



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

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Batı'yla İliőkiler



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16 AUGUST 2012

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ORSAM

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1. IRAQ

- **Iraq denies visa to Turkish nationalist leader**

ERBIL, Aug.15 (AKnews)- Iraqi government has refused to give visa to Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli for a visit to the ethnically mixed Kirkuk province, Turkish media reported today.

The reports said that Turkish leader intended to get the visa directly through the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs so that he crosses the border through Nineveh province and his passport does not contain any stamps prints from the Kurdistan Region.

Bahçeli's demand was turned down, the reports said, without identifying the reason.

Earlier reports today said that the Turkish government has sent letters to both the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Baghdad government to protect the nationalist leader and his accompanying delegation in his visit to the oil rich Kirkuk province.

Bahçeli is expected to visit Kirkuk during the Eid al-Fitr and say Eid's prayer in the province, where Turkmans reside side by side Kurds and Arabs.

The visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to Kirkuk on Aug.2 sparked tensions between Baghdad and Ankara.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/32/2022/>

- **MP: Closing down Kurdistan representation in Baghdad "illegal"**

ERBIL, Aug. 16 (AKnews)- Shutting down the representative office of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Baghdad is "illegal and unconstitutional" and Baghdad should justify this step, said a member of the Kurdistan Blocs Coalition (KBC) at the Iraqi Council of Representative.



Yesterday Baghdad government closed down the KRG office in the General Secretariat of the Iraqi Council of Ministers, claiming that the office is "illegal" and Baghdad and KRG can talk directly not through a representative office. KRG representative to Baghdad Mohammed Ehsan refuted the claim, saying the office was founded on legal basis.

Deputy head of KBC Mohsen Saadun said the decision by Baghdad is "unconstitutional and illegal because the KRG representation is not new in Baghdad.

"It is seven years this representation is coordinating between Iraq and the regional governments This decision is... improper."

The official added after the parliamentary recess, the KBC will meet with Ehsan and discuss the reason for closing down his office.

"The Iraqi government should clarify closing down the KRG office because this is an official representation and has committed no violations," Saadun said.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/322070/>

- **Iraqi senior delegation meets with Iranian parliament speaker**

ERBIL, Aug.16 (AKnews)- The Iraqi delegation from the Council of Minister met yesterday with Ali Larijani, speaker for Iranian People's House and discussed the obstacles on the way of improving relations, IRNA news agency reported.

The Iranian official thought implementing the joint agreements will help in settling most of the issues in Iraq in relation with basic services and reconstruction.

Larijani described economic cooperation as vital and demanded that trade

exchange between the two countries be developed.

Commenting on the political situation of Iraq, Larijani said Iran has always supported Iraq and warned any disputes among the political parties will affect the security and unity of the country.

Rozh Nouri Shawes, deputy PM, who leads the Iraqi delegation to Tehran, said the cooperation zone between Iraq and Iran is wide and there is a historic relation connecting the two nations.

Shawes said the Iraqi political parties and officials are willing to improve amicable relations with Iran.

The Iraqi delegation arrived in Tehran on Tuesday at an official visit and met with Iranian vice president and chief for Supreme National Security Council.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/322066/>

- **Kurdistan Parliament must be reference of Supreme Negotiations Council, says Gorran**

ERBIL, August 15 (AKnews) – The head of the relations for the Gorran Movement said the Kurdistan Region's Parliament must be the reference of the Supreme Negotiations Council and should avoid partisan interventions.

Mohammed Tofiq Raheem said: "We support the formation of this council but it has to be a real council and make its own decision.

"The council members should include experts and people with knowledge and [keep their distance] from party members."

Raheem explained that if the council takes its work seriously then it should be able to solve the disputed issues between Baghdad and Erbil.

A private committee had a meeting on Saturday to form the council and asked the Kurdistan Regional Government and parliament to prepare the council's draft law.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/321907/>

- **Iran's Vice President: Iraq, Iran enjoy very good relations**

Baghdad (NINA) – Iran's Vice President, Ali Saeed Lu, said that Iran and Iraq enjoy very good relations in the political and economical fields; and the exchange of visits between both countries' officials point out their intention to develop their relations.

Iran's ERNA news agency reported that when receiving Iraqi delegation, headed by Deputy Prime Minister, Rowsch Nuri Shaways, at Iran's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday, Aug. 15, Lu said that Iran hopes that Iraq overcomes the problems and assumes its status in the area; he pointed out that Iran is happy for Iraq's success and is ready to develop its cooperation with it in all economic fields, because increased trade between them serves their interests.

He added that the two sides have reached good agreements toward increased cooperation and setting mechanism to speed up executing earlier agreements; pointing out that increased economic relations and cooperation has been realized in recent months.

Lu praised Iraq's wise regional policies, pointing out that Iraq and Iran can together play an important regional role.

For his part, Shaways affirmed the strong relations between Iraq and Iran, saying that Iran is one of the region's strong countries, and expressed hope to develop the level of cooperation between the two countries in light of exchanged visits of both countries' officials

Pointing out that Iraq and Iran possess good capabilities that would help consolidate bilateral cooperation, as well as regional cooperation, he hoped increase the level of economic cooperation for their mutual benefits. / End.

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

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

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

- **Official source denies what was attributed to al-Maliki for describing / Mecca summit / as summit of terrorism.**

Baghdad / NINA /--An official source denied what some media outlets attributed to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for describing current Mecca summit as summit of terrorism.

The source told NINA : "Iraq participated in Mecca summit by a delegation headed by Iraq's ambassador to Saudi Arabia Ghanem Jumaili.

A number of media outlets quoted statements attributed to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in which he described Mecca Islamic Summit which held yesterday in Mecca as summit of terrorism, against Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

The summit of the Islamic Organization for Economic Cooperation was launched on Tuesday, with the participation of 57 leaders of Islamic state in Mecca.

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

- **Iraqiya white bloc: the blocs begin to take new stands towards calm.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Iraqiya white bloc announced that the blocs began to take new political stances towards calm and dialogue.

The secretary general of the bloc Sheikh Jamal al-Batekh said in a statement to his press office today that "everyone is aware that the situation now needs to dialogues and discussions between the political blocs," adding that "the recent meetings between the leaders of the blocs are good signs to solve political problems."

He added "the change of the political blocs' approach during the current period and work to demand reform and solve problem in according to truce and dialogue, will make the political problems a thing of the past."

The recent period has witnessed a number of meetings between the leaders of political blocs; the most prominent one is the meeting between Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki with Vice Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Barham Saleh.

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

- **Kurdistan conflict threatens to bring new violence to Iraq**

Just how far will the dispute between Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan go? Clashes between the Iraqi prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, and the Kurdish president, Massoud Barzani, have been escalating since the US withdrawal at the end of 2011, leading to speculation about the declaration of an independent Kurdish state. Certainly the hypothesis of an armed conflict between the central Iraqi government and the autonomous Kurdish region cannot be excluded.

One recent example of current tensions occurred last month when the Kurdish peshmerga prevented the Iraqi national army from reaching the Fishkhabur crossing into Syria in the Zimar region, one of the "disputed territories". According to AFP, an anonymous Iraqi source has accused the Kurdish authorities of illegally buying anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons "with help from a foreign country". Fingers point to Turkey, which supports Iraqi Kurdistan and is in conflict with

Baghdad. Last spring Barzani tried in vain to dissuade the US from selling F16 fighter planes to Iraq.

This tension has been exacerbated by the war in Syria. Barzani supports the rebels whereas Maliki, who is pro-Iran supports Bashar al-Assad. Profiting from this situation, the Iraqi branch of al-Qaida has resurfaced and on 23 July claimed responsibility for a series of attacks that killed 116 people.

Baghdad and Erbil have an endless list of grievances, ranging from border controls and the integration of the peshmerga to the Iraqi national army, to the delimitation of Kurdistan and the sharing of wealth between the centre and the autonomous region – especially oil.

There is a fear that growing Kurdish independence will serve as an example to the Sunni provinces, or even to the oil-rich Shia province of Basra in the far south of Iraq, which produces 2m of the 2.5m Iraqi barrels a day. "Al-Maliki would far rather be the leader of a large country than the master of a 'Shia-istan' in the south of Iraq," was one western diplomat's analysis. Conversely, Barzani sees himself

as the defender of Iraqi minorities in the face of Shia "hegemony". That is why he granted asylum to the Sunni vice-president Tariq al-Hashemi in December 2011, after he was judged in absentia in Iraq for having headed a death squad during the civil war (2005-2008).

The Kurdish-Sunni rapprochement, promoted by Turkey, has led to a coalition that is seeking to overthrow Maliki – so far without success. In retaliation, the Iraqi prime minister denounced his opponent's corruption and nepotism on a private Kurdish television station last June, pointing out that Barzani's son heads the autonomous region's security services while his nephew is prime minister.

At the core of this friction lies the issue of Iraqi Kurdistan's independence. According to one diplomat, Barzani's dilemma is as follows: "He knows that Kurdistan is not ready and that other countries in the region would not appreciate a declaration of independence. But he is also aware that the longer he waits, the stronger Baghdad will become."

<http://pukmedia.co/english/index.php/77/kurdistan-region/2026-324>

- **Barham Salih: If we waited for fuel and electricity from Baghdad, we would be like the southern provinces**

Shafaq News / The Deputy Secretary-general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Barham Salih described on Wednesday, the oil as the source, of the "Kurds suffering and misery" throughout history, while considered the arrival of major international companies to Kurdistan as an evidence of the importance for global energy markets.

Salih said in an interview with the "Awena" weekly Kurdish newspaper on its issue dated Tuesday and briefed by "Shafaq News" that "oil was historically a source of suffering and misery for Kurds and it is not allowed once again to our make oil as a weapon that destroy our country," stressing that "this issue is related to the national security and economic development of our country and it should be considered at the level of responsibility away from the partisan interest."

Salih said that the oil policy of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) that "The region now has a position on the world's energy map," considering the advent of

major international companies to the region as "Exxon Mobil, Total and Kazirrom," as an evidence of the importance of Kurdistan to the world energy markets, and an international admission of its constitutional right in oil production, as well as its contribution to strengthen and enhance Kurdistan Region in the political, regional and international levels. "

On the processors that were taken by the provincial government to overcome the problem of fuel and electricity, Salih stressed that "the government has been able to solve the problem of fuel and oil in the region thanks to the refineries and the domestic production."

Saleh pointed out that "if we had waited for Baghdad to resolve the problem of fuel and electricity, Kurdistan Region would be as the case in the Iraqi southern provinces that provide citizens in this hot summer with five to six hours of electricity a day."

KRG announced earlier this summer that it will provide citizens with an average of 22 to 23 hours of electric power, while entrusted the responsibility of providing electricity during the cut off hours to the

local or civil generators that announced last week that it will pay the full payment of wages instead of the citizens during August and September.

It is worth mentioning that the President of the regional government, Najervan Barzani had announced last week that the government will distribute three barrels of oil for citizens in the cities of the region, one of them for free with an extra barrel for the inhabitants of remote and rural areas.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/3286-barham-salih-if-we-waited-for-fuel-and-electricity-from-baghdad-we-would-be-like-the-southern-provinces-.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>

- Tourism in Kurdistan and its role in reducing the political tension

Dhiya'a Alsurmali / The General Body for Tourism in the Kurdistan region expect to reach the number of tourists during the summer season to more than two million tourists from inside and outside Iraq.

The influx of thousands of Iraqis to the Kurdistan Region from central and southern Iraq calls the political leaders in Iraq to the attention to this trend as important to build bridges of cooperation in order to provide recreational services for tourists and here lies the role of the provincial government in the planning for tourism development and sustain while lies on the central government major complementary responsibilities in order to optimally care holidaymakers through the fruitful coordination with the Government of the Region and the building away from the intolerance and political tension, especially tourism became a science and trade, especially many countries depend

in its incoming of its budget on tourism only.

Sometimes some of the officials say unwise statements that do not serve the interests of tourism, but in the stifle and keep tourists from going to the tourist sites and this confirms that these officials do not know their responsibilities. Recently an unfair campaign increased against the precautionary measures undertaken by the security forces in providing security for the tourists themselves before they provide it to others to protect them from booby and sticky bombs, silencers pistols, or killing by snipers and explosive belts and explosives planted by the roadsides. Instead of presenting thanks for these efforts to protect the lives of citizens we hear some cacophony voices demanding on some grounds or another to stop these big security efforts.

The keen official, is that who takes the initiative in resolving the problems by providing constructive suggestions, not through sterile statements based on the ideas of chauvinism and directions of racial or for the objectives of the election propaganda through which they ignite the

fire of strife between Arabs and Kurds, as was aroused by the statements of One official who called for deportation of Kurds from Baghdad and other provinces on the grounds that the authorities in the region harass Iraqi Arabs travelers. Such a tendentious call is issued only from a stateless person of wisdom and knowledge and ignorant of administrative simplest security and tourist things. If such a person is in any European country and , said such a statement, this statement would have been rich material for the media and the judiciary will stand a lookout on charges of inciting hatred and racism and incitement to murder and displacement of the others. It is interesting that that official he claims to be the head of the coalition of the" People of Iraq" and later it was found that this coalition does not exceed the same official and his driver and the tea maker as one of those who is close to him.

The checkpoints at the entrances of the Kurdistan Region have been evolved considerably in recent years because of the much momentum that passes through the crossing to the Kurdistan Region, and we hope to develop them more to provide better services to visitors and tourists and

holidaymakers and this subject would be the pride of Kurdistan and the pride of all travelers through this interesting ports. We also hope to add to this the escort of this such as adequate health and casinos, restaurants and medical centers to provide services to passengers while waiting at these stations.

The measures as known by any traveler to Kurdistan is complex and does not go beyond checking the identity of the traveler and the codification of his information in the database of prepared for foreign comers to the region and then giving the traveler an official sealed paper to help him in passing all the checkpoints within the region without accountability, and when he comes out of the region , they get back this paper at the nearest checkpoint to get out of any port in the region. It is the best procedures carried out of random checkpoints scattered along the highways coming into Kurdistan, which most travelers complain of.

We also hope that the inspection procedures are developed as well as the packaging of the bags of passengers at the point of departure in their provinces and the driver is responsible for the

contents of the carried bags and we hope that these procedures are simplified so as to reduce the waiting of the traveler and it is working to provide all necessary facilities for all.

As we have said previously that tourism is a science and knowledge, trade and economy that presents bumper profit. The Ministry of Tourism in the region realized that the tightening of security measures and exaggerating in them will lead to obstruction of Tourism and consequently affect hoteliers and tourism facilities . For this reason it is developing t these ports and increasing the number of employees, especially in special events and public feasts and official holidays and seasons of tourism and it has trained its staff to cope with the big momentum on the checkpoints.

There are in the Kurdistan Region a number of hotels up to 370 hotels in addition to 180 Motel and 45 tourist village and a large number of tourist sites in the provinces of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk as well as a large number of tourist restaurants and tourist facilities and commercial markets and modern

malls which depend in their economy on tourism fully.

These hotels and tourist villages receive thousands of tourists and the region has to provide the security and safety requirements and control of hygiene and prices and to ensure the comfort of citizens and the organizing of transport routes and try to prevent the occurrence of traffic accidents. These efforts require cooperation collectively with the places from which tourists come from.

The tourism and hospitality institutes graduate dozens of people every year who will be working on the development of the tourism sector which needs trained and scientific cadres.

In addition to the domestic tourism there are foreign companies operating in the region and foreign tourists who need certain peculiarities that suit their work and the nature of their communities in addition to all foreign delegations visiting the region and regular meetings, as well as Kurds citizens living outside Iraq who come to the region from Europe and America. All those are in need of care and

security and comfort and excellent services.

In summary, the tourism sector in Kurdistan need the cooperation of the authorities of the Region with the Ministry of Tourism in the central government to reach the participants that are away from the bigoted looks and tense statements in order to provide better services to tourists and support to the public and private sectors who stand behind the work of tourism from restaurants, hotels and tourist villages.

The scientific coordination shared between specialized bodies in tourism and between them and the rest of the devices that support them such as the media and the press and continuous publicity will support the tourism sector in the increase of the bonds of the relationship between the Region and the center, especially if it is accompanied by media working to spread the culture of the two, Arabic and Kurdish peoples and In addition to the heritage and folklore of the rest of the other components that live in Iraq and to highlight the bright side to all of them. W wonder where is the Iraqi media of Kurdish and Assyrian and Turkmen and

Izidis and the Shabak , folklore. Where are the fashion shows and pop music that belong to these people? Have you heard a Kurdish song in Iraqi Arab channels after the fall of the former regime and so far. The media should be directed to the calls for cooperation and harmony instead of hatred and racial discrimination and encouraging hatred .

Finally, since tourism in Kurdistan depends on the arrivals from the center and south, and the comers from outside Iraq, the authorities in the Kurdistan Region have to move towards labeling the function in both Kurdish and English in addition to Arabic language and to direct the restaurants and hotels to use the Arabic and English in their ads to reduce the problems of language and create trained cadres that will guide visitors without intolerance or tension for the service of the tourist economy and culture tourism everywhere in Iraq. The government authorities have to promote public awareness to preserve the tourist facilities and deal with it positively and with urbanization to reduce losses resulting from vandalism hatred and lack of awareness associated with the actions of many tourists.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/articles/328-7-tourism-in-kurdistan-and-its-role-in-reducing-the-political-tension.html>

2. IRAN

• Iran finds ways to sidestep sanctions

High oil prices and complicated financial schemes have helped Iran survive sanctions, analysts and officials have said.

This month, U.S. authorities accused Standard Chartered of concealing about 60,000 transactions with Iranian clients from U.S. regulators, violating sanctions against the Iranian government. StanChart said that “well over 99.9 percent” of its transactions with Iran complied with the U-turn regulations that govern the clearance of dollars from Iran in the U.S.

The Standard Chartered case comes weeks after a U.S. Senate panel released a 335-page report describing a decade of compliance failures by HSBC, Europe’s biggest bank. An outside audit by Deloitte showed that 25,000 transactions totalling more than \$19.4bn involved Iran. Of those, as many as 90 percent passed through the bank’s U.S. accounts with no

disclosure of ties to Iran, according to the Senate report.

Those cases highlight the measures the Iranian government has been able to take to survive the sanctions.

Businessmen have found myriad ways to live with the financial restrictions. They use trusted money changers and an old financial transfer system known as hawala, even though these deals are costly.

“It is becoming increasingly difficult as our costs are going up and we have to give more discounts to customers,” said one Europe-based Iranian businessman with links to the Islamic Republic.

China has played a large role. Chinese banks are more welcoming than other Asian lenders to Iranian businessmen and still open letters of credit. Iran’s government seems to have convinced China and other Asian oil customers to accept barter deals for oil sales.

Meanwhile, Iranian businessmen say small European banks, notably those in crisis-hit economies, still help with financial

transactions to Iran through foreign nationals and money transactions to countries such as Turkey, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and some Persian Gulf Arab Gulf states. Businessmen, however, refuse to reveal the names of the European banks involved.

It is difficult for the U.S. to track transfers. Many Iranian expatriates – who are estimated to number at least 2m worldwide – hold dual nationality. They may be tempted by the high commissions on offer from the Iranian government or businessmen to help them circumvent sanctions.

Transferring money this way takes time. It can lead to delays in imports of raw materials for factories and prices have risen. But while Iran’s currency has lost nearly half its value against the dollar over the past year and inflation has shot up 23 percent, according to official figures, the average Iranian consumer has yet to notice shortages. Supermarkets and retail shops are still fully stocked with domestic and imported foods as well as luxury goods.

High oil prices help, too. As long as oil stays at about \$100 a barrel, Iranian observers and western diplomats in Tehran say, then Iran should be able to continue its plans.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/100633-iran-finds-ways-to-sidestep-sanctions>

- **Iranian President Warns of NATO, Enemies' Plots to Dominate Muslim States**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a meeting with his Tunisian counterpart Muhammad Monsef al-Marzouki in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, warned of the plots hatched by the enemies and the NATO to dominate the Muslim nations.



"Today the enemies of the regional nations and the NATO forces are ready to

dominate all Islamic states," Ahmadinejad said during the meeting on the sidelines of an emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Mecca on Tuesday night.

He said enemies are attempting hard to stir sectarian strife between the Shiite and Sunni Muslims, and underlined that the Iranian nation supports the Tunisian, Egyptian, Yemeni and Palestinian Muslims without considering their religious faith (Shiite or Sunni).

His warnings alluded to the recent conflicts in the region, specially in Syria, where different arrogant powers and their regional allies and proxies are seeking hard to topple the country's Muslim state. The Arab country has been experiencing unrest since March 2011 with organized attacks by well-armed gangs against Syrian police forces and border guards being reported across the country.

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

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104254259>

- **Syria is the red line of resistance: Iranian general**

TEHRAN, Aug. 15 (MNA) -- Brigadier General Massoud Jazayeri of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps has said that Syria is the red line of the resistance movement against the Zionist regime.

Jazayeri made the remarks during an interview with the Persian service of the Mehr News Agency published on Wednesday when asked about his view

about discussing developments in Syria during the XVI Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, which is scheduled to be held in Tehran from August 26 to 31.

Jazayeri stated, "The Syrian issue is a very important issue, and (Syria) is regarded as the red line of the resistance. Therefore, any negotiation about it should be held within the framework of the interests of the resistance and the Syrian people, who are being targeted by terrorists, the hegemonistic governments and regimes, and (the governments that) are subservient to the West.

"The hegemonistic bloc is openly and impudently taking subversive and terrorist actions against the Syrian nation and government. Given this, freedom-seeking countries should seriously support Syria against its enemies.

"It should be noted that the psychological operations of the Western bloc and Syria's subservient neighbors against the Syrian government and people are (being carried out) in such a way to portray themselves as the winner of this war, while circumstantial evidence indicates a victory of the Syrian government and people.

“This great victory will be fondly remembered in future history. (And) of course, media outlets in the Islamic Republic of Iran should pay special attention to this important issue and prevent other countries from being influenced by the suggestions and the media psychological operations of the enemy.

“The enemy is seeking to declare Syria the loser and the countries supporting Syria sure losers, and this can definitely affect the extent to which and the way the... country of Syria is being supported. Hence, this great lie should be exposed so that the world will know about the defeat of the United States and global Zionism and reactionarism in the region at the hands of Syria’s resistance.

“Therefore, no passivity should emerge at the summit of the Non-Aligned (Movement) countries in regard to the governments supporting terrorism because these countries are the allies of the United States and must be held accountable for the killing of human beings and the destruction of Syrian cities.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1674558>

- **Iran calls for massive turnout on International Qods Day**

TEHRAN – On Wednesday, Iranian dignitaries, religious scholars, organizations, and political groupings called for a massive turnout on the International Qods Day rallies on Friday.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry, Expediency Council Chairman Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Assembly of Experts Chairman Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani, Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, and Grand Ayatollah Jafar Sobhani issued separate statements inviting Muslims across the world to participate in the demonstrations on the International Qods Day.

The International Qods Day is a day of solidarity with Palestine observed on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan. Anti-Zionist demonstrations are held on the Quds Day all over the world, especially in Iran, where the event was devised after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The late Imam Khomeini, the founder of the

Islamic Republic, made the proposal to establish an international day of solidarity with Palestinians in August of that year.

In its statement, the Foreign Ministry emphasized that the Quds Day reminds all Muslims and the free peoples of the world about their religious and moral duty to support the oppressed people of Palestine through holding massive demonstrations across the world.

This year, the International Quds Day will be held as the world is witnessing the aggressive measures of the Zionist regime, particularly the continued Judaization of Beit-ul-Moqaddas (Jerusalem), and the West's silence over the issue, part of the statement said.

However, the world is witnessing the massive wave of the Islamic Awakening rolling across regional countries and the establishment of governments emerged from the will of the people, which bodes well for the resistant people of Palestine, the statement added.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/100630-iran-calls-for-massive-turnout-on-international-gods-day>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

• Egypt deployed troops in Sinai without Israel's prior approval

Egyptian security forces arrest suspected militants after a firefight at the al-Goura settlement in Egypt's north Sinai region, about 15 km (10 miles) from the border with Israel, August 12, 2012.

The Egyptian army has been deploying large anti-terrorist forces in parts of the Sinai peninsula without informing Israel in advance. The peace treaty between the two countries limits the Egyptian military presence in Sinai.

Some of the Egyptian forces in the peninsula were sent there with Israel's consent, but Haaretz has learned that forces have also been deployed without Israel's prior approval. Israeli government officials only learned about it after the fact. Although Israeli defense officials declined to comment on the matter, they did note that there has been good security cooperation between the two countries, adding that there is regular contact between the two sides.

The Egyptian troop movements come in response to the expanding power vacuum in Sinai. On August 5, militants took over an Egyptian border post in the peninsula, killing 16 soldiers and stealing two armored personnel carriers that then headed to the Israeli border. One of the APCs exploded in the Kerem Shalom border terminal linking Egypt, Gaza and Israel; the other drove two kilometers into Israeli territory before it was hit in an Israel Air Force strike.



According to the 1979 peace agreement negotiated at Camp David, Egypt is not allowed to introduce tanks into certain areas of Sinai, including the vicinity of Al-Arish, to which dozens of tanks have been transported over the past several days. The treaty also bars the use of fighter aircraft, including helicopters, but that was approved retroactively by the Israeli security cabinet.

More than a year ago, Israel agreed to allow Egypt to maintain seven military battalions and six companies in Sinai, including tank units, in addition to the forces permitted by the peace treaty itself. Before the August 5 terrorist attack, Egypt had not stationed the full complement of troops in Sinai that it was permitted. Since the attack, the Egyptians have done so, but have also exceeded the terms to which Israel has agreed.

At the moment, Israel has decided not to respond to the unilateral Egyptian moves, apparently to avoid a confrontation. Nonetheless, it is seen as a source of future problems, particularly with the entrenchment of the Muslim Brotherhood's power in Egypt. The Egyptians could ask to have their current troop presence remain in Sinai until the end of their military operations there, although it is not clear when that would be.

The situation puts Israel in a dilemma. Just three days ago, Mohammed Gadallah, legal adviser to President Mohammed Morsi, said the president was considering amendments to the Camp David Accords to provide Egypt with "full sovereignty"

over the peninsula.

Speaking at the Islamic Solidarity Conference in Mecca yesterday, Morsi stressed that for Egypt and Arab Muslim countries, the Palestinian issue remains the most urgent, and called on the Palestinians to unite their ranks.

This week, Egypt's Information Minister Salah Abd al-Maksud, a Muslim Brotherhood member, said: "Egypt will not normalize relations with Israel until occupied Palestinian land is freed." He added that "we are carrying out our relations with Israel based on agreements Israel has made with Egypt. Therefore, even if we request to change some stipulations of the Camp David Accords, the president and national institutions have stated that they respect the agreement." However, Maksud also said that "this entity [Israel] stole Palestinian lands, and for this reason we will not normalize relations with it until those lands are freed." The information minister was not asked, and did not specify, if the "occupied lands" include territory conquered in 1967, or all of Israel.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/egypt-deployed-troops-in-sinai-without-israel-s-prior-approval-1.458511>

- **'J'lem willing to hit Iran, even to delay nuke program'**

Ambassador to US Michael Oren points to Osirak reactor in Iraq, "in the past, we have operated on the assumption that we can only gain a delay"; Uzi Dayan says J'lem hasn't yet decided to strike.

Israel is willing to strike Iran's nuclear facilities even if doing so only delays the Islamic Republic's nuclear progress for a few years, Ambassador to Washington Michael Oren told Bloomberg News Wednesday.

"One, two, three, four years are a long time in the Middle East - look what's happened in the last year," he said in reference to the ongoing upheaval throughout the Arab world.

He said that "in the past, we have operated on the assumption that we can only gain a delay."

When Israel struck at an Iraq reactor in 1981, the military assumption was “we would gain a delay of between one and two years on that program,” Oren said. “To this day, Iraq does not have a nuclear weapon.”



Oren, who described the Iranian nuclear threat as unprecedented in Israel's 64-year existence, warned, however, that “diplomacy hasn’t succeeded” thus far in halting Iran's atomic program, adding that “we’ve come to a very critical juncture where important decisions do have to be made.”

Asked about US assessments that an Israeli attack would delay Iran’s nuclear program for no more than two or three years, Oren said, “I’m not saying we agree or disagree. What I am saying is that - on the basis of our previous experience - is not an argument against.”

While “no country has a greater stake in resolving this diplomatically” than Israel, Oren said, “Iranians show no signs of flexibility in negotiations” with the US and other countries over its program.

“An Iranian nuclear weapon is an existential threat to Israel,” Oren said. “We don’t just say it. They say it as well. They confirm it.”

Also Wednesday, former National Security Council Uzi Dayan said he believes there is still time to convince Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak to postpone an attack on Iran, The New York Times reported.

Dayan, who confirmed to the Times that he met on Monday for over an hour with both Netanyahu and Barak at their personal residences, claimed that the government has not yet decided whether or not to attack but that it will be forced to do so before November.

Dayan said he has known Netanyahu and Barak “a very long time,” and expressed confidence they would make a decision to strike “only if they feel that there is no other way, as the last, last thing.”

Compounding the rhetoric between Israel and the Islamic Republic, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Wednesday that he was confident "the fake Zionist (regime) will disappear from the landscape of geography," Iran's Mehr News Agency reported.

Earlier on Wednesday Brig.-Gen. Gholamreza Jalali, the head of Iran's Passive (civil) Defense Organization and a former commander of the Revolutionary Guards, during a speech ahead of Al-Quds Day, an anti-Israel event initiated by Iran, said that in order to liberate Palestine there was no other option but to destroy Israel.

<http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=281414>

- **2 blasts shake Eilat, authorities search for rockets**

Eilat residents flood police's emergency number after hearing explosions; police suspect rockets landed in open areas.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Security forces searched the Eilat area on Wednesday night after two powerful blasts rocked the Red Sea resort city.

Eilat residents flooded the police's emergency number after hearing the explosions, police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said.

Related:

IDF deploys Iron Dome battery near Eilat
Police ground units searched through various parts of the city, and suspect that rockets landed in open areas. No injuries or damages were reported following the explosions.

An IDF spokeswoman said the search was halted by security forces late Wednesday night, and did not definitively confirm that the blasts were caused by rockets.

She added that the search resumed at 6:30 a.m. on Thursday morning.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=281357>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Jihadist group warns Egypt army over Sinai crackdown**

The Egyptian army has been hunting militants in the Sinai desert since an attack last week on border guards killed 16 soldiers.

People watch as smoke rises from the burning remains of a building and vehicle after a firefight between at the al-Goura settlement in Egypt's north Sinai region, August 12, 2012. Photo by Reuters

Egypt deployed troops in Sinai without Israel's prior approval

An Islamist militant group operating in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula bordering with Israel warned the Egyptian army on Wednesday that an ongoing military crackdown on jihadists in the area will force it to fight back.

The Egyptian army has been hunting militants in the Sinai desert since an attack last week on Egyptian border guards that killed 16 soldiers. Egypt blamed the attack on Islamist militants.

The army operation is the biggest in almost three decades in the tense border region where troop and army vehicle movements are strictly limited under the terms of Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel.

"We have never raised our weapons against the Egyptian army," the Salafi Jihadi, one of the biggest jihadist groups in the Sinai, said in a statement. "So stop the bloodshed or else you will be dragging us into a battle that is not ours," the group said, addressing the Egyptian army.

The group belonging to the Salafist jihadist current in the Sinai denied involvement in the attack on Egyptian border guards and said its true fight was with the "Zionist enemy."

Security officials had said that 20 militants were killed by the Egyptian army on the first day of the Sinai sweep on Aug. 8.

The conflict is an early test for President Mohamed Morsi - a moderate Islamist elected in June following the overthrow last year of Hosni Mubarak - to prove he can rein in militants whose actions on the border worry Israel.

Moderates fear 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.

The Salafi Jihadi statement said other jihadist groups, which it did not name, were behind past attacks on Sinai's gas pipeline that delivers gas from Egypt to Israel and Jordan.

The group also said Sinai jihadists had fired rockets at Israel in the last few years. Egypt had repeatedly denied that rockets had ever been fired from Sinai into Israel.

Disorder has spread in North Sinai, a region with many guns and much resentment over neglect by Cairo. Bedouin tribes now control some areas that were cleared by Egyptian police during last year's uprising against Mubarak, who had worked closely with Israel to secure the border region.

Morsi, who took office in June, has promised to restore stability.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/jihadist-group-warns-egypt-army-over-sinai-crackdown-1.458615>

- **At Islamic conference, Egypt's Morsi calls for regime change in Syria**

Speaking at a summit in Mecca, Morsi calls on Muslim nations to work together in solving Syria's crisis, but stresses Palestinian issue remains most urgent.

Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi attends the opening of the Organization of Islamic Conference in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, August 14, 2012.

Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi said on Wednesday that it is of utmost importance that Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran work together to solve the ongoing crisis in Syria.

Speaking at the Islamic Solidarity Conference in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Morsi said that it is time for regime change in Syria. He quoted the Prophet Mohammed who forbade war among Muslims and criticized those who allowed for the situation to deteriorate and for "blood to

have been spilled during the holy month of Ramadan."

Morsi stressed however that for Egypt and Arab Muslim countries, the Palestinian issue remains the most urgent, and called on the Palestinians to unite their ranks.

On Tuesday, Egypt's Information Minister Salakh Abd al-Maksud, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, said that "Egypt will not normalize relations with Israel until occupied Palestinian land is freed." He added that "we are carrying out our relations with Israel based on agreements Israel has made with Egypt.

"Therefore, even if we request to change some stipulations of the Camp David accords, the president and national institutions have stated that they respect the agreement." However, al-Maksud also said that Israel "stole Palestinian lands, and for this reason we will not normalize relations with it until those lands are freed."

The information minister was not asked, and did not specify, if the "occupied lands" include territory conquered in 1967, or all of Israel.

Following Morsi's decision to appoint 53 new government-run newspaper editors, the new editor of Al-Akhbar newspaper refused to publish an article critical of the Muslim Brotherhood on Tuesday, according to reports. Author Youssef al-Qaeed told al-Ahram newspaper that Al-Akhbar's new editor, Mohamed Hassan al-Banna – who was appointed by the Brotherhood – was the one who banned the article.

Al-Banna denied these allegations, saying that al-Qaeed had not sent a copy of his piece to the news desk. "He has no contract with us, we did not censor his article and we haven't received any articles from him at all," El-Banna told al Ahram. He added that his newspaper has no intention of publishing articles from journalists outside the paper.

Earlier this week, an Egyptian court ordered a ban on all Saturday editions of Al-Dustour newspaper, claiming it had insulted Morsi. According to reports, the editions of the privately-owned newspaper were confiscated as part of an investigation into suspected subversion against Morsi.

In the Saturday edition of the newspaper, the first page featured articles warning of a takeover of the Brotherhood Islamic rhetoric. This case is not an isolated one: A few days ago a television network was closed down for allegedly inciting to murder Morsi.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/at-islamic-conference-egypt-s-morsi-calls-for-regime-change-in-syria-1.458487>

- **Guards halt illegal border crossing attempt near Rafah**



Security authorities thwarted an attempt by seven Sudanese individuals and one Ghanaian to illegally cross the border from Sinai into Israel on Wednesday night.

The individuals have been taken into custody and referred to investigation.

They were trying to cross near the international border marker 10, south of the Rafah crossing.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/guards-halt-illegal-border-crossing-attempt-near-rafah>

- **Mubarak to stay in prison hospital, says public prosecutor**



Public prosecutor Abdel Meguid Mahmoud on Wednesday ordered former President Hosni Mubarak to stay in Tora Prison hospital.

Earlier this month, Mubarak's son Gamal had filed a formal complaint against the hospital's conditions.

In response, Mahmoud sent a medical committee to Tora Prison to determine if

the hospital's equipment was adequate to treat his medical condition.

The committee found that Mubarak's condition was stable and that the hospital was well equipped, and therefore determined that the former president should not be moved.

Mubarak is serving a 25-year prison sentence on charges that he played a role in the deaths of protesters involved in the demonstrations that lead to his ouster last year.

A delegation of the Supreme Council for Human Rights had visited Mubarak last week and said he had no demands, which also contributed to the committee's decision to reject Gamal Mubarak's request.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/mubarak-stay-prison-hospital-says-public-prosecutor>

- **New minister of defence reshuffles more brass in Egypt's armed forces**

The newly appointed Minister of Defense Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi has made new

changes within military ranks on Wednesday, according to the Ahram Arabic Website.

Head of military prosecution Adel El-Morsi was appointed as armed forces' Deputy Chief of Staff and General Medhat Ghazi was appointed as head of military prosecution instead.

General Osama Roshdy Aaskar was appointed head of Third Army instead of Sedki Sobhy who was appointed as the armed forces' new Chief of Staff earlier on Sunday.

These changes follow president Mohamed Morsi' decision on Sunday to retire head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces Field Marshal Tantawi as well as the armed forces' Chief of Staff Sami Anan.

El-Sisi was appointed Defence Minister instead of Tantawi while Sobhy was appointed instead of Anan.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/50554/Egypt/Politics-/New-minister-of-defence-reshuffles-more-brass-in-E.aspx>

- **Critics blast Egyptian cleric's fatwa against anti-Morsi protesters**

Al-Azhar cleric issues edict sanctioning resistance to planned anti-Brotherhood protest; ElBaradei and other critics warn of looming fascism 'cloaked in religion'
Ahram Online, Wednesday 15 Aug 2012
Print Send

Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi speaks during the Laylat al-Qadr at Egypt Al-Azhar Conference Center at Nasr City in Cairo (

Sheikh Hashem Islam, a member of the Fatwas (religious edicts) Committee of Egypt's highest Islamic authority, Al-Azhar, has preached that confronting those who plan to hit the streets 24 August to protest against the Muslim Brotherhood and President Mohamed Morsi may not be punishable.

"This is a revolution that starkly goes against democracy and freedom," he said during a forum held at the Egyptian Diplomatic Club late Tuesday.

"Who wants to join the 24 August uprising will be against the 25 January Revolution ... These people would be committing high

treason against their nation, God, his prophet and Muslims."

"So, I say stand up against them. If they fight you, fight them back ... if they kill some of you, the victims will go to heaven, and if you kill them, that would be righteous."

Some of the attendees allegedly voiced disgruntlement with his statements, which they deemed inflammatory.

Former liberal MP Mohamed Abu-Hamed, along with other anti-Brotherhood supporters of TV presenter Tawfiq Okasha, who is wanted on charges of incitement to murder the president on air, primarily called for this month's protests, to protest against president Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Azhar cleric comments draw fire

Mohamed El-Baradei, reform activist and co-founder of Egypt's Constitution Party, for his part, voiced fury over the comments.

"If these religious clerics aren't put on trial, we will fall into the trap of fascist

rule cloaked in religion," El-Baradei said via Twitter.

Also demanding that the cleric be put on trial was MP Abu-Hamed, who supported Mubarak-era Ahmed Shafiq against Morsi in the presidential race last June and is well known for his strong anti-Islamist stance.

"This is what we told Egyptians would happen if religion was mixed with politics," said Abu-Hamed, stressing that, if the cleric was not punished for his statements, then this would constitute proof of "Al-Azhar's failure to discipline its officials."

"These clerics are known for hypocritically flattering the country's rulers; he's probably one of those who accused protesters of committing a sin by participating in last year's January 25 uprising," Abu-Hamed added.

In the early days of the Tahrir Square uprising, several religious clerics condemned the mushrooming anti-regime protests, claiming it was a sin to "disobey the ruler."

Said Kamal, head of Egypt's Democratic Front Party, stated that his party would consider joining the called-for protests to defend the public's right to stage peaceful demonstrations.

The cleric's statements, he said, "threaten the January 25 Revolution and its main accomplishments, one of which is the right to peaceful protest," said Kamal, asserting that the comments foreshadowed a return to "the repressive times of the former regime."

Kamal further stated that, "If it wasn't for the peaceful protests of January 25, the Muslim Brotherhood would not have gained the political positions it currently holds." He went on to demand that President Mohamed Morsi issue a statement clarifying his stance vis-à-vis threats against those planning to take part in the planned protests.

Muslim Brotherhood Secretary-General Mahmoud Hussein, for his part, said that the Brotherhood opposed calls to kill or criminalise anyone, stressing that every citizen enjoyed the right to stage demonstrations as long as they remained

within the confines of the law and did not damage public property.

"However," he added, "calls to stage protests... and damage public property on 24 August are illegal."

Rumours have recently circulated that the 24 August protests would target the Brotherhood's Cairo headquarters. Protest organisers, however, have stressed that the planned demonstrations were to be of a peaceful nature.

"Unfortunately, many have taken the president's leniency as an excuse to engage in undemocratic activity," said the Brotherhood's Hussein, adding that the law would have the final word in judging offenders "regardless of their ages or political positions."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/50515/Egypt/Politics-/Critics-blast-Egyptian-clerics-fatwa-against-antiM.aspx>

- **Arrested Protesters in Sidi Bouzid Reportedly Released Today**

Today, the Sidi Bouzid First Instance Court decided to release protesters who were

arrested for participating in last week's demonstrations, reported several news outlets in the Tunisian media.

Water shortages and low standards of living in Sidi Bouzid drove residents to protest last week. Their demonstrations soon became violent, with confrontations between the protesters and the police resulting in a week of escalating tension. According to local sources, around 45 protesters were arrested, including two journalists.

The imprisonment of the demonstrators was condemned by Tunisia's national union, UGTT, who on Sunday called for a general strike in Sidi Bouzid on Tuesday. Yesterday, over a thousand people answered this call and took to the streets, marching to the courthouse in order to demand the release of the protesters arrested last week.

Tunisian radio station Mosaique FM reported that the Sidi Bouzid tribunal decided to release all of the arrested protesters today. Additionally, the same source stated that some of the freed protesters claimed that they were treated violently during their arrest.

However, the Tunisian state-owned news agency TAP, reported that only 10 of the protesters were released. The article also stated that at least one protester will continue to be held in custody due to evidence of him attacking a police vehicle. However, the article did not specify whether other demonstrators are still being held in police custody.

Yesterday, the Governor of Sidi Bouzid Mohamed Najib Mansouri condemned the violence and chaos caused by the recent protests. Mansouri told Mosaique FM that “the government is not against peaceful social demands, but does not tolerate vandalism of public property.”

Mansouri also stated that only 30% of the public sector workers of the region participated in the general strike, while private sector workers did not protest.

Demonstrators not only called for social change, but also held signs and chanted slogans condemning the violent response of the police to previous protests and criticizing the government for ignoring Sidi Bouzid, a historically marginalized region.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/08/15/arrested-protesters-in-sidi-bouzid-reportedly-released-today/>

- **Marzouki Reiterates Tunisia’s Demand to Extradite Ben Ali from Saudi Arabia**

Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki repeated yesterday Tunisia’s demand to extradite former President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali from Saudi Arabia.

In a statement to Saudi media, Marzouki criticized the Saudi Kingdom’s sheltering of Ben Ali.

Marzouki is currently visiting Saudi Arabia in order to attend the 4th emergency Islamic summit in Mecca.

“How can the Kingdom shelter an individual that has repressed Islam, defiled the Koran, and robbed people’s money?” asked Marzouki. He added that it remains a sensitive issue in bilateral relations between the two countries.

The Tunisian President commended the Saudi monarch King Abdullah Ibn Abdelaziz’s initiative for holding the

summit. Marzouki stated that the holding of the meeting comes as a response to what he described as the sensitive and delicate situation experienced by the Islamic world and the challenges that its people face, which requires a unified position.

He also reaffirmed Tunisia's support for the Syrian people and its opposition to Bashar al-Assad's regime, indicating that the Syrian regime has lost its legitimacy by carrying on its policy of murder, bloodshed, and massacres against his people.

"Following the historical revolutions against dictatorship that have swept the region, we cannot as Arab people and leaders accept the continued violations of human rights and freedoms," said Marzouki.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/08/15/marzouki-reiterates-tunisi-as-demand-to-extradite-ben-ali-from-saudi-arabia/>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Moqdad family warns about killing abducted Syrians

Maher al-Moqdad warned on Thursday that his clan will execute the Syrians they have kidnapped if his relative, Hassan al-Moqdad – who was abducted in Syria by the rebel Free Syrian Army – was "threatened or killed."

"The Moqdad [family] does not have a problem [with] killing [the] kidnapped Syrians... in case our son [Hassan] is threatened or killed," Maher al-Moqdad told NOW.

He added that the Moqdad family was cooperating with the Jaafar, Zeaiter and Shamas families whose stronghold lies in the Beqaa and northern Lebanon. These Lebanese families are known to possess arms.

"These families [also] abducted a group of Syrian opposition [figures]," Moqdad said, adding that there was "no intention of abducting Saudi and Qatari nationals as they are our brothers."

“Until Hassan returns [to us, our] problem is with the Syrian and Turkish people opposing [the Syrian regime].”

Moqdad added that the a family delegation will meet with Interior Minister Marwan Charbel in the upcoming hours.

Members of the Moqdad Lebanese family said on Wednesday that its “military wing” abducted “more than 20 Free Syrian Army members” and a Turkish national.

The kidnapping followed the abduction of Hassan al-Moqdad in Syria. The FSA identified the abductee as a Hezbollah member, but the Shiite party denied the charges.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=428276>

- **Berri, Franjeh will not attend dialogue session**

Speaker Nabih Berri and Marada Movement leader MP Suleiman Franjeh will not attend Thursday’s national dialogue session, which is to be held at President Michel Suleiman’s Beiteddine

summer residence, the National News Agency reported.

However, the report did not elaborate any further.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=428295>

- **Fatfat: Hezbollah responsible for reported death of Shiite pilgrims in Syria**

Future bloc MP Ahmad Fatfat said on Wednesday that Hezbollah was responsible for obstructing the mediations with the abductors of the 11 Shiite pilgrims kidnapped in Syria.

“Hezbollah is responsible for the halt of mediations because it refused to apologize to the Syrian people and rebels [as per] the request of the kidnappers in exchange for the release of the abductees,” Fatfat told NOW.

The wife of one of the Shiite pilgrims kidnapped in Syria earlier on Wednesday held Future Movement leader MP Saad Hariri responsible for the reported death of four abductees in Aleppo’s Aazaz.

“Saad Hariri was mediating for the release of the abductees, but two days ago we suddenly stopped hearing from him,” a woman identified as Hajja Hayat told LBC television.

Fatfat also held the Syrian regime responsible for the reported death of the abductees.

“The shelling of the Aleppo town of Aazaz was aimed at [killing the abductees and] causing chaos in Lebanon.”

Fatfat added that Interior Minister Marwan Charbel told him his ministry “cannot do anything” about the Moqdad family’s kidnapping of Syrian nationals in Lebanon.

“What can we do about this? We have no state,” Charbel was quoted by Fatfat as saying.

Members of the Moqdad family said on Wednesday that its “military wing” abducted “more than 20 Free Syrian Army members” and a Turkish national.

The kidnapping followed the abduction of a Moqdad family member in Syria. The

FSA identified the abductee as a Hezbollah member, but the Shiite party denied the charges.

Later on Wednesday, Syrians were kidnapped across Lebanon following reports that a number of the Lebanese Shiites abducted in Syria had been killed.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=428182>

- **South Lebanon road blocked over disappearance of Lebanese man in Syria**

Residents from the southern town of Maaroub blocked the main road with burning tires as a sign of protest against the disappearance of Louai Mansour in Damascus, the National News Agency reported.

The father of Louai, who hails from Maaroub, said that his son went missing last week while shopping in the Damascus area of Al-Abbasiyin.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=428156>

6. SYRIA

- **Organization of Islamic Cooperation suspends Syria over Assad's suppression of revolt**

Secretary General says 'did not see much support for external military intervention;' adds that decision to suspend Syria is a 'message to the international community' that Islamic community wants politically peaceful solution, not bloodshed.



The Organization of Islamic Cooperation suspended Syria's membership at a summit of Muslim leaders in Mecca early on Thursday, citing President Bashar Assad's violent suppression of the revolt.

"The conference decides to suspend the Syrian Arab Republic membership in the OIC and all its subsidiary organs, specialized and affiliated institutions," the closing statement said.

The move had been approved on Monday at a preliminary meeting of OIC foreign ministers and was agreed on the summit's second night despite opposition from Iran.

Saudi Arabia, the summit's host, has led Arab efforts to isolate Syria diplomatically and has backed calls for the Syrian rebel opposition to be armed, which Foreign Minister Saud al-Fasial described in February as "an excellent idea."

However, speaking to reporters after the summit, OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu said he "did not see much support for external military intervention" in Syria during the summit.

He described the decision to suspend Syrian membership as "a message to the international community ... that the Islamic community stands with a politically peaceful solution and does not want any more bloodshed."

The summit, which has taken place late on consecutive nights because of the Ramadan fast, had been billed as a diplomatic showdown between Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite Iran,

which have backed different sides in sectarian conflicts in the Middle East.

However, Saudi King Abdullah tried to conciliate Iran at the summit opening by placing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at his side to welcome Muslim leaders in a gesture Saudi political analysts said was aimed at putting old grievances aside in the quest for a resolution to the Syrian crisis.

He also suggested founding a centre for dialogue between Islam's sects, another move aimed at defusing some of the region's sectarian tensions. That proposal was adopted by the summit.

In his first published comments since the summit opened, Ahmadinejad appeared to rebuff the Saudi move.

On Iran's Mehr news agency on Wednesday he said countries which wanted the Syrian crisis solved must come up with a plan of action to do so.

"But unfortunately some of our brothers and friends have not acted well in this area and instead of inviting the conflicting

parties for talks and understanding, they are busy sending weapons into the country and encouraging slaughter," he added.

Syria and Iran have accused Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey of arming the rebels.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/organization-of-islamic-cooperation-suspends-syria-over-assad-s-suppression-of-revolt-1.458548>

- **Syrian air strike on border town kills at least 30 people, wounds dozens**

As violence intensifies, UN human rights investigators accuse President Assad's forces of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Aftermath of the air strike in the town of Azaz on the outskirts of Aleppo, Syria, August 15, 2012

A Syrian air raid killed 30 people in the rebel-held northern border town of Azaz on Wednesday, a local doctor said, and a bomb went off near UN and military sites in the capital Damascus, wounding three.

The doctor, Mohammad Lakhini, said at a hospital in Azaz that scores of people were wounded in the air strike. It reduced several houses in the town to rubble and dozens of men clawed through the concrete and metal debris looking for survivors.

As the violence intensified, UN human rights investigators accused forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

They said rebels had also committed war crimes, but the violations "did not reach the gravity, frequency and scale" of those by state forces and the pro-Assad shabbiha militia.

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page report by the independent investigators led by Paulo Pinheiro.

In s video posted by activists earlier on Wednesday, residents in Azaz - situated just north of the major urban battleground of Aleppo - screamed and shouted "God is greatest" as they carried bloodied bodies from collapsed concrete buildings.

The opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said dozens had been killed. One activist in the town said at least 30 bodies had been found and rescuers were searching for more.

The video footage, which could not be immediately verified, showed crowds of residents wrestling with steel bars and pulling away a giant slab of concrete to reveal the dust-covered arm of a child. "This is a real catastrophe," said an activist who gave his name only as Anwar. "An entire street was destroyed."

Seven Lebanese hostages being held in Azaz were also wounded, with four others still missing, a rebel commander said.

"The building they (the hostages) were in was hit ... We were able to remove seven from the wreckage. They are wounded, and some of the injuries are serious," rebel commander Ahmed Ghazali told the Lebanese news channel Al Jadeed.

Assad's forces have increasingly used helicopter gunships and warplanes against the lightly-armed insurgents.

In Damascus, a bomb exploded in the car park of a hotel used by UN monitors, but several military buildings are also in the vicinity and it was not clear what the target was.

No UN staff were hurt in the blast, which occurred exactly four weeks after a bomb killed four of Assad's senior aides. The bomb set a fuel tanker ablaze and black smoke billowed over the city. Ash and dust covered white UN vehicles parked nearby.

State media said three people were wounded in the bombing and several rebels were killed or captured in a separate gunbattle with security forces in the western district of Mezze.

Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad said the bomb blast proved "the criminal and barbaric nature of those who carry out these attacks - and their backers in Syria and abroad."

UN emergency relief coordinator Valerie Amos, on a mission to seek more access for aid deliveries, was meeting European Union officials in Damascus when the bomb went off.

She herself was unable to reach the town of Douma, a trouble spot just north of the capital, due to bombardment.

"Waiting at checkpoint to get into Duma. Sounds of shelling. Could not enter," Amos tweeted. The authorities told her she had been turned back for her own safety, her spokesman said later.

Syrian state media said Amos met Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem to discuss the growing needs of civilians affected by the "destruction of private and state property by terrorist armed groups" - the government's usual term for rebels.

Groups calling themselves The Descendants of the Prophet Brigade and

the al-Habib al-Mustafa Brigade said on a Facebook page they were jointly responsible for the bombing and that the attack had killed 50 soldiers. It was impossible to verify that claim.

Last month Assad's troops successfully counter-attacked after rebels seized parts of Damascus. They are still trying to dislodge insurgents from Aleppo, Syria's biggest city.

More than 50 were killed across Syria on Wednesday, the Syrian Observatory said, after 160 the day before.

Opposition sources say 18,000 people have been killed since the uprising against Assad erupted in March last year.

The bloodshed has divided regional and world powers, foiling peace efforts and paralysing the UN Security Council on Syria.

Russia accused the West on Wednesday of renegeing on an agreement to establish a transitional government in Syria and of prolonging the bloodshed by encouraging the rebels to keep fighting to overthrow Assad.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said an agreement made by world powers and the then-peace envoy Kofi Annan in Geneva on June 30 was still valid and urged the West to do more to put it into practice.

Most Western and Arab governments have called on Assad to go, saying his government's violent response to initially peaceful protests give him no place in a future Syria.

Russia has opposed tougher UN sanctions against Damascus, a long-time strategic ally, but denies it is actively helping Assad remain in power.

Muslim heads of state were expected to suspend Syria from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation at a summit in Mecca on Wednesday, over the objections of Iran, Assad's closest ally.

The 57-member body's rebuke is mostly symbolic, but it shows Syria's isolation in much of the Sunni-majority Islamic world.

Syria's own Sunni majority is the dynamo of the revolt against Assad, whose Shi'ite-rooted Alawite minority is at the core of a

ruling system based on the army and security services.

Syria has been caught up in a wider sectarian-tinged tussle pitting Shi'ite Iran against Saudi Arabia and its Sunni-ruled Gulf allies. Turkey has also turned against Assad. Tehran is determined to prop up a proven ally who has provided vital support for its Shi'ite ally Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Ankara and Washington have pledged to step up aid to the Syrian opposition and planning for a post-Assad Syria.

- **Former Syrian PM: Assad controls only 30% of the country**

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<http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/syrian-air-strike-on-border-town-kills-at-least-30-people-wounds-dozens-1.458497>

- **UN: Assad's forces and rebels committed crimes against humanity**

AFP

Syrian government forces and allied Shabbiha militia have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder and torture in what appears to be state-directed policy, UN human rights investigators said on Wednesday.

Syrian rebels fighting to topple President Bashar al-Assad have also committed war crimes but these “did not reach the gravity, frequency and scale” of those carried out by the army and security forces, they said.

“The commission found reasonable grounds to believe that government forces and the shabbiha had committed the crimes against humanity of murder and of torture, war crimes and gross violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including unlawful killing, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, sexual violence, indiscriminate attack, pillaging and destruction of property,” said the 102-page report by the independent investigators led by Paulo Pinheiro.

Both government forces and armed insurgents had violated rights of children during the 17-month-old conflict, it said.

Karen AbuZayd, an American expert serving as senior investigator alongside Pinheiro, told Reuters: “We have identified both parties as guilty of war crimes and of course a greater number and of bigger variety from the government side.”

“What happened on the government side appears to be a policy of the state. It is not just widespread but similar large-scale complex operations, how they are carried

out, the way the military and security work together,” she said.

Completing their inquiry into a massacre in Houla north of Homs in late May, the investigators said on Wednesday that government forces and Shabbiha fighters were responsible for the killings of more than 100 civilians, nearly half of them children.

The investigators said they would update their confidential list of suspects or units responsible for violations and hand it over to UN rights boss Navi Pillay next month.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/un-assad-s-forces-and-rebels-committed-crimes-against-humanity>

- **Syrian govt envoy praises China, Russia as "non-colonisers"**

A Syrian government envoy praised China and Russia on their stance towards the bloody conflict engulfing her country in an interview published on Thursday during a visit to Beijing that she said would give officials a "real picture" of the crisis. REUTERS/Stringer

BEIJING: A Syrian government envoy praised China and Russia on their stance towards the bloody conflict engulfing her country in an interview published on Thursday during a visit to Beijing that she said would give officials a "real picture" of the crisis.

Envoy Bouthaina Shaaban's interview with the state-run China Daily was the first public comment from her trip to Beijing, where she arrived on Tuesday, and she sought to cast China as a steadfast friend of President Bashar Assad's government, which is beset by a civil war with opposition forces.

"We're happy to see countries like China and Russia, who are not colonisers or deal with people as colonisers," Shaaban told the English-language newspaper, adding that this is "a very different stance from the West".

She said her visit would give "the Chinese leadership a real picture of what's going on in Syria".

In a separate interview with the popular Chinese-language tabloid the Global Times, Shaaban said she hoped Syria's

friends in Russia, Iran and China could "help find a solution" to the crisis.

She also dismissed comments by former Syrian Prime Minister Riyad Hijab, who has fled to Jordan, that Assad only controls 30 percent of the country and his power is crumbling.

"What Hijab said was lies. He knows that very well," Shaaban said.

"Anyone who does not have faith in the Syrian authorities or system can leave. But the number of defectors has been obviously exaggerated."

Shaaban, an adviser to Assad, was due to meet Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi later on Thursday, said the report. China has so far not disclosed what its officials have told the envoy.

On Wednesday, the official People's Daily said China hoped the talks with the envoy and a proposed visit by opposition representatives would help rekindle hopes for a brokered solution to the violence in Syria.

But Chinese media commentary has also underscored the extent to which Beijing remains resistant to Western proposals for more forceful steps in Syria, where the tide turns steadily against Assad.

Opposition sources say at least 18,000 people have been killed since rebels began fighting to oust Assad in March 2011.

Apart from Iran, China and Russia have been Syria's main supporters outside the Arab world. Both vetoed proposed U.N. Security Council resolutions intended to put Assad under more pressure.

Though the former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan quit in frustration as the international peace envoy for Syria early this month, China has continued to argue that his proposals offer the most viable way out of the increasingly bloody war.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Aug-16/184790-syrian-govt-envoy-praises-china-russia-as-non-colonisers.ashx#axzz25rgOv3rm>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• **Amnesty urges release of Yemen journalist**

Amnesty International on Wednesday urged the release of a journalist detained for the past two years after having reported US involvement in a deadly air raid against Al-Qaeda in southern Yemen.

Abdul Ilah Haydar Shae, an investigative journalist, was arrested on August 16, 2010 on charges of links to Al-Qaeda and sentenced the next year to serve five years behind bars.

"On 1 February 2011, former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh issued an order to free him, but it was not carried out after US President Barack Obama expressed concern over the journalist's release," Amnesty said.

It said Shae's lawyers and Yemeni activists insist the charges against him were fabricated because of his investigative journalism.

"There are strong indications that Abdul Ilah Haydar Shae was targeted for

revealing evidence of the US role in a cluster bomb attack that killed dozens of residents," said Hassiba Hadj-Sahraoui, Amnesty's deputy Middle East and North Africa program head.

"Two years on, he remains behind bars. The charges on which he was convicted appear to be based on what he has done as part of his legitimate activities as a journalist. As such his conviction must be set aside and he should be released."

It said Shae had before his conviction been "held incommunicado, and he told his lawyers and others who were present at one of the court sessions that he was beaten during that time."

Shae alleged US involvement in a December 2009 missile attack on Al-Majalah in Abyan province of southern Yemen, Amnesty said, noting the strike killed 41 local residents, mostly women and children, and 14 alleged Al-Qaeda members.

"The Yemeni and US authorities have failed to account for the attacks that killed dozens of Yemeni residents, and a

journalist who revealed information about the US involvement has been behind bars for two years," said Hadj-Sahraoui.

In January 2011, a special court convicted Shae, 34, of "working in the media for the benefit of Al-Qaeda, taking pictures of security buildings, embassies and foreign interests in Sanaa, and inciting Al-Qaeda to attack them."

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=428158>

- **Saudi frees 82 jailed Egyptian nationals in Ramadan amnest**

Whether or not royal pardon includes jailed Egyptian lawyer Ahmed El-Gizawi, however, remains unclear

Ahram Online, Wednesday 15 Aug 2012

Print Send

On the left Shahenda Fathy, the wife of Egyptian lawyer Ahmed al-Gizawi who is detained in Saudi Arabia, and Gizawi's sister Sherine protest in front of the presidential palace on 1 July demanding

the release of political prisoners



Eighty-two Egyptian nationals that had been jailed in Saudi Arabia were granted pardons by Saudi King Abdullah on Wednesday in a Ramadan amnesty.

Saudi ambassador to Egypt Ahmed Qattan has stated that Egypt's foreign ministry would soon be provided with the names of those released.

The number of Egyptians still languishing in Saudi Arabian prisons remains unknown.

Notably, there was no news about the release – or lack thereof – of Egyptian lawyer Ahmed El-Gizawi.

El-Gizawi was detained by Saudi authorities earlier this year on charges of smuggling prescription drugs into the kingdom.

His arrest angered many Egyptian activists at the time, who attributed his detention

to complaints that the lawyer had filed earlier against Saudi authorities, which he accused of unlawfully jailing Egyptian citizens.

El-Gizawi's case has been adjourned by a Saudi court until 5 September.

El-Gizawi's family, which believes he was detained for allegedly "insulting" Saudi Arabia's royal rulers, has urged Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi to intervene in the case on El-Gizawi's behalf.

Morsi returned to Egypt on Wednesday from Mecca where he had attended a two-day Islamic summit devoted to tackling issues of concern to the Muslim world, and held a meeting with King Abdullah of the Kingdom.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/50526/Egypt/Politics-/Saudi-frees--jailed-Egyptian-nationals-in-Ramadan-.aspx>

- **Gulf States warn citizens to leave Lebanon**

Kidnapping of more than 20 in Hezbollah-controlled Shi'ite area raises risk sectarian

violence spreading from Syria. PHOTO:
REUTERS/SHARIF KARIM



BEIRUT - Lebanese Shi'ite gunmen kidnapped more than 20 people on Wednesday in retaliation for the capture of one of their kinsmen in Syria, prompting Sunni Gulf states to warn their citizens to leave Lebanon immediately.

A Turk, a Saudi and several Syrians were among those abducted in an area of Lebanon controlled by Hezbollah Shi'ite operatives, raised the risk that the sectarian violence driving the conflict in Syria will spread to its neighbor, which fought its own civil war on sectarian lines for 15 years.

Related:

UN: Syrian gov't forces committing war crimes

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar told their citizens to leave

Lebanon after the kidnappings and threats to seize more citizens of countries that have backed the uprising against Syria's President Bashar Assad.

Members of the Meqdad clan, one of Lebanon's powerful Shi'ite families, said the kidnapping was retaliation for the capture of kinsman Hassan al-Meqdad by the rebel Free Syrian Army in Damascus two days ago.

They said their hostages included a Turkish businessman, a Saudi and several Syrians they described as rebel fighters.

In remarks to Lebanon's National News Agency, Hassan al-Meqdad's brother Hatem said "the snowball would grow", and warned "Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey and their citizens".

Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are all led by Sunnis and strongly support the mainly Sunni Muslim rebels fighting Assad.

Air France diverted one of its planes to Amman from Beirut on Wednesday evening for "security reasons" after the kidnappings, a spokeswoman in Paris said. The road from the airport into central

Beirut has regularly been blocked by families of Lebanese hostages held in Syria.

The Syrian conflict has polarized Lebanon, with its Sunnis mainly supporting Syria's rebels, while Shi'ites, including Hezbollah, mainly backing Assad, a member of the Alawite minority sect, an offshoot of Shi'ism.

The appearance of masked gunmen on the streets conducting mass abductions brings back memories of Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war, when the country was divided by Sunni, Shi'ite, Christian and Druse militia. Kidnapping became common during the conflict, and some of those taken were never found.

Saudi Arabia's official news agency said Riyadh's embassy in Lebanon had "called on Saudi citizens currently in Lebanon to leave immediately given the latest developments in Lebanon and the appearance of some explicit threats to abduct Saudi citizens and others".

A diplomat said the Turkish businessman had been kidnapped shortly after arriving in Lebanon on Wednesday.

"He was here for business, arrived today, and was kidnapped near the airport," the source said, adding that there was little progress so far in negotiations to secure his release.

The Lebanese news channel Al Jadeed was given access to the Turkish hostage, who said he had been treated well.

In a video broadcast by Al Mayadeen, a Lebanon-based TV station, two of the Syrian hostages were shown in the custody of masked gunmen from the Meqdad clan wearing green fatigues and armed with automatic rifles.

Clan member Maher al-Meqdad said the detained Syrians included a lieutenant who had deserted from Assad's army to join the rebels, while those who were not FSA members had been freed.

One of the detainees, looking tense in a room full of gunmen, identified himself as a captain by the name of Mohammed, and said his role was to help supply the FSA. The other man said he was his assistant.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=281367>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Seven militants killed in Kamra
airbase attack: PAF officials**

Pakistan and Afghanistan be successful in combating terror together?

ATTOCK: Seven heavily armed militants stormed the Pakistan Air Force's (PAF) Minhas airbase at Kamra during the early hours of Thursday, sparking an intense gun battle lasting almost five hours, our sources reported.

The militants were said to be armed with automatic weapons, grenades and suicide vests. Intense exchange of fire between militants and security forces ensued after the attackers infiltrated the base, located in Attock, Punjab.

PAF officials confirmed that all seven attackers have been killed. One Pakistani soldier also lost his life in the attack, confirmed officials.

It was not immediately clear how the attackers managed to enter the sprawling base this time.

Although the attack took place at about 2 am, it is likely many of the soldiers on the

base were awake for prayers or breakfast during the fasting month of Ramadan.

Faheemullah Khan, a civilian who lives near the base, said he was at a mosque praying when he heard gunfire and explosions which he thought were military exercises.

"Then we came to a restaurant, which is next to the main entrance to the base, and heard a louder explosion," he said.

"We saw six police vans rush in, and realised something was wrong."

Several squadrons of fighters and surveillance planes are believed to be housed there.

"One body of a suicide bomber strapped with explosives has been found close to the impact area," said an air force statement.

Base commander, Air Commodore Muhammad Azam, who led the operation against the attackers, was wounded, but is in stable condition, said the spokesman.

"Security personnel are now in the process of scanning the entire area to check for the presence of any other miscreant," said the spokesman.

Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Tahir Rafique Butt has ordered investigations of the incident.

Air Chief Marshal summoned a meeting today at Air headquarter Islamabad to analyse the situation after the attack and to mull over the initial intelligence reports. The meeting would be attended by top leadership of Pakistan Air Force.

Chief of Kamra aeronautical complex and Base Commander will brief the meeting.

Officials also said that one of aircraft at the base was damaged in the attack, which appeared to have been targeted at the PAF's fighter jets parked at the Minhas base. Air Force officials confirmed that over 30 planes parked, including state-of-the-art JF-17 Thunder fighter jets.

Three to four of the militants wore military uniforms, officials said, adding that the attackers were between 19 to 33 years of age. It was also reported earlier

that some of the militants wore suicide vests.

A joint search operation of security forces and police inside and outside the base was launched. PAC Hospital Kamra was also put on high alert following the attack.

The militants were reported to have attacked the base from Pind Salman Makhan village at around 2:30 am, sources said. When security officials at the check-post attempted to halt them, the militants opened fire. An intense gun battle lasting hours followed. Commandos of the Army and PAF were engaged in the operation against the attackers.

Tehrik-iTaliban (TTP) spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan declined to comment on the incident whereas no other group has claimed responsibility for the attack as yet.

Kamra is located about 70 kms from the Pakistani capital Islamabad. The Minhas airbase is a heavily guarded compound with the Pakistan Air Force's Kamra Aeronautical Complex in its vicinity, where Pakistan assembles and overhauls JF-17 Thunder fighter jets in collaboration with

China. According to reports, at least 11 Chinese engineers were working at the Kamra Aeronautical Complex.

All Chinese and others foreign engineers and technicians involved in co-production of Chinese and Pakistan JF-17 Thunder aircraft project were shifted to a high profile secure location, sources told Dawn.com, adding that the engineers were not present near the attack area. Sources confirmed that at least 30 aircraft were on the base.

The government and military's top leadership, including President Asif Ali Zardari, Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani and Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf were notified of the attack, and the operation was being closely monitored by the army chief.

In recent weeks, military intelligence had warned of the possibility of such an attack on military installations. However, there was no specific information about an attack being targeted at the Kamra base.

This is not the first time that Kamra has been the target of a militant attack. On Oct 23, 2009, a suicide bomber blew

himself up at the entrance of the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex in Kamra. Two security officers and six other people were killed in the attack.

Last year, six Taliban gunmen attacked a naval base in Pakistan's biggest city Karachi to avenge the killing of Osama bin Laden. At least 10 military personnel were killed and 20 wounded in the 16-hour assault.

<http://paktribune.com/news/Seven-militants-killed-in-Kamra-airbase-attack-PAF-officials-252467.html>

- **No plan under consideration to postpone election: cabinet**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf on Wednesday reaffirmed the government's resolve to hold upcoming general elections as per schedule.

"The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) believes in free, fair and impartial elections and whichever political party wins, result will be welcomed," he told the federal cabinet which took up host of issues.

Briefing reporters after the cabinet meeting, Information and Broadcasting Minister Qamar Zaman Kaira said that the PPP was not running away from elections and would hold them on time.

To a question asked about any plan of the government to delay the poll, he said, "The polls will neither be held before the schedule, nor will they be delayed."

He completely ruled out any emergency situation to delay the polls, saying that such issue were never raised in a party meeting.

Kaira, however, pointed out that the PPP was concerned on the emerging situation in the country.

On Balochistan unrest, the information minister said the Cabinet's Special Committee on Balochistan briefed it on the progress made so far and sought more time to come up with recommendations to resolve the issue.

To a question, he said legislation was under consideration to make public assets of all who draw salaries from the national exchequer.

<http://paktribune.com/news/No-plan-under-consideration-to-postpone-election-cabinet-252469.html>

- **Zardari, Gul vow meaningful role for peace, stability**

MAKKAH: President Asif Zardari and Turkish President Abdullah Gul met on Wednesday on the sidelines of the fourth extraordinary Islamic summit in Makkah and exchanged views on wide-ranging bilateral, regional and international issues, situation in Middle East with focus on Syria and the reconciliation and peace process in Afghanistan.

Zardari praised the Turkish leadership for the positive role it is playing for bringing peace and stability in Middle East and said that Pakistan considered Turkey as an important player in the region and expressed hope that it would continue playing its role in the regional peace and development.

About the situation in North Africa and Middle East, President Zardari said that as pillars of stability in the broader region, Pakistan and Turkey were well placed to play a positive role in dealing with the

prevailing situation in the region and Middle East. The two leaders were unanimous in the view that both countries had significant and important responsibility in the comity of nations and that both had unanimity of views on all the regional and international issues.

They said that both the countries were facing many challenges to ensure peace, security and stability in the region but vowed to confront all the challenges and contribute in a meaningful way to the cause of peace and stability of the region.

Discussing Pak-Turkey bilateral ties, the president said that the mechanism of High Level Cooperation Council (HLCC) between Pakistan and Turkey was geared towards further deepening the bilateral cooperation and enhancing its scope to the benefit of peoples of both countries. Turkey and Pakistan enjoy exemplary relations which go beyond the governments and are rooted in common history, culture and ethos of our people, he said.

He said further establishment of the HLCC between the two countries symbolised the close and special nature of Pak-Turkey

bilateral ties, adding that it also reflects the shared common vision of the leadership to give a future-oriented strategic outlook to our time tested bilateral partnership. The Turkish president assured full support and cooperation from Turkey to Pakistan in all spheres.

He appreciated Pakistan's sacrifices in the fight against terrorism and also assured full help to Pakistan in its efforts in the war against terror. He said the close cooperation at various levels between Pakistan and Turkey would further strengthen bilateral ties.

They hoped for early implementation of bilateral agreements signed during Turkish Prime Minister's recent visit to Pakistan.

Separately, Zardari and Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak on Wednesday vowed to enhance bilateral economic and trade cooperation and explore avenues for joint ventures in a host of sectors, including agriculture, construction, energy, infrastructure development and manufacturing sector. The two leaders discussed bilateral,

regional and international issues of mutual interest.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar, Interior Minister Rehman Malik, Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Muhammad Naeem Khan were also present.

**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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