for al-Qaeda but deny factional ties.

"Al-Qaeda is more interested in using Palestine as a tag for its global fight rather than have an actual base in Gaza or the West Bank," said one diplomat. "They believe a Palestinian group would have a more nationalist outlook."

Yaari said he believed the Bedouin jihadis were communicating with al-Qaeda in Yemen, and maybe also in north Africa. "But so far, although they are seeking recognition from al-Qaeda, they have not obtained it."

He also dismissed suggestions that foreign fighters might have played a big role in the border attack. "There are some foreigners in the Sinai, but they are more like hitchhikers," he said. "If it weren't for the

fact that so many are heading to Syria, we would see more in the Sinai."

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4268688,00.html>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **UN warns of 'imminent' attack on Somali Shebab bastion**

Top UN humanitarian aid official warns of impending assault on southern Somali port of Kismayo, stronghold of Shebab insurgents.

NAIROBI - The United Nations warned Tuesday of an impending assault on the southern Somali port of Kismayo, the largest remaining stronghold of the country's Al-Qaeda linked Shebab insurgents.

"Fighting for control of the town appears imminent," said Mark Bowden, the top UN humanitarian aid official for the war-torn nation, noting reports of recent naval artillery bombardment as well as air strikes.

African Union troops, Ethiopian forces and various Somali militia forces have wrested

a string of towns from the hardline Shebab, with the capture of Kismayo -- a crucial revenue source for the fighters -- seen as a key target.

Last week Shebab officials and residents said three civilians were killed by missile strikes on the port, reportedly by a naval barrage from an unidentified ship.

Several foreign navies operate anti-piracy patrols off the coast of the Horn of Africa nation, including European, US, Russian and Chinese forces.

Neighbouring Kenya has smaller vessels operating offshore from Kismayo, supporting its ground troops, who invaded southern Somalia last year, before joining the nearly 17,000-strong AU force.

"I am deeply concerned by recent reports of civilian casualties in Kismayo caused by naval gunfire and airstrikes," Bowden said.

"I reiterate my call for all parties to the conflict to make every effort to minimise the impact of conflict on civilians, and to allow full humanitarian access to all people in need," Bowden added in a statement.

The reports of the long-awaited assault come as the corruption-riddled government wraps up eight years of infighting, with a UN-backed selection process for new leaders due to be completed by an August 20 deadline.

Three Ugandan army helicopters en route to Somalia to support the AU force crashed in Kenya on Sunday leaving at least two soldiers dead.

The deployment would have greatly aided forces ahead of any assault on Kismayo.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53899>

- **Tunisia without constitution until April 2013: Political uncertainties rise**

New timetable looks likely to delay elections, aggravate political uncertainties already facing Tunisia, which has been rocked by social unrest in recent months.

Constitution in delay = More time in power for Islamists

Tunisia's new constitution will not be adopted until April 2013, six months later

than planned, the head of the drafting committee said on Monday, threatening to compound political uncertainties.

"The final draft of the constitution could be put to the vote (in the National Constituent Assembly) at the end of April," said Habib Khedher, a member of the ruling Islamist party Ennahda and MP in the interim parliament.

"I think that is a realistic target," Kheder said.

The government had until now insisted that it would meet the deadline of October 23 for ratifying the new constitution, in order to hold planned general elections in March next year.

The new timetable looks likely to delay those fresh elections and aggravate the political uncertainties already facing Tunisia, which has been rocked by social unrest in recent months.

The government's failure to improve living standards, as well as fears that a rising Islamist tide threatens personal freedoms, have led to strikes, protests and confrontations with the police.

Kheder declined to comment on when he now expected the elections to be held, saying that was "the responsibility of the government."

The constitution's revised timetable will be discussed at a meeting of the NCA on September 3, ahead of the next parliamentary session, he said.

Tunisia's main parties were given one year to draft a new constitution, after elections last October that brought Ennahda to power at the head of a coalition also grouping centre-left parties the Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol.

Opposition MPs were quick to criticise the new hitch to the democratic transition in Tunisia, 17 months after the revolution that overthrew veteran strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and touched off the Arab Spring.

"Can the country handle another such delay? Can Tunisia's fragile economy withstand another delay?" asked Issam Chebbi, MP and spokesman for the Republican Party.

"We will demand a law that fixes a date for the elections," he said, adding that "the longer the transition lasts, the more the chaos will spread."

The new constitution is due to replace the provisional laws that have governed Tunisia since the revolution, and allow fresh elections to take place.

But it has been heavily delayed due to an apparent deadlock over certain key issues, with the Islamists seeking a pure parliamentary system and the other parties wanting important powers to remain in the hands of the president.

The news of further setbacks comes amid heightened criticism of Ennahda by opposition and civil society groups, which accuse the ruling party of increasingly authoritarian and Islamist tendencies.

Another factor behind rising social discontent is the persistence of poor living conditions in certain parts of Tunisia, and high youth unemployment in particular, a key factor behind the revolution.

Explaining the delays to the timetable, Khader said the first version of the

constitution should have been presented to parliament at the end of last month, but was never completed, while the final draft should have been ready by October.

The six committees responsible for the six different chapters of the constitution have to submit each article individually for approval by MPs, who can make further amendments.

Only then can the text be adopted by parliament, where it requires a two-thirds majority. Failing this, the draft constitution would be put to a referendum.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53893>

- **Egypt and World Bank sign US\$200 million loan aimed at creating quarter million jobs**



Egyptian Cabinet ministers and World Bank officials have signed off on a US\$200 million project aimed at creating 250,000 jobs after more than a year of slow economic growth.

The World Bank says the investments will be spent on financing for job creation by improving the environment for private sector-led growth and education.

Egypt has been in an economic downturn since the popular uprising that brought down longtime President Hosni Mubarak last year.

Egypt and the World Bank agreed on the loan in late June and signed it in Cairo on Tuesday.

The World Bank says the loan is meant to encourage local community participation in projects to enhance water and sanitation, energy and reliable transportation, as well as social services like health, education and social welfare.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-and-world-bank-sign-us200-million-loan-aimed-creating-quarter-million-jobs>

[million-loan-aimed-creating-quarter-million-jobs](#)

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Mufti Qabbani: Future Movement officials should 'fear God'

Grand Mufti of the Lebanese Republic Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Qabbani said in remarks published Wednesday that some Future Movement officials should "fear God."

"Let the [Future Movement] officials fear God. I say this as an advice, not out of hatred," Qabbani told Al-Akhbar newspaper.

"[The Future Movement] audience is good... but [the movement's] officials are [being egotists]. The ego is what drove Lucifer out of heaven."

However, the top Sunni cleric said there was no current disagreement between him and the Future Movement, despite past disputes.

"The disagreement began when I took an administrative decision to stop tasking Akkar Sheikh Osama al-Rifai with issuing

fatwas pertaining to administrative issues. [Afterwards], a [Future bloc] MP came out and said: ‘Do not pray behind Mufti [Qabbani when he leads Muslim prayers],’ Qabbani said.

“[No matter how much] opinions diverge, [differences] should not lead to defamation. The Future Movement slandered Lebanon’s mufti a lot,” he added.

Asked about his relation with Lebanon’s Shiite group Hezbollah, Qabbani said: “I have good ties with everyone.”

Turning to the proportionality-based electoral draft law approved by the cabinet last week, Qabbani said: “I do not say that proportionality targets the Sunni sect, as I also do not criticize [other views], but I give pieces of advice and suggest [ideas].”

The cleric said that proportionality was “a fair electoral principle, because it allows [all groups to be] represented. However, proportionality has regulations and conditions.”

Furthermore, Qabbani said that the way electoral constituencies were divided in the approved draft-law was motivated by political interests.

Last week, the cabinet approved an electoral law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts for the 2013 parliamentary elections. It seeks to replace the 1960 electoral law, which was based on simple majority representation.

However, the Western-backed March 14 coalition and the Progressive Socialist Party, led by MP Walid Jumblatt, voiced their objection to the electoral law. The Future Movement is a main pillar in the March 14 bloc.

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

- **Jumblatt to attend national dialogue session**

Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) leader MP Walid Jumblatt said in remarks published Wednesday that he was going to attend a national dialogue session set for Thursday, regardless of the March 14 alliance’s stance.

“I salute President Michel Suleiman for the questions he asked on [ways] to benefit from the arms of the Resistance to defend Lebanon only through a Lebanese defense strategy. Accordingly, I will participate in the dialogue,” Jumblatt told As-Safir newspaper.

On July 19, March 14 suspended its participation in national dialogue sessions following the assassination attempts against Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea in April and March 14 MP Boutros Harb in early July.

It is yet unclear whether the Western-backed coalition will attend Thursday’s national dialogue meeting.

Jumblatt used to be an influential pillar in the March 14 alliance, which was formed following the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Premier Rafiq Hariri. However, after the May 7, 2008 incident, when gunmen led by Lebanon’s Shiite group Hezbollah began a military operation in Beirut, Jumblatt started changing his political stances.

Last week, Jumblatt and the March 14 group rejected a debatable

proportionality-based electoral draft law approved by the cabinet.

However, PSP Secretary General Zafer Nasser told NOW on August 8 that it was still “early” to talk about Jumblatt’s return to the March 14 alliance; despite the latter’s opposition to the electoral draft law.

According to the Lebanese constitution, the cabinet transfers draft laws to parliament for final approval.

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

- **Aoun warns against breaking Army-People-Resistance formula**

Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun warned of breaking the Army-People-Resistance formula.

“Such an [aggressive] attempt [aims] to make Lebanon submissive to international [schemes] that threaten its entity in the future,” Aoun told Al-Manar television.

He added that “some are betting [to make] sectarian gains [through] breaking [the Army-People-Resistance] formula.”

Addressing Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the FPM leader said: "We [support you]...because no man can be against a part of his people which is struggling for its land."

Aoun added that if a war similar to the July 2006 War was launched against the country, he would support the Resistance because he cannot "accept any aggression against [Lebanon]."

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

6. SYRIA

- **Syria ex-PM says regime collapsing, OIC studies suspension**

A handout picture released by the Syrian opposition's Shaam News Network Syrian shows opposition fighters at a checkpoint outside Rastan, Homs. (AFP/ HO/ SNN)

Syria's former prime minister, the highest profile government figure to defect, said the regime was collapsing as Muslim countries mulled suspending Syria from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

"The Syrian regime only controls 30 percent of Syria's territory. It has collapsed militarily, economically and morally," Riad Hijab told a news conference in the Jordanian capital Amman on Tuesday.

Hijab fled to Jordan last week, the latest in a string of defections from President Bashar al-Assad's government, which is becoming increasingly embattled as the 17-month conflict shows no signs of abating.

The United States, which has imposed a raft of tough sanctions to try to force Assad's departure, reacted by lifting an asset freeze imposed on Hijab.

"The United States encourages other officials within the Syrian government, in both the political and military ranks, to take similarly courageous steps to reject the Assad regime and stand with the Syrian people," Treasury official David Cohen said.

Hijab's replacement as premier, Wael al-Halqi, insisted the sanctions imposed by

Arab and Western governments "have only affected innocent Syrians."

After Damascus talks with UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos on what she called the "deteriorating humanitarian situation," the new prime minister voiced confidence in "Syria's capacity to resist, to overcome the crisis and to bring about reconciliation, security and stability."

In an apparent snub to Amos, he said the fate of more than a million people displaced by the conflict was "not a UN issue."

Western policymakers hope that a wave of defections will bring the collapse of the autocratic government, ending a conflict that seems to be in stalemate with the international community deeply divided over what action to take.

An emergency summit of the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) began late Tuesday in the holy city of Mecca with a proposal to suspend Syria, a move strongly opposed by Iran.

A draft final statement obtained by AFP said the summit "approves the suspension

of Syria's membership," a measure recommended by a preparatory ministerial meeting held Monday in the western Saudi city of Jeddah.

The move would further isolate Assad's regime, after Syria was suspended from the Arab League last year over its brutal crackdown on an Arab Spring-inspired revolt launched in March 2011.

The OIC represents 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide, and its suspension of Syria would heap pressure on Assad, who has characterized the uprising as a plot by Western and rival powers to overthrow his Iran-allied government.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose country has openly criticized the push to suspend Syria, is attending the extraordinary OIC meeting and was expected to strongly oppose the move against Damascus.

The draft statement says Syria should be suspended over "the obstinacy of the Syrian authorities in following the military option" to solve the crisis and the failure of a UN-Arab League peace plan brokered by Kofi Annan.

Although a number of senior figures have abandoned the regime, analysts say that until military units begin to defect en masse, the Assad family and the top echelon of the military and security services will remain intact.

"Syria is full of officials and military leaders who are awaiting the right moment to join the revolt," Hijab said, urging the fractured opposition to unite.

His comments came as fresh fighting erupted for control of key districts of the northern city of Aleppo while Syrian forces bombarded areas around Damascus and launched a new security operation in the capital, a human rights watchdog said.

A total of 89 people were killed nationwide on Tuesday, 53 of them civilians, it said.

The opposition issued a new appeal Monday for the international community to impose no-fly zones similar to those established during the conflict in Libya amid increasing air strikes by Syrian warplanes.



With Assad under mounting pressure, a top presidential aide was dispatched Tuesday to China, which has said it wants an immediate ceasefire and political dialogue to halt the bloodshed.

China and Russia are at odds with the West over how to end the fighting, after both traditional Syria allies vetoed UN Security Council resolutions.

The conflict has killed more than 23,000 people since March last year, according to the Observatory, while the UN says more than one million people have been displaced and another 140,000 have fled to Syria's neighbors.

Washington charged Tuesday that Tehran is working to form a pro-regime militia in Syria, similar to the Hezbollah militia it promoted in neighboring Lebanon during that country's 1975-90 civil war.

"It is obvious that Iran has been playing a larger role in Syria in many ways," US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told a news conference.

"There's now an indication that they're trying to develop, trying to train a militia within Syria to be able to fight on behalf of the regime," he said.

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

- **Isolated Syria seeks China help on conflict**

Special adviser to Assad due in China for talks about political resolution to the violence in Syria.

More than 21,000 people have been killed since March last year

BEIJING - A top aide to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was due to arrive in China on Tuesday for talks about a political resolution to the violence in the conflict-torn country.

China said late Monday that Bouthaina Shaaban, a special adviser to Assad, would visit to hold talks with Foreign Minister

Yang Jiechi, and it was also considering inviting Syrian opposition members in future.

Syria's embassy in Beijing declined to comment about the visit on Tuesday.

The UN Security Council is due to debate the future of the United Nations mission in Syria on Thursday, but so far there is little consensus among world powers on how to deal with the conflict between government forces and rebels.

China, a traditional ally of Assad, has come under fire for vetoes of three UN Security Council resolutions on Syria.



Beijing's unwillingness to back further action despite the violence may stem from its discomfort with Western military intervention, analysts say.

Still, China earlier this month expressed regret over former UN chief Kofi Annan's resignation as international envoy for Syria and said it would continue to "work for a political resolution" to the deadly conflict.

Beijing has said it wanted the UN to play an important role in trying to solve the conflict. It previously supported Annan's plan to trying to bring peace to the country, before he resigned as special envoy.

Foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang said in a statement that Shaaban's visit was part of China's efforts to address the crisis.

China has actively supported an immediate ceasefire, protection of civilians and political dialogue to resolve the crisis, he said.

International concern is mounting over how to end the conflict that has triggered a major humanitarian crisis and sent around 140,000 Syrians fleeing to neighbouring countries.

More than 21,000 people have been killed since March last year, with fighting

escalating after the failure of Annan's peace plan and the regime hit by an increasing number of defections by high-ranking officials.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53890>

- **World Muslim body opens meeting on Syria**

Saudi King presides meeting of 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation on suspending Syria from it.

By Lynne Nahhas and Abdel Hadi al-Habtoor - MECCA, Saudi Arabia

Saudi King initially proposed the suspension of Syria

An emergency summit of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) began late Tuesday with a proposal to suspend conflict-wracked Syria, a move strongly opposed by Iran.

A draft final statement obtained by AFP said the summit "approves the suspension of Syria's membership," a measure recommended by a preparatory

ministerial meeting held Monday in the western Saudi city of Jeddah.

The move would further isolate President Bashar al-Assad's embattled regime, after Syria was suspended from the Arab League last year over its brutal crackdown on an Arab Spring-inspired revolt launched in March 2011.

The OIC represents 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide, and its suspension of Syria would heap pressure on Assad, who has characterized the uprising as a plot by Western and rival powers to overthrow his Iran-allied regime.

Saudi King Abdullah -- who initially proposed the suspension of Syria -- is presiding over the meeting held in Mecca, the holiest Islamic city.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose country has openly criticised the push to suspend Syria, is attending the extraordinary meeting and was expected to strongly oppose the move to suspend Damascus.

The draft statement says Syria should be suspended over "the obstinacy of the

Syrian authorities in following the military option" to solve the crisis and the failure of a UN-Arab League peace plan brokered by Kofi Annan.

It demands that Assad's regime "immediately end all acts of violence" while defending Syria's "unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity."

Tensions have been simmering for months between Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia and Shiite-dominated Iran as Syria has emerged as another arena for the longtime rivalry between the two regional heavyweights.



Saudi Arabia, which hosts the OIC's headquarters in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, has openly called for arming Syrian rebels.

Tehran meanwhile accuses Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey of arming and financing the mainly Sunni rebels against Assad, who leads a regime dominated by members of his Alawite sect, an off-shoot of Shiite Islam.

Iran is the Syrian regime's biggest regional ally and has pledged its full support for Assad, though it denies US and rebel accusations that it is providing his regime with arms and fighters.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi on Monday criticised the move to suspend Syria's membership of the OIC, saying it would not resolve the conflict and was not in line with the group's charter.

"We have to look for other ways, means and mechanisms for resolving conflicts and crises," he said, calling for a "Syrian-Syrian solution" reached through negotiations between the government and the rebels.

But foreign ministers meeting ahead of the summit agreed to suspend Syria "based on consensus with an absolute majority" and forwarded the decision to

heads of state for final approval, OIC chief Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu said.

Sources close to the meeting said that only Iran and Algeria were against the recommendation. Syria had no representative at the meeting.

Mohammed Ahmed Taieb, a top Saudi foreign ministry official, said that some delegates believed the body should go further by demanding that Assad step down and "preparing for a post-Assad transition period."

Tunisian Foreign Minister Rafik Abdessalem hailed the move to suspend as "a strong message to the Syrian regime on the importance of listening to the will of the people and their demands for freedom, justice and dignity."

The United States said that special envoy to the OIC Rashad Hussain would take part in the summit as an observer and meet with delegates on the sidelines.

The State Department said his attendance demonstrates Washington's commitment to "bring additional pressure to bear on the Assad regime."

The 17-month conflict in Syria has killed more than 21,000 people, according to rights groups.

In addition to the Syrian crisis, the OIC was also to discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict, the violence against the Muslim Rohingya minority in Myanmar and the unrest in Mali.

The meeting has added significance as it is being held on the 26th night of the fasting month of Ramadan, the night Muslims believe the Koran was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed.

Hundreds of thousands of Muslims flooded Mecca on Tuesday as prayers went on until the early morning hours.

Security forces were massively deployed across the city as one of them held a banner at the entrance of the Grand Mosque reading: "The Grand Mosque is full, please pray outside to ensure your own safety."

Saeed al-Khathami, a member of the security forces, put the numbers of

worshippers on Tuesday night at around "four or five million people."

Outside the mosque, streets crammed up with tens of thousands who lined up to pray in the open as beggars sat along the pavements hopefully eyeing passers-by willing to give away some money in return for Allah's reward.

"On this holy night, God fulfills all our prayers," said one 36-year-old woman who came from Egypt to perform the minor pilgrimage. "I prayed for Egypt's glory and victory for all Muslims, especially those in Syria."

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53904>

- **Syrian regime sought to use offshore companies to circumvent sanctions: report**

Top Syrian regime officials have plotted to use offshore companies in Russia and Malaysia to circumvent Western sanctions, according to a series of Syrian government documents uncovered by the Wall Street Journal.

The U.S. paper said Tuesday that it had Syrian government documents and correspondence spanning from March until early July this year that provided insight into how a shrinking group of loyalists to the embattled regime of President Bashar al-Assad have attempted to keep its cash flowing in the face of stiff sanctions and heavy fighting with armed resistance groups.



“Offshore companies are being formed in Russia and Malaysia and bank accounts are being activated in Russia in euro and Russian-ruble [denominated accounts] and could be ready Thursday July 5, 2012,” the paper quoted.

“[T]hen we would be able to pay for the value of the imports and receive the money for crude exports easily, while all concerned parties will take all the necessary actions to ensure the confidentiality of the proceedings in order

not to open the way to the European Union and the United States to track the work of these companies and include them on the list of sanctions.”

The documents, which the paper confirmed through multiple involved parties, follow a series of crucial meetings between four Syrian officials—the central-bank governor, the ministers of oil and finance, and the head of the state oil-marketing company responsible for selling Syrian oil. In these meetings and subsequent correspondence letters, Syrian officials propose using of offshore companies as a remedy against sanctions from Western banking institutions and trade, and Russia as a prime ally.

Syria has been facing pressure from the U.S. and European-imposed sanctions since August last year. Last summer, the Syrian government announced it had approximately \$17 billion in foreign-currency reserves—a figure that some Western diplomats believe has since fallen by anywhere from one-third to one-half, the newspaper reported.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/14/232268.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahrain court postpones verdict on opposition figures**

Amnesty International calls for release of 13 leading opposition figures facing jail sentences over charges of plotting to overthrow the Gulf monarchy.

DUBAI - Bahrain's appeals court postponed on Tuesday its verdict in the case of 13 leading opposition figures facing jail sentences over charges of plotting to overthrow the Gulf monarchy, lawyers said.

The defendants who played leading roles in the month-long protests last year demanding drastic democratic reforms did not turn up in court, lawyers said, adding that the court set September 4 as a new date for its verdict.

Amnesty International criticised the decision saying the opposition leaders, whom it describes as "prisoners of conscience", should be released and their convictions quashed.

"The defendants have endured months in detention already," Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty's deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa Programme, said in a statement.

"But instead of quashing their convictions and releasing them, the Bahraini authorities have resorted to the now-familiar tactic of postponing the hearing and toying with defendants, thus prolonging their ordeal and that of their families," she added.

The watchdog also quoted Ghanim Alnajjar, an internationally recognised human rights expert who observed the court proceedings on behalf of Amnesty, as saying: "The decision to postpone the final verdict is unjustified, and is tantamount to a denial of justice."

The 13 activists are being retried in a civil court after they were convicted, along with seven others who remain at large, of plotting to topple the Sunni ruling family.

Another defendant was acquitted.

The prosecution has dropped charges "related to the freedom of expression,"

for saying things that were considered illegal in the past.



On trial is activist Abdulhadi Khawaja who ended in June a 110-day hunger strike.

Also on trial Hasan Musheime and Abdel Jalil al-Sankis, both leaders of the Shiite Haq banned movement, as well as Sunni leftist Ibrahim Sharif, who heads the secular Waed group.

In June last year, a specially formed tribunal handed down lengthy jail terms against the 21 mostly Shiite activists after convicting them of plotting to overthrow the regime.

Ten months later, Bahrain's highest appeals court ordered a retrial.

Bahrain came under strong criticism from international human rights organisations

over last year's crackdown on the Shiite-led protests.

An international panel commissioned by King Hamad to probe the government's clampdown found out that excessive force and torture had been used against protesters and detainees.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53902>

- **Pro-Saleh troops flex muscles: Yemen defence ministry attacked**

Yemeni troops from elite Republican Guard force, led by son of ousted president Saleh, attack headquarters of defence ministry.

SANAA - Yemeni troops from the elite Republican Guard force, led by the son of ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh, attacked on Tuesday the headquarters of the defence ministry, witnesses said.

The forces laid siege to the ministry in Sanaa before attacking it with machineguns and rocket-propelled grenades, witnesses said.



The attack comes a week after new president Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi ordered a restructuring of army forces, reducing the number of units under the command of rival chiefs including Saleh's son.

The troops led by General Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh which blocked the roads leading to the ministry in central Sanaa came from the main base of the Republican Guard in Sawad, south of the capital, witnesses said.

Other witnesses said that those forces exchanged fire with police on their way to the ministry.

Yemeni army reinforcements were deployed around the residence of Hadi, who replaced Saleh in an Gulf-brokered peace deal that ended 13 months of protests against the veteran leader, witnesses said.

Other reinforcements were stationed around the central bank where employees were evacuated, other witnesses said.

In a presidential decree last week, Hadi ordered the formation of a "presidential protection" force which will include three brigades from the Republican Guard.

The force will also include a brigade from the First Armoured Division led by General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar who defected to the anti-Saleh opposition last year, Saba said.

Hadi assigned other brigades from the two rival units to the central and southern regions, it added.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53896>

- **Political and social crisis in Bahrain**

Manama: Bahrain has been rocked by a political and social crisis, often along sectarian faults, since February 2011. Political solutions have been lacking amid concerns about the level of street violence and almost daily clashes between rioters and the police. Earlier this month, the

police chief said that more than 700 policemen have been injured during operations since the beginning of the year.

Touring several majlises, Ramadan gatherings, Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa has emphasised the need to use the month of Ramadan to launch moves to end violence and start direct talks to overcome the crisis, the worst in Bahrain's modern history.

The justice minister has held several individual meetings with the political formations in a bid to push for the dialogue. All groups said that they were ready for the dialogue, but put forward several conditions, denoting the depth of the challenges ahead.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/political-and-social-crisis-1.1061273>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Afghan Official Says Border Shelling Kills One

August 14, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

An official in eastern Afghanistan says shelling from across the border in Pakistan has killed at least one Afghan border guard.

Wasifullah Wasify, a spokesman for eastern Konar Province, said a battle between Afghan and Pakistan border patrols broke out early on August 14 near a checkpoint in Konar's Dangam district, across from the Pakistani district of Bajaur.

He said one of the rockets killed a border-patrol officer and wounded at least four others.

Wasify says at least 83 rockets have landed in the area.

It is the latest report of cross-border fire that has raised tensions between the two neighbors.

Pakistan officials had no immediate comment. Islamabad has denied deliberately targeting Afghan territory in fighting militants on its side of the border.

Based on reporting by AP, dpa, and BBC

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

- **22 killed in southwestern Afghan suicide bombings: governor**

ZARANJ, Afghanistan, Aug. 14 (Xinhua) -- At least 22 people were killed and more than 40 others injured Tuesday afternoon when three suicide bombers blew themselves up in Zaranj, the capital city of southwestern Afghan province of Nimroz, Governor Abdul Karim Barahawi said.

"Three suicide bombers blew their explosive vests up in different parts of Zaranj, killing at least 22 people and injuring over 40 others," the governor told Xinhua.

Three back-to-back blasts hit the area, with the first blast occurring at around 3:30 p.m. local time. Security forces had cordoned off the blast scenes.

The governor said three policemen were among the killed.

The personnel of Afghan National Police have gunned down three other attackers before they detonate their explosive, he said.

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

- **Afghans Olympic medalist warmly welcomed home**

KABUL, Aug. 14 (Xinhua) -- The inciting Afghans awarded red-carpet welcome to Olympic medallist Rohullah Nikpa who returned home on Tuesday as thousands of people waited in long queue at Kabul International Airport.

A long convoy of motorcades and horse riders were slowly moving on the road leading to the airport to welcome the medallist. The roads as well as government building were seen decorated with the pictures of the Nikpa and banners inscribed with slogans encouraging sport and athletes.

Afghan taekwondo player, Rohullah Nikpa, was the first Afghan athlete who had won bronze medal in Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and secured again bronze in London Olympics 2012 on Aug. 9.

Hundreds of people were accompanying their athletes from airport to Kabul sport stadium, where thousands of people were waiting to welcome them.

The emotional and happy fans were chanting "Thank you for win", "Victory is yours," and "Afghanistan, Afghanistan" when meeting the players at the stadium.

The Afghan parliament is going to formally appreciate Nikpa and his team on Wednesday; while sport fan and businessmen will also award the Olympic medallist privately.

A six-member Afghan team which includes Rohullah Nikpa and Nisar Ahmad Bahawi in taekwondo, Masoud Azizi and Tahmina Kohistani the only female in the team in running, Aimal Faisal and Ajmal Faizi Zada in boxing and judo represented Afghanistan in the London 2012 Olympic Games.

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

- **Afghan girls inspired to maintain exercise**

By Abdul Haleem

KABUL, Aug. 14 (Xinhua) -- "By attending the London Olympics I have given the message to all the Afghan girls that they are talented, they can do sport, they can attend international competitions and

above all they can earn honor to their country," Tahmina Kohistani told Xinhua on Tuesday.

The only Afghan girl, Kohistani, 23, who competed in running at London Olympics but failed to win medal, was joyful for representing Afghan women there in the international contests.

"Although I could not earn medal in the contest, I was able to represent Afghan women with talent and so, I am proud to be the first Afghan girl attending Olympic Games," said the ambitious Kohistani after returning home.

In the conservative Afghanistan it was unbelievable 11 years ago when Taliban regime was in power.

The fundamentalist regime which collapsed in late 2001 by the U.S.-led military campaign had banned schools for girls and confined women to their houses. The outfit has also imposed series of restrictions on men athletes including sporting long beard and wearing long trousers during playing.

In the national sport stadium -- Ghazi Stadium, Kabul where the athletes in the post-Taliban Afghanistan exercise daily to improve their ability, Taliban militants during their six-year reign often awarded punishment including execution and chopping hands and feet to alleged criminals there each Friday which is the Muslim Weekly holiday.

A six-member Afghan team which includes Rohullah Nikpa and Nisar Ahmad Bahawi in taekwondo, Masoud Azizi and Tahmina Kohistani the only female in running, Aimal Faisal and Ajmal Faizi Zada in boxing and judo represented Afghanistan in the London 2012 Olympic Games.

In the men's 68kg category, the Afghan taekwondo player, Nikpa after beating his rivals Michal Loniewski from Poland 12-5, Martin Stamper from Britain 5-3, David Boui of Central African Republic 14-2 and losing to Iranian player Mohammad Bagheri Motamed had earned Bronze medal, the second of its kind earned by Afghanistan, both by Nikpa, 25.

However, the remaining five had lost in the London 2012 international tournaments.

The team returned home Tuesday morning and the exciting Afghans awarded red-carpet welcome to Olympic medalist Rohullah Nikpa and his entourage as thousands of people including government officials and lawmakers waiting in long queue at Kabul International Airport to receive the Olympic hero and associates.

A long convoy of motorcades and horse riders were slowly moving on the road leading to the airport to welcome the athletes.

"I would try my best to win gold medal in the next Olympic Games," Nikpa told Xinhua amid hundreds of his admirers.

The people waiting to receive the athletes were proud of the earning a medal -- the bronze in the London Games.

"It is a matter of pride for Afghans that their country has secured position among the medal winning nations," a sport fan and athlete Ahmad Adeeb Wali, 21 told Xinhua at Ghazi Stadium; while eagerly waiting among thousands of people to receive the six athletes which includes Ms.

Tahmina Kohistani, the ambitious girl inspiring Afghan females to support sport in Afghanistan.

<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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