



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

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1. IRAQ

- **Iraqi Army withdraws from disputed area**

ERBIL, Aug. 2 (AKnews) – The Iraqi Army has withdrawn from Zumar area, a disputed area on the Syrian border controlled by the Kurdish army forces where Baghdad sent troops to recently that sparked tensions between the regional government and Baghdad, a Kurdish MP in the Iraqi Parliament said Thursday.

Kurdish forces intercepted Iraqi Army forces late last month that were heading to Zumar area, in northern Iraq, who claimed to be controlling the Iraqi border with Iraq to prevent the spillover of instability from Syria into Iraq.

The “uncoordinated” move by the Iraqi Army, however, was seen as a threat posed on the Kurdish region by the Kurdish leaders. Kurdish leaders said the Iraqi Army did not communicate with Kurdish forces about the move which should have been the case under political agreements as Zumar is a disputed area between the central government and KRG.

On Thursday, Hasan Jihad, a member of the Iraqi Parliament’s Security Committee told AKnews that the “The disputes between the Iraqi Army and the Peshmarga forces in Zumar area is about to be over”

“The Iraqi Army troops have pulled back from those areas and there is no fear of reemergence of the issue now” said Jihad.

“The two forces have agreed that instead of facing each other, they should face the Syrian border” he said.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/3/319981/>

- **Iraq’s Foreign Ministry criticizes “inappropriate” Turkish FM’s Kirkuk visit**

ERBIL, Aug. 2 (AKnews) – The Iraqi Foreign Ministry has railed against a visit by the Turkish Foreign Minister to the disputed city of Kirkuk, north of Baghdad, describing it as a “violation on Iraqi sovereignty”

The Ministry posted a press release on its website on Thursday saying Turkish FM

Davutoglu, who is in Kurdistan Region for talks with Kurdish leaders over the future of the Kurds of Syria, visited Kirkuk without approval from, or notice of, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry.

The Turkish FM Ahmet Davuoglu's Kirkuk visit today is considered a kind of violation that is not appropriate of the Foreign Minister of a neighboring country as important like Turkey"

Davutoglu's Kirkuk visit is an "intervention in the Iraqi affairs", the statement stressed warning Turkey to "account for the results" in front of the Iraqi people and what it might cause of "negative impacts on the bilateral relations and the Iraqi people in general and the people of Kirkuk in particular"

Kirkuk is a multi-ethnic oil-rich city in northern Iraq with a slightly Kurdish majority alongside Turkmen and Arab communities. There is much sensitivity around the ethnic balance and control in the city between the different groups in the city.

Baghdad and Erbil have been locked in a dispute over the city since 2003. Kurds

believe the city was historically part of Kurdistan Region and should be incorporated into the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region.

Arabs vehemently oppose the annexation of Kirkuk and want more of Baghdad's control. The city was subjected to wide Arabization during the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein where thousands of Kurdish families were expelled from the city and Arabs were resettled from southern and central Iraq.

Turkmen were not saved the Arabization policy, neither. Thousands of dunams of land plots were also taken from Kurdish and Turkmen owners and were given to the Arab families in order to encourage more Arab settlement in the city.

The Iraqi government now sees Davutoglu's Kirkuk visit as a sign of Turkish support for the Turkmen and possibly the Kurds as well.

Turkey has strengthened relations with Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region over the past decade and Turkish companies and investors have largely entered the region for investment.

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry's statement continued to criticize the Turkish PM's visit saying "It is not in the interest of Turkey or any other party to insult the national sovereignty [of Iraq] and violate the international code of conduct."

The Turkish PM did not commit to the "simplest rule in international relations", according to the statement.

The Ministry also criticized the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) for facilitating the visit without "notifying the federal government... It [KRG] is violating its [Iraqi] constitutional duties."

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/319979/>

- **Islamic parties concerned about tensions between Gorran and ruling party**

ERBIL, Aug.2 (AKnews)- The strained relations between the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the opposition party Gorran (Change) Movement is not in the interest of the Kurdish issue, leaders of the Islamic parties said.

During an interview which was aired by Gorran's KNN channel, Gorran's General Coordinator Nawshirwan Mustafa accused KDP leadership of consolidating the power of KDP President Massoud Barzani and his family in Kurdistan administration over the past 20 years.

Mustafa said for the KDP Kurdish nation's unity means only following the order and word of Barzani (who is also Kurdistan Region's President).

KDP responded with a statement saying Gorran is dedicated to oppose Barzani and KDP.

"I don't think that the current situation in Kurdistan is appropriate for any tensions between two major parties in Kurdistan such as KDP and Gorran Movement," said Salahaddin Babakir, assistant for Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU)'s general secretary.

Babakir added deteriorating these relations is not in the interest of Kurdistan people and both parties and urged the parties to settle any issue through dialogue and talks.

"It's ordinary for them to hold different positions over any issue but they should find their common points through dialogue," the KIU official said.

The complicated relations between the two parties is not in the interest of any one and especially the Kurdish nation's cause in Iraq, said Sabah Mohammed, a member of the Shura (Consultancy) Council of the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG).

Mohammed continued "therefore, they should look for common points and reach a stage to put an end to any tension."

He urged public not to support anyone of the parties against the other but to speak up against any deterioration in their relations.

Gorran did not participate in a meeting of the political parties early this week. The meeting was chaired by Barzani and discussed the tensions between Kurdistan and Baghdad over deploying Iraqi army in areas under the control of Kurdistan border guards (peshmarga).

Gorran issued a statement after the meeting, saying it does not wish to become "appendix" of any political party. This followed by Mustafa's interview strained KDP-Gorran relations.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/3/319981/>

- **Barzani and Turkish FM pledge cooperation against "terrorism"**

ERBIL, Aug.2 (AKnews)- Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stressed the new Syria should be void of any "extremist or terrorist" organizations.

Davutoğlu arrived in Erbil yesterday and met with Barzani and a number of Kurdish senior officials. After the meeting a joint statement was released.

The statement said the situation in Syria is catastrophic and the agonies of the Syrian nation continue. It described the sacrifices and the destruction in Syrian as "unprecedented.

"The behavior and policy of the Syrian regime for inciting sectarian and ethnic conflict in the country has deteriorated

the situation more while the developments in Syria threaten the regional security and stability.

"This situation is unbearable by all measures.

"Any attempt by any extremist group or organization to exploit the power vacuum [in Syria] will be considered a common threat and should be settled jointly."

The parties also underlined their commitment to "peaceful" transition of power in Syria and stressed only the will of the nation should indicate the future of the country.

Barzani and Davutoğlu also agreed to cooperate in their efforts for aiding the Syrian nation so that it can attain its legitimate rights of having a democrat, free and plural Syria where all citizens enjoy equal rights and freedoms.

"In the new Syria all the ethnic, religious or sectarian identities should be respected and their rights given and protected," the statement said.

The Turkish FM arrived in Erbil after the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and its ally, Democrat Union Party (PYK), controlled some areas in Syria.

The visit was also made after Barzani announced Syrian Kurdish fighters are training in Kurdistan so that in the future they protect the Kurdish areas in Syria.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/319830/>

- **Sulaimani Brigade forces kill 5 terrorists**

Iraqi Army on Thursday killed 5 terrorists and injured one another in cooperation with the Kirkuk's 15th Brigade in Salahaddin.

Iraqi Army on Thursday killed 5 terrorists and injured one another in cooperation with the Kirkuk's 15th Brigade in Salahaddin, said Tuz mayor.

The terrorists attacked a check point of Sulaimani's 1st regiment of 16th Brigade of Iraqi Army near Shasaywani village 5 kilometers north of the Tuz Khormato,

killing three soldiers and injured 4 others, all were Kurdish, PUKmedia reported.



The Sulaimani's 16th Brigade of Iraqi Army followed the terrorists soon after they attacked the check point and killed 5 terrorists and arrested an injured one, Shalal Abdul Tuz mayor told PUKmedia.

Sulaimani's 16th Brigade killed Wednesday an al-Qaeda amir who was responsible for killing a number of Kurdish soldiers in Diyala.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/index.php/77/kurdistan-region/1864-sulaimani-brigade-forces-kill-5-terrorists>

- **Barzani receives SNC head in Erbil**

Massoud Barzani Kurdistan region president received Thursday head of

Syrian National Council Abdulbaset Sayda in Erbil

Massoud Barzani Kurdistan region president received Thursday head of Syrian National Council Abdulbaset Sayda in Erbil who was accompanied by people from Jazeera and Hasaka governorate to emphasize on the spirit of fraternity between Kurds and Arabs in Syria.

The meeting comes a day after Barzani met with Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu in Erbil with the talks of Syrian recent developments.



According to the written statement released by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Davutoglu and Barzani held productive meetings in Erbil about bilateral relations, regional problems and discussed the Syria crisis.

They focused on the necessity of the spirit of brotherhood among the Syrian Kurds and Arabs to avert any obstacles from distorting that cooperation.

Barzani also expressed his support to Syrian people who will decide on their fate after Bashar Assad's collapse.

- **Kurdish official discuss with Chalabi political situation in Iraq, area**

Baghdad (NINA) – Kurdistan region's Vice President, Kosert Rasoul and Deputy Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Barham Saleh, discussed with the Leader of Iraqi National Congress, Ahmed al-Chalabi, the political situation in Iraq and the area.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) web site reported on Thursday, Aug. 2, that the convened affirmed the importance of drawing a road map regarding outstanding issues in Iraq for the good of Iraqi people and the political process.

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

- **Biden makes phone call to Maliki, expresses support to government's efforts of imposing authority on borders**

Baghdad (NINA) – Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki received on Thursday afternoon, Aug. 2, a phone call from US Vice President Jo Biden.

Informed source said that Biden and Maliki discussed latest developments in the area and means to consolidate Iraq-US relations on all levels

He added that Maliki stressed the necessity to develop bilateral relations in accordance with the Strategic Frame Agreement concluded between the two countries.

Maliki affirmed that Iraq is moving ahead to impose its authority along its borders to prevent any breach that contradicts the government's policy of not to interfere in other country's affairs and to prevent any infiltration that contradicts the government's policy and moves that infringe internal security.

For his part, Biden expressed satisfaction over the government's efforts to

consolidate its authority and taking required measures to safeguard its borders, being the Federal Government's task.

He also expressed pleasure on the government's oil policy to consolidate its international exports.

He pointed out that both sides agreed to continue dialogue on all issues of common interest. / End.

Barzani, Allawi, Chalabi discuss political developments Jafari meeting with Kobler: Efforts being exerted to solve outstanding problems

Turkey's Foreign Minister arrives in Erbil Nechirvan Barzani discuss with Russian official developments of the political crisis.

Army Chief of Staff discusses with Iranian Interior Minister bilateral cooperation.

IS in Kirkuk, condemns "arbitrary measures" by Baghdad forces against a village in the province.

Bahaa al-Araji: the crisis between Baghdad and Kurdistan is of accumulation

of political problems.

Postponement the vote on the Federal Court and the Judiciary Legal Council .

Hani Ashour: political blocs have not received the reform paper so far alluding to a procrastination maneuver.

Parliament start today's session.

Nujaifi and Al-Hakim discuss the reform paper and Syrian crisis. MP asks government to provide protection after threats due to criticizing Hassan Nasrallah. Maliki receives Putin's envoy.

Source: the meeting of the political leaders suggested a meeting between Maliki and Barzani.

MP holds responsibility of the crisis between the central and Kurdistan to the Parliament. MP: increasing the members of Electoral Commission is unjustified.

Barzani discusses with US vice president the political situation in Iraq, Kurdistan and the region in general. Iraqiya MP accuses state of law of creating crisis.

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

2. IRAN

- **Tehran Urges Libya's Swift Action to Release Abducted Iranian Aid Workers**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran on Thursday called on the Libyan officials to take swift and serious actions to free the 7 Iranian Red Crescent workers who were abducted in the Eastern city of Benghazi earlier this week.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for African and Arab Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian called on Libya to take urgent measures to release the kidnapped Iranian Red Crescent workers in that country.

Criticizing the Libyan officials for not providing security measures for the Iranian relief team, he expressed hope they would be released soon through serious efforts of the Libyan officials.

Libya announced on Wednesday that the 7 Iranian Red Crescent workers are healthy.

"The Iranian Red Crescent team abducted in the Libyan city of Benghazi are safe and healthy," Libya's Deputy Interior Minister

Wanis al-Sharef was quoted by al-Jazeera as saying.

Sharef said that kidnappers have asked the Iranian officials to mediate the freedom of tens of Libyan prisoners who are in Iraqi jails.

The Libyan Red Crescent said in a statement on Tuesday that armed men have kidnapped a seven-member delegation from the Iranian Red Crescent visiting Benghazi.

The Iranians were heading to the Tibesti hotel when an armed group intercepted them. They were loaded into a different car and whisked away to an unknown location, the statement added.

The driver of the vehicle, a local volunteer, was not taken. The delegation arrived in Libya on Monday at the invitation of the Libyan Red Crescent.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252473>

- **Iranian, Turkish Top Diplomats Review Latest Regional Developments**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian and Turkish Foreign Ministers Ali Akbar Salehi and Ahmet Davoudoglu in a phone conversation conferred on the latest developments in the region, specially in Syria.

Salehi and Davutoglu reviewed issues of mutual interests during the telephone conversation Wednesday evening.

The two foreign ministers also discussed the latest regional developments, the critical situation in Syria in particular.

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

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

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252463>

- **Iran demands clear response from P5+1: Jalili**

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili (R) and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton

A clear and specific response [from the P5+1] to the Islamic Republic of Iran's sensible ideas is a logical request."

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili

The secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council has called on the group of six major world powers to provide a clear

response to ideas put forward by Tehran in the negotiations with the P5+1.

In a telephone conversation with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton on Thursday night, Saeed Jalili pointed to Iran's 'constructive, effective and innovative attitude' toward the negotiations and said, "A clear and specific response [from the P5+1] to the Islamic Republic of Iran's sensible ideas is a logical request."

Ashton, for her part, welcomed Iran's proposed ideas in the recent Tehran-P5+1 talks in Istanbul. She said that she would confer with the P5+1 group on the issue and will announce the conclusion to Jalili within two weeks.

The deputies to Jalili and Ashton ended their day-long talks in Istanbul on July 24.

The meeting between Ali Baqeri and Helga Schmid was held three weeks after Iran and the P5+1, comprising Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany, held an expert-level meeting on July 3 in Istanbul with the participation of

representatives and experts from both sides.

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

At the heart of the Moscow negotiations was Iran's nuclear energy program, with Tehran reiterating its inalienable right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes.

The United States, Israel and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran rejects the allegations, arguing that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/08/03/254162/iran-expects-clear-response-from-p51/>

- **Turkish MGK backs comprehensive solution to Iran nuclear issue**

Secretary General of Turkey's National Security Council (MGK) Muammer Turker has reaffirmed his country's support for Iran's nuclear energy program.

In a meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Ankara Bahman Hosseinpour on Thursday, Turker said his country supports the Islamic Republic's peaceful nuclear energy program and is ready to help the sides find a "comprehensive" solution to the Western dispute on the nuclear issue.

The United States, Israel and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran rejects the allegations, arguing that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

The MGK secretary general also praised the positive cooperation between Iran and Turkey in security fields and campaign against the smuggling of goods and drugs, calling for enhanced bilateral trade exchanges and border cooperation to

promote welfare and resolve social problems.

The Iranian ambassador, for his part, said the two countries have expanded relations in all fields over the recent years and added that the Iranian and Turkish officials are determined to further strengthen their cooperation.

Hosseinpour stated that Iran and Turkey are two complementary countries in the region and emphasized that secure borders and cultural, religious and historical commonalties are valuable assets to both sides to promote relations.

The Iranian and Turkish officials also exchanged views on the latest developments in Syria and stressed the importance of bolstering bilateral cooperation to put an end to bloodshed in the Arab country.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011. Damascus says outlaws, saboteurs, and armed terrorists are the driving factor behind the unrest and deadly violence, while the opposition accuses the security forces of being behind the killings.

The Syrian government says that the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the armed insurgents are foreign nationals, mostly from Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan.

Western states have been calling for Assad to step down. However, Russia and China are strongly opposed to the Western drive to oust the Syrian president.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/08/03/254166/turkey-backs-iran-nuclear-program/>

- **Iranian DM: US Experiencing Most Difficult Economic Period**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi reiterated on Thursday that the US is now experiencing the most difficult economic period, adding that the American statesmen, instead of meeting the real needs of their people, have focused on issues with no value for their nation.

Vahidi said that the United States is currently experiencing the "most difficult

economic era", and emphasized that Washington suffered defeat in the international political scene such as its failures in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine.

Instead of considering the real demands of Americans, the US statesmen have concentrated on the issues that have no values for the people, he said.

Vahidi said that the saber-rattling of the US Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney against Iran is aimed at diverting the US public opinion from 'the grave' domestic issues.

"The economic issue is one of the [most] important factors in the American people's decisions to vote, while none of the US presidential candidates, neither Democratic nor Republican, have presented a solution yet to break the economic stalemate they have reached," he added.

In an interview with the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, Romney said, "We will employ every means short of military power. We recognize that if all means are exhausted and fail, a military option will have to be considered."

The United States has always stressed that military action is a main option for the White House to deter Iran's progress in the field of nuclear technology.

In response, Iran has warned that in case of an attack by either the US or Israel, it will target not just Israel, but also the worldwide interests of both the US and Israel, including 32 American bases in the Middle East, and close the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

An estimated 40 percent of the world's oil supply passes through the waterway.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252471>

- **Envoy: Iran, Turkey Play Important Role in Muslim World**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Envoy to Turkey Bahman Hosseinpour reiterated that Iran and Turkey play an important role in the Muslim world and should make efforts to consolidate solidarity among Islamic countries.

Addressing a group of cultural figures from Turkey, Hosseinpour said that enemies of Muslims do not favor unity of

the Muslim World, hatching plots to sow discord among them.

He said that Iran and Turkey play major role in the Muslim World.

Hosseinpour said the two countries should try to strengthen solidarity of Muslim World and help restore peace and tranquility in the international community.

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

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104252433>

- **Iran agrees to talk with world powers again in August: EU**

Iran's main nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili agreed in phone talks on Thursday to resume dialogue with world powers before the month is out on Tehran's contested programme, the EU's top diplomat said.

"I proposed, and Dr Jalili agreed, that we talk again after further reflection at the end of the month," Catherine Ashton said in a statement.

She did not say if these would be face-to-face talks or more phone contact, but underlined: "I impressed the need for Iran now to address the issues we have raised in order to build confidence."

Working on behalf of Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, European Union High Representative Ashton is trying to elevate dialogue with Tehran into a stable exchange after tortuous stop-start diplomacy.

Their planned call followed face-to-face talks between the pair's respective deputies in Istanbul in Turkey, last week.

Ashton said she had "explored diplomatic ways to resolve international concerns about Iran's nuclear programme," which Israel and the West suspect is a cover for efforts to build an atomic bomb, a charge denied by Iran.

The so-called P5+1 group she represents has told Iran to immediately stop enriching uranium to the 20 percent level, to ship out its existing 20 percent stock and to shut down a fortified underground enrichment facility.

Experts say uranium must be enriched to 90 percent purity to make nuclear bombs, but that 20 percent purity is a key stage in paving the way towards that capacity.

Iran insists it has a right to uranium enrichment under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and wants Western sanctions on its economy to be eased.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/49414/World/Region/Iran-agrees-to-talk-with-world-powers-again-in-Aug.aspx>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel can rely on Obama to stop nuclear Iran'**

Michele Flournoy, former top US defense official and Obama adviser, vows president won't allow nuclear Iran; says day after military action, unified int'l effort will be needed to keep Iran from restarting nuclear program.

Israel can rely on the US to take the necessary steps – including possible military action one day – to stop Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon, Michele Flournoy, former undersecretary of defense for policy, has told The Jerusalem Post.

Speaking following US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta's visit to Israel on Wednesday, Flournoy said Obama was serious about stopping Iran.

Related:

US Congress passes 'strongest' Iran sanctions yet

'Ahmadinejad anti-Semitic rant a wake up call'

"[US President Barack] Obama is careful with what he says and he means what he

says," said Flournoy, who left the Pentagon earlier this year and is now a member of the Obama campaign's National Security Advisory Committee. She is also rumored to be a candidate for secretary of defense if Obama wins reelection.

"He chose his words carefully that the policy is not containment and I think he is serious about that," she added, giving as examples how the president has followed through on his policy statements regarding Iraq, Afghanistan and in the war against al-Qaida.

"My experience with this president is that there is no light between what he says and does. Obviously, it will be his decision at the time, but I believe there is a strong consensus to prevent this [Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon]," she added.

Flournoy – who is familiar with Israel's top defense chiefs including Defense Minister Ehud Barak and IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Benny Gantz from her three years at the Pentagon – admitted that Israel and the US view the Iranian threat differently, and the time that remains to stop it, mostly as

a result of their different military capabilities.

She said though that both Israeli and American intelligence agencies agreed that the Iranians have not yet begun “weaponization” and that once they do so, it will still take time before they obtained a weapon.

“The US view is that it is not time [for a strike]. There have just been new sanctions put in place and those take time but the screws have been turned and the impact will take several months,” she said.

One of the additional reasons for hesitation in taking military action, Flournoy explained, was that most assessments are that a strike would only set back the Iranians by one-to-three years.

“Any military action – at best – is a delay tactic and does not ultimately solve the problem, so how and when you take the action matters, since the day after, you will need the international community to stay unified so Iran does not restart,” she said. “But if you do it in a way that destroys the international consensus then

you have a tactical step that undermines the strategic goal.”

Asked about Israel’s claim that Iran is close to moving into what Barak has coined the “immunity zone” – the point when an Israeli strike might no longer be viable – Obama’s top adviser said she believed there was still time.

“I think they will continue to monitor the impact of the sanctions and see if additional sanctions can add to the pressure, but it is hard to put a timeframe on it. They are watching for the impact,” Flournoy said.

Under Obama, she claimed, Israel-US defense ties have taken an impressive leap forward.

She said Israel-US ties were “like a marriage” and that while there were differences over policy sometimes, the US commitment to Israel’s security was “unshakable.”

“The quality of the relationship – both the amount of interaction and the quality – has increased substantially in terms of comparing notes on the full range of

strategic issues in the region, in terms of people understanding Israel's concerns and security needs and what it means to ensure [Israel's] qualitative military edge," Flournoy said. "It is really the intensity and depth of the interaction that has grown a lot."

Meanwhile, former Mossad chief Efraim Halevy fueled speculation of an impending Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear program.

"If I were an Iranian, I would be very fearful of the next 12 weeks," Halevy told The New York Times on Wednesday.

The Times reported that some American officials believe Israel might attack Iran this year.

<http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=279942>

- **Romney, Panetta's Israel trips hit election ads**

Just three days after presumptive Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney left the country, a conservative pro-Israel advocacy group called the

Emergency Committee for Israel (ECI) had a 30-second pro-Romney advertisement prepared and ready for broadcast this weekend in Florida – a key battleground state with a relatively large percentage of Jewish voters.

And, of course, footage of Romney delivering a speech Sunday in front of the Old City walls, and his visit to the Western Wall, figured prominently.

But the Romney advertisement was not out there alone. The office of Public Affairs at the US Embassy in Tel Aviv had a three-minute video on YouTube within 24 hours of Defense Secretary Leon Panetta's departure from Israel, emphasizing Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak lauding Israeli-American security cooperation.

The ECI ad, which the organization announced would air hundreds of times in the coming days in Florida, begins with a deep voiced announcer asking, "What's the capital of Israel? President [Barack] Obama is embarrassed to say."

The ad then shows a White House spokesman fumbling over the question of

what is Israel’s capital, followed by a shot of Romney, at his speech Sunday, saying: “It is a deeply moving experience being in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel.”

“Next year President Mitt Romney in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel,” the ad concludes, as a picture of Romney, eyes closed, is seen touching the Western Wall.

Those quick to wring their hands over this advertisement would do well to look at the very professional video uploaded on Thursday by the US Embassy in Tel Aviv.

The video, which begins with dramatic music and shots of Panetta stepping off a US Air Force jet, is titled “Rock Solid Commitment – US Secretary of Defense Panetta’s Visit to Israel.”

It shows him reviewing an honor guard with Barak, and then saying, “We are friends, we are partners, we have – as the defense minister pointed out – probably the strongest US-Israel defense relationship that we have had in history.”

It also shows Panetta warmly shaking hands with Netanyahu, and the prime minister saying that he wanted to “use

this opportunity to thank you, President Obama, and the American Congress for enhancing the strategic relationship between our two countries. In this time of great instability in our region, the strong, bipartisan message of support for Israel is deeply appreciated.”

The video also features footage of Panetta’s visit Wednesday to the Iron Dome battery near Ashkelon, where he said “The Israeli people should know that the United States stands with them in this fight and the fight to ensure peace in this region, and that we have a rock solid commitment to Israel’s security and to the security of its citizens.”

In a related development, Romney on Thursday launched the Jewish Americans for Romney coalition and defended his citation earlier this week in Jerusalem of “culture” to explain the economic disparity between Israelis and Palestinians.

“The Jewish community has made contributions to American society that stand in amazing disproportion to its numbers, and I am genuinely honored to have so many of its leading thinkers,

diplomats and political leaders support my campaign,” Romney said in an announcement released Tuesday through his presidential campaign.

In a separate release, Romney continued to defend his comment during his Jerusalem trip that culture is the reason Israel is more prosperous than the Palestinian areas.

Palestinians slammed Romney’s remarks as racist and as willfully ignoring the limitations imposed upon them by Israel’s occupation.

“Like the United States, the State of Israel has a culture that is based upon individual freedom and the rule of law,” Romney said in the release. “It is a democracy that has embraced liberty, both political and economic.

This embrace has created conditions that have enabled innovators and entrepreneurs to make the desert bloom. In the face of improbable odds, Israel today is a world leader in fields ranging from medicine to information technology.”

<http://www.jpost.com/USPresidentialrace/Article.aspx?id=279949>

- **CTB: Israelis should leave Sinai at once**

Counter-Terrorism Bureau issues repeated warning against travel to Sinai Peninsula, citing concrete info on terror groups' intention to carry out attacks against Israeli citizens

The Counter-Terrorism Bureau at the National Security Council on Thursday issued a repeated travel warning to the Sinai Peninsula, calling on all Israelis who are planning to travel to or who are currently staying in Sinai to return to Israel immediately.

A travel warning to the area has been in place for a long time, however the Bureau is now reiterating its call, citing terror groups' intention to carry out attacks against Israeli citizens.

The Bureau stated that it has obtained concrete information on terror organizations in Gaza Strip and other elements that are planning terror attacks and abductions of Israeli tourists in Sinai.

The statement also requested that relatives of Israelis who are currently in Sinai to inform them about the travel warning.

Despite the alarming announcement, a source at the border crossing between Israel and Egypt claimed that only 2,000 people crossed over into Sinai in the past two days, few of which were Israelis.

The source told Ynet that since the revolution in Egypt, Israelis have become more attentive to travel advisories, and most of those who enter Egypt these days are either Israeli-Arabs, or Israelis who head for the casinos in Taba. Only few, the source added, were backpackers heading to Sinai's beach resorts.

In recent weeks, a number of attempts to carry out attacks against Israeli citizens and soldiers near the Egypt border have been thwarted.

Last week, armed terrorists opened fire at a bus carrying soldiers near the Ein Netafim area. Last month, Border Guard officers shot two suspects, apparently from Gaza, who crossed the border fence from Sinai and entered Israel. One man

was killed and the other one sustained injuries. The incident occurred at the section of the border where the fence has yet to be completed.

Several weeks ago, a terrorist cell opened fire at a group of construction workers who were building the border fence. Said Phashpashe, 36, from Haifa, was killed in the incident. Two of the terrorists were later killed by IDF forces that arrived at the scene.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4263887,00.html>

- **Top minister criticizes PM's economic policy**

Likud minister warns 'budget cuts, tax increase will push voters away.' Failure to pass budget could spell early elections
Attila Somfalvi

In light of the expected budget cuts and economic measures announced by the government, senior Likud officials criticized the Finance Ministry and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new economic measures, expressing concern

that the party may suffer serious electoral damage.

"For the past three years we've heard that everything is wonderful, yet suddenly we find that there's a NIS 30 billion (about \$7.5 billion) gap in the budget. This means that things weren't as good as Netanyahu and Steinitz presented them," a top minister said on Thursday.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4263926,00.html>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Two die in Clashes between security forces, protesters in Upper Egypt**

Clashes between family of Abu Seleem village in Beni Suef and central security forces resulted in death of two civilians earlier on Thursday; two sides trade blame

Two men have died on Thursday after clashes broke out between central security forces and hundreds of angry residents in Beni Suef governorate, about 120 km south of Cairo.

Two other men were critically wounded, prompting protesters to storm the Beni Suef governorate building, smash its façade and set three police vehicles on fire.

The exact reason for the clashes remains vague. There were two accounts as to what really happened, according to Al-Masry Al-Youm Arabic newspaper

Central security forces said they had acted in self defence after being "attacked by thugs" while residents insisted the melee started when one of the soldiers tried to harass a girl that was passing in front of their camp.

The public prosecution in Beni Suef said it was carrying out investigations to find out what happened. It is due to question the head of the central security camp and six other officers.

Amr Abu Zaeouzeou, head of the lawyers' syndicate freedom committee in Beni Suef, held the interior ministry responsible for the incident.

"We will file a complaint on Friday to the general prosecutor against the interior

minister and director of security in Beni Suf. We will request that both men be put on trial,” he said.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49417/Egypt/Politics-/Two-die-in-Clashes-between-security-forces,-protes.aspx>

- **Clashes erupt again at Cairo's Nile City Towers**

Families, angered by death of member at hands of police officer, came back to throw stones at security forces

Cars burn after riots broke out in front of a luxury hotel in central Cairo (Photo: AP)

Related

One dead as clashes erupt at Cairo's Nile City Towers

Morsi's promises: First month with nothing to show on security

Clashes erupted once again on Thursday night in front of downtown Nile Towers after a number of families threw security forces guarding the Towers with stones.

According to Ahram Arabic Language website, security forces said they succeeded in pushing back the families

who cut off the courniche road paralyzing traffic completely.

Security forces shot bullets in the air in an attempt to disperse the angry crowd.

Clashes had broken out at the downtown Cairo's Nile City Towers on Thursday afternoon.

Dozens of civilians with molotov cocktails have set light to several parked vehicles beside the Nile-front complex and attacked parts of the building.

Security and emergency services arrived at the scene in a bid to quell a potentially flammable situation.

The assailants came by three minibuses and several motorcycles then blocked the street after a man had been gunned down by a police officer, according to a report at Ahram's Arabic-language news website.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49421/Egypt/Politics-/Clashes-erupt-again-at-Cairos-Nile-City-Towers.aspx>

- **Egypt's President Morsi holds 1st meeting with new cabinet members**

Morsi breaks Ramadan fast with members of Egypt's new government, instructs Prime Minister Hisham Qandil to continue implementation of 100-day plan

Meet Hisham Qandil's new Egypt cabinet

BREAKING: Egypt president Morsi appoints El-Ganzouri as advisor

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi on Thursday afternoon held his first meeting with members of his newly-appointed prime minister's cabinet at the Presidential Palace in Cairo's Heliopolis district.

The meeting was held shortly after new cabinet ministers took their oaths of office before Morsi.

The president instructed Egypt's new prime minister, Hisham Qandil, to continue implementation of a presidential programme aimed at solving chronic domestic problems – including a post-revolution security vacuum, bread and fuel shortages, traffic congestion and inadequate public sanitation – within the first 100 days of Morsi's tenure.

Morsi's presidential programme also aims to enhance public services, revive the national economy, boost Egyptian exports and encourage investment, both local and foreign.

At the meeting, the president also stressed the necessity of combating rising unemployment, providing job opportunities for university graduates, encouraging small business enterprises and supporting Egypt's struggling tourism industry.

Morsi went on to stress the need for bolstering Egypt's relations with foreign countries, especially African nations, and launching a unified Arab stock market.

The president concluded the meeting by holding a Ramadan iftar (breakfast) with newly-appointed cabinet members.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49406/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt's-President-Morsi-holds-st-meeting-with-new-c.aspx>

- **New Egypt cabinet faces criticism by revolutionary group, liberal figure**

The Revolution Youth Union blasts new Cabinet as part of a 'deal between the military, Muslim Brotherhood, and remnants of old regime'; Ayman Nour claims President Morsi's popularity has plummeted

Qandil: 35 ministries in upcoming government; oath to take place shortly

Technocrats outnumber Islamists in Egypt's new Qandil government

President made wrong choice with Egypt PM Qandil: Revolution Youth Union

The Revolution Youth Union (RYU) slammed the newly formed Cabinet Thursday, stating the choices of ministers have not been made according to merit, as technocrats, nor according to national consensus.

These terms were used by Prime Minister Hisham Qandil and other state officials over the past week about the Cabinet that Qandil was putting together, unveiled today.

The RYU is one of several youth groups that were formed following the ouster of former president Hosni Mubarak amid the January 25 Revolution.

In a press statement, the RYU claims that favouritism was the main method of choice.

The group slammed the new Cabinet as being an outcome of a balance of power between the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), figures with allegiances to ousted president Hosni Mubarak, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

“The insistence of Mohamed Morsi to appoint Hisham Qandil — who occupied key posts within the former regime — in addition to heading one of the most important issues of national security, which is that of Nile Water, is highly indicative of the fact that Morsi and the SCAF do not wish to see change,” claimed RYU spokesperson Wael Hamada.

Haitham El-Khatib of the RYU stated that the composition of the Cabinet is the clearest proof that a deal was forged between Morsi and the SCAF, in an attempt to “bury the revolution,” but did not provide examples.

Also commenting on controversy around the new government's formation, head of Ghad Al-Thawra Party and member of the

second Constituent Assembly that is tasked with drafting Egypt's upcoming constitution, Ayman Nour, stated Thursday that the Cabinet would not work in the interest of President Mohamed Morsi.

Nour added that Morsi's popularity has "markedly decreased" at a time when public support for the presidency is most needed. He added that he believes Egyptians increasingly express concern over the chances of Morsi's success, adding: "We all wish he is able to prove otherwise since his success will mean the success of the second Egyptian republic."

Nour underlined his hope for "the success of the upcoming government given its delay in formation and amid such critical times for Egypt."

A swearing-in ceremony took place Thursday at the presidential palace. In a press conference, Prime Minister Hisham Qandil stated that 35 ministries would be part of the incoming government, up from 29 under former premier Kamal El-Ganzouri.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49376/Egypt/Politics-/New-Egypt-cabinet-faces-criticism-by-revolutionary.aspx>

- **Morsy to visit Iraq soon, says ambassador**

President Mohamed Morsy will visit Iraq soon to reaffirm the good relationship between the two countries, said Egyptian ambassador to Iraq Sherif Shaheen on Thursday.

The daily Iraqi newspaper Al-Sabah quoted Shaheen as saying that Morsy will undertake his visit after resolving urgent domestic affairs, but the ambassador did not specify a date.

The trip would come as part of a tour of the Arab region, Shaheen continued, stating that preliminary arrangements have already been made.

"Egypt is currently working to achieve safety and stability, and this should happen with the collaboration of all the Arab peoples, especially the people of Iraq. We look forward to working with Iraq in the coming period, as there are many

points that the two nations can cooperate on,” said Shaheen.

The ambassador added that when Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zabari met with Morsy in Cairo last month, the president expressed his wish to visit Iraq at the earliest opportunity.

Shaheen was appointed as Egypt's ambassador to Iraq in June 2009, four years after diplomatic relations were suspended between the two countries. The former Egyptian ambassador in Baghdad, Ihab al-Sharif, was believed to have been assassinated there in July 2005 by Al-Qaeda.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-visit-iraq-soon-says-ambassador>

- **Women’s Rights Clause in Tunisian Constitution Defines Woman as Man’s “Associate”**

The newly written constitutional clause protecting women’s rights in the Tunisian constitution has angered feminists and opposition politicians with wording that calls women the “associate” of man.

The article – article 27 of the constitution – states that women’s rights should be protected “under the principal of complementarity at the heart of the family and as man’s associate in the development of the country,” according to versions of the text, translated from Arabic to French, which have circulated on the Internet and in Tunisian media.

It was approved by a vote of 12 to 8 by the Commission of Rights and Liberties, with 9 of those voting for the clause coming from Tunisia’s ruling Islamist party, Ennahdha.

The article was quickly and publicly condemned by Salma Mabrouk, a member of the center-left Ettakatol party who voted against the version of the clause passed by the committee. In a statement on her official Facebook page that quickly spread throughout the activist and feminist communities, she stated, “The majority version completely annuls the concept of equality of the sexes.”

She went on to criticize the wording of the clause for contradicting other, previously approved clauses, which also treat citizens’ and families’ rights.

Another committee member who voted against the clause, Hasna Mrsit of the centrist Congress for the Republic Party, lamented the fact that the description seemed to marginalize the rights of single mothers, who would not seem to enjoy the “complementarity at the heart of the family” mentioned in the text. In November, Ennahdha representative Souad Abderrahim stated that single mothers “do not have a right to exist.”

“It’s a step backwards,” said Mrsit.

The distressed reactions of these politicians were echoed by human and women’s rights activists in Tunisia.

“I am distraught and worried,” said Samla Hajri of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, a longstanding women’s rights organization. “Women are not given rights as individuals, only in reference to men.”

While she said that her organization had not yet taken a position on the issue, she was confident that feminists will do all they can to push against the article’s ratification.

“We will bring all possible pressure. We are not ready to accept this,” said Hajri.

Amna Guellali, who is associated with Human Rights Watch in Tunisia, was concerned not just for the apparently secondary place given to women in the article, but also by its failure to specifically forbid discrimination and its lack of reference to legal standards, domestic or international.

“It’s a very weak protection. It doesn’t achieve the protections that our organization would have wanted,” said Guellali, who added that she expected Human Rights Watch to issue a statement on the article in the coming days.

However, head of the Commission on Rights and Liberties Farida Laabidi, a member of Ennahdha, felt that the wording of the accepted version was misunderstood by its opponents. The “complementarity” mentioned in the text, according to Laabidi, was meant to stress that the relation between man and woman was not one of “competition.”

Concerning the seeming exclusion of single mothers from the clause, Laabidi

stated that the commission had simply not considered this group in their formulation of the text.

“We shouldn’t construe a situation which is perhaps quite rare as a phenomenon in this country,” said Laabidi, who went on to state that single mothers’ rights were covered by the article and by other rights articles in the constitution.

The women’s rights clause is scheduled to be brought to the floor of the National Constituent Assembly later this month for final approval.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/08/02/womens-rights-clause-in-tunisian-constitution-defines-woman-as-mans-associate/>

- **NGO Criticizes Limits on Press Freedom in Tunisia’s Draft Constitution**

“ARTICLE 19 is concerned about a draft Article on media regulation at the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia.”

This statement was posted on the website of Article 19, an NGO that defends freedom of the expression and

information, on Monday July 30. The international NGO claims that the proposed article, put forward by the Commission for Constitutional Institutions, and which essentially sets up an “independent body for the media” comprised of members of the media and civil society, is undemocratic and would impose limits on the media.

According to the NGO, these limits violate international standards for freedom of expression such as Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) and the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa.

Dr. Jamel Tourir, the President of the Commission for Constitutional Institutions, said that the candidates for the body would be nominated by their peers, and then voted on by the legislature.

“They (the legislature) are the representatives of the people. Essentially, they are the people, so this body will be elected by the people,” he said.

Tour showed Tunisia Live a copy of the draft and explained its implications. “We need to limit the abuses of the media,” he said. Tour explained that misinformation and slander can be published by print, audio visual, and internet media, including Facebook and Twitter. all of which would fall under the new governing body, if the draft is passed.

“We won’t limit freedom of expression,” Tour stressed.

But Hichem Snoussi, a representative of Article 19 in Tunisia, countered that the political parties involved in drafting the article merely want to control things. “People won’t choose the members of this body. They [politicians] will influence civil society in terms of their choice, to serve their own interests.”

Although he agrees that there should be a body to regulate media, he asserted that this group should not be chosen by the legislature. “There are issues in media everyday, so it is necessary to have an independent committee that will try to regulate everything. The committee has to be independent and certainly not related to political parties.”

According to a statement on Article 19’s website, only audio-visual mediums like TV and radio should be governed by the government. “In other words,” the statement reads, “the state should have no custody over the print media.”

Farida Labidi, the chair of the Rights and Freedoms Committee

This debate comes in the same week that another Constitutional Committee, charged with drafting the “Rights and Freedoms” section of the constitution, voted on Article 26, which concerns freedom of expression. A quote from the draft reads, “Freedom of thought, opinion, and expression is guaranteed.” The only prohibitions on this freedom are in cases where information might hurt the health or safety of a person, or in cases of defamation.

“This article is unlimited when it comes to freedom of expression and liberty,” said Farida Laabidi, the Head of the Commission for Rights and Freedoms. Laabidi continued that she believes freedom of the press should be protected, but that there are limits when information

published by the media could interfere with the health and security of individuals.

Article 26 and the article concerning media regulation of the Constitutional Institutions Commission will both be presented to the General Assembly after the August vacation period.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/08/02/ngo-debates-freedom-of-the-press-in-tunisia-draft-constitution/>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Syrian shells hit northern Lebanon's border towns**

Shells fired from the Syrian side of the border on Thursday night landed near the towns of Bireh and Kherbet Daoud in northern Lebanon's Akkar, the National News Agency reported on Friday.

The report added that shells also hit towns near the An-Nahr al-Kabir river.

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- **March 14: Nasrallah's liberation strategy a ploy**

FILE - March 14 coalition members attend a meeting at Hariri's downtown residence in Beirut, Thursday, May 24, 2012. (The Daily Star/Mohammad Azakir)

BEIRUT: Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah's call for developing a strategy to liberate Lebanese territory still occupied by Israel alongside a national defense strategy drew criticism from rivals in the March 14 coalition Thursday.

Akkar MP Riad Rahhal, from the Future Movement, said Nasrallah's call was an attempt to sidestep the real topics of National Dialogue.

"Nasrallah's call for a strategy of liberation in addition to a defense strategy is a diversion in the direction of the National Dialogue table to come up with an excuse for his illegitimate arms," Rahhal said after holding talks with Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea at his residence in Maarab.

Rahhal said Hezbollah began using its arms like a militia following the events of May 2008, describing them as a cause of chaos.

Nasrallah said in a speech Wednesday that in addition to a national defense strategy, Lebanon also needed a strategy of “liberation of the Kfar Shouba Hills and Shebaa Farms still occupied by Israel.”

He explained that a genuine national defense strategy should be based on coordination between the Lebanese Army and the resistance.

The March 14 coalition boycotted a National Dialogue session that was scheduled for July 24 after head of Hezbollah’s parliamentary bloc MP Mohammad Raad said it was pre-mature to discuss a national defense strategy, adding that the country was in need of a strategy of liberation. Attendees had been set to discuss a defense strategy during the session.

Fares Soueid, the general coordinator of the March 14 coalition, said that Nasrallah had to choose between engaging in a strategy of liberation or adhering to U.N.

Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended Israel’s summer 2006 war against Lebanon.

“Let Sayyed Nasrallah, President Michel Sleiman and Prime Minister Najib Mikati announce the fall of the 1701 and summon U.N. Special Coordinator for Lebanon Derek Plumbly to the presidential palace and inform him of the matter,” Soueid told the Central News Agency.

“Let them ask him to pull out the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon and we will then engage together in a strategy of liberation,” he added.

For his part, Zahle MP Elie Marouni, from the Kataeb (Phalange) Party, said Nasrallah reiterated in his speech his party’s insistence on retaining arms.

“If we give the Lebanese Army political support ... then it should be the only force that protects us,” the lawmaker told a local radio station.

Future bloc lawmaker Hadi Hobeish, who interpreted the speech slightly differently, said Nasrallah’s call for discussing a strategy for liberation along with a

national defense strategy indicated a willingness to discuss a defense strategy, unlike Raad who refused to discuss a defense strategy until the remaining Israeli occupied Lebanese territories were liberated.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Aug-03/183224-march-14-nasrallahs-liberation-strategy-analysis.ashx#axzz25Ca2NG5h>

- **Jordan, Australia see eye-to-eye on Syria, region — foreign ministers**

Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh and his Australian counterpart Bob Carr speak at a press conference following talks on cooperation and regional issues on Thursday (Petra photo)

AMMAN — Jordan and Australia on Thursday called for a diplomatic solution to the Syrian crisis and an end to the violence in Syria, calling on the international community to help address the humanitarian disaster the Syrian people are facing.

Following a meeting with his Australian counterpart Bob Carr, Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh said the talks covered means

to strengthen bilateral cooperation, in addition to the Kingdom's reform process, the Syrian crisis and other regional issues.

“We had excellent and comprehensive discussions that tackled bilateral ties and issues of mutual concern as well as the Syrian crisis, its repercussions on the Kingdom and the increasing burden of the Syrian refugees on the national economy,” Judeh said at a press conference after the meeting.

Carr, who arrived in Jordan on Thursday on a several-day visit, is expected to visit the Zaatari Refugee Camp and meet with NGOs offering humanitarian assistance to the Syrians who fled the violence in their country and sought safe haven in the Kingdom.

Judeh said he briefed the visiting official on the government's efforts to provide adequate accommodation to the thousands of Syrians who are still flowing into the Kingdom due to the deteriorating situation in their country, noting that more than 145,000 Syrians have entered Jordan during the past 18 months.

“Despite our limited resources and the burden we are sustaining in hosting this number of refugees, the Kingdom remains committed to playing its humanitarian role in assisting the Syrians who are suffering from the violence and bloodshed taking place in their country. However, we urge the international community to support our efforts so we can sustain them until the Syrian crisis comes to an end,” he said.

The foreign minister also briefed Carr on Jordan’s reform efforts and the measures taken so far to transition to democracy and broaden political participation.

Judeh underlined that Jordan and Australia agree on the peace process and the need to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of a two-state solution by establishing an independent and viable Palestinian state on the 1967 border with East Jerusalem as its capital that will coexist in peace with Israel.

For his part, Carr urged the international community to effectively support Jordan in its efforts to aid displaced Syrian refugees, stressing that as the international community continues to

seek an end to the violence in Syria, an immediate humanitarian initiative is needed to ease the suffering of the thousands of refugees.

“In the coming few days I will be visiting the northern parts where the Syrians are being hosted in order to have a closer look at the situation of the Syrians and see how we can work with the local authorities in order to provide additional assistance,” Carr said, adding that Australia has already donated more than \$16 million towards supporting Syrian refugees

<http://jordantimes.com/jordan-australia-see-eye-to-eye-on-syria-region----foreign-ministers>

- **King warns of 'dangerous ramifications' of Syrian crisis**

His Majesty exchanges views on Syria, region with US defence secretary, Australian FM

His Majesty King Abdullah greets US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta in Amman on Thursday (Photo by Yousef Allan)

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah on Thursday voiced Jordan’s concern over the escalating situation in Syria and its “dangerous” ramification on the region, calling for a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

The King reiterated the need for a solution that would put an end to the bloodshed and spare the Syrians more suffering, a Royal Court statement said.

In two separate meetings on Thursday with US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta and Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr, His Majesty discussed the latest regional developments, especially the situation in Syria.

The meeting with the US official tackled possible scenarios in Syria in light of the escalation on the ground, an informed source said.

The source told The Jordan Times that the talks also delved into means to end the worsening suffering of the Syrian people.

“Any transitional political stage in Syria has to conform to Arab and international

consensus,” the source quoted the King as saying.

During the meeting, Panetta “pledged to explore ways to continue US help in providing humanitarian aid to those affected by violence in Syria”, a US Department of Defence statement said.

The talks focused on regional security challenges, especially in Syria and the recent refugee flows into Jordan, the statement, posted on the Pentagon’s website, quoted Press Secretary George Little as saying.

“Panetta also reiterated the US commitment to its strategic relationship with Jordan and to the strong defence relationship between the two countries,” the press secretary added, according to the statement.

Panetta’s six-hour stop in Jordan — his first visit to the Kingdom as defence secretary — is part of a regional tour that he began earlier this week, making stops in Tunisia, Egypt and Israel.

A US embassy statement quoted US Ambassador to Jordan Stuart Jones as

saying that Panetta “had a very productive meeting” with the King.

Jones said the US defence secretary praised Jordan’s response to the humanitarian crisis.

“The United States shares Jordan’s concerns about the chemical weapons threat in Syria... we will continue to make it clear to Assad and those around him that the world is watching and that they will be held accountable by the international community and the United States should they make the tragic mistake of using chemical weapons,” the ambassador said in the statement.

Meanwhile, the Australian foreign minister also voiced his country’s keenness to support Jordan’s efforts to receive Syrian refugees and provide them with humanitarian aid.

Discussions with Carr, who was visiting Jordan as part of a regional tour, also covered efforts to bring about peace in the Middle East, according to a Royal Court statement.

The Monarch called on the international community to bolster its efforts to move the peace process forward and help the Palestinians and Israelis return to the negotiation table to reach a just and permanent solution that addresses the final status issues, arriving at the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders.

King Abdullah and Carr also discussed bilateral ties and prospects for further cooperation. The Australian official commended the Kingdom’s reform efforts and its role in bringing about peace and stability in the region.

<http://jordantimes.com/king-warns-of-dangerous-ramifications-of-syrian-crisis>

6. SYRIA

- **Annan Quits As Syrian Envoy Over Disunity, Fighting**



PNA - The joint United Nations-Arab League envoy for Syria, Kofi Annan, announced Thursday that he will leave his post on August 31, saying that increased militarization in Syria and disunity in the international community have hampered his ability to carry out his work.

Annan told reporters in Geneva that without serious and united international pressure, it is impossible for him or anyone else to compel the Syrian government and the opposition to take the necessary steps to begin a political process.

Paul Salem, director of the Carnegie Endowment's Middle East Center in Beirut, says Annan's resignation is disappointing, but that the environment was not conducive for him to be effective.

"He certainly was probably the best mediator with the most prestige for such a crisis. But having said that, no crisis is ready for mediation until the parties are ready to mediate and ready to negotiate. And I think in the Syrian situation, both parties have not yet reached that point," Salem said.

Salem adds that the opposition might feel vindicated by Annan's resignation because it will bolster their argument that the government has never been ready to negotiate and was only using the envoy's mission as a cover to buy time to put down the uprising with force.

<http://www.peyamner.com/English/PNAnews.aspx?ID=284455>

- **UN official says "main battle" for Aleppo about to start**

The "main battle" for the Syrian city of Aleppo is about to start, a top UN official said Thursday, highlighting the spiraling violence in the civil war.

UN peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous also said after briefing the UN Security Council on the conflict that UN observers had not yet seen opposition rebels using the tanks and other heavy weapons that they now have.

"The spiral of violence is still increasing," Ladsous told reporters.

"The focus two weeks ago was on Damascus, the focus is now on Aleppo where there has been a considerable

buildup of military means and where we have reason to believe that the main battle is about to start," he added.

Aleppo has been under siege from President Bashar al-Assad's forces since July 20 and military observers have predicted a prolonged battle for the northern city.

Syrian rebels used tanks for the first time to attack a military airport northwest of Aleppo on Thursday, a rebel commander said. Rebel commander Abdel Aziz Salameh told AFP his forces had captured four tanks from government forces.

Ladsous said unarmed military observers who have been near Aleppo have seen the heavy weapons.

"We have not yet seen the opposition in the action of using those heavy weapons against government forces. But we know that they have tanks, that they have armored personnel carriers et cetera – that's a fact," he said.

The UN Supervision Mission in Syria has cut its number of observers from nearly 300 to less than 150 in the past two weeks

because of the increased strife and the suspension of most of its operations.

Ladsous said the mission had still been able to carry out about 50 patrols in the past two weeks and had tried to arrange local ceasefires to let civilians get out of conflict zones.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is preparing recommendations on the future of the UN presence in Syria after the UNSMIS mandate ends on August 20.

Western nations want the mission closed down while Russia is arguing that it should be extended and strengthened, despite the increased violence and the resignation of UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said UNSMIS was still playing an "important and useful role."

France's UN Ambassador Gerard Araud said the observers will probably have to leave because there is no agreement on the 15-nation Security Council about the future of UNSMIS.

"Honestly, I think there will be no agreement. I think the mission will disappear on August 19," Araud told reporters. "I cannot see a scenario, except a change on the ground, that would allow the mission to stay."

- **Annan urges Obama and Putin to resolve Syria differences**

Former UN chief Kofi Annan on Thursday called on Russia and the United States to shoulder responsibility for saving Syria from catastrophic civil war as he announced he was quitting as international envoy.

Writing in the Financial Times, Annan stressed that Western military intervention would not deliver success on its own and that a political solution which was not comprehensive was doomed to failure.

"Syria can still be saved from the worst calamity. But this requires courage and leadership, most of all from the permanent members of the Security Council, including from Presidents Putin and Obama," he wrote.

He blamed "finger-pointing and name-calling" in the Security Council for the failure to form a coherent international plan to deal with the worsening violence.

The former UN chief earlier complained that his April peace plan had not received the support it deserved from major powers.

As the Syrian army deployed fighter jets against rebels armed with tanks around the commercial capital Aleppo, Annan regretted an "increasing militarization" of the 17-month conflict.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=424581>

- **Bodyguard killed in attack on Yemeni minister**

Gunmen strafed the car of Yemeni Information Minister Ali Ahmed al-Amrani with bullets on Thursday, killing his bodyguard, but the official was not in the vehicle at the time, officials said.

"Armed men fired shots at the information minister's car, killing his bodyguard," a security official told AFP.

"The minister, who was not in the car at the time of the attack, was apparently the attackers' target."

The assailants sprayed the car with bullets as it stopped outside a pharmacy.

A ministerial source confirmed the attack and the death of the bodyguard, whose name was not given.

Amrani also escaped an assassination attempt on January 31 as he was leaving government headquarters in Sanaa.

The minister, a member of the opposition named to the post in December as part of a deal that led to the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in February, was also unhurt on that occasion.

Amrani was a member of Saleh's General People's Congress who joined the opposition along with several other party members in March 2011 in protest over a deadly crackdown on anti-regime protests by the president's loyalists.

The January attack was the first on a government official since a unity government was formed on December 7

under the Gulf-brokered power transfer deal that gave an equal number of seats to the GPC and opposition.

At the time of the first assassination bid Saleh was in the United States for medical treatment after being seriously wounded in a bombing at the presidential palace in Sanaa in June 2011.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=424605>

- **China “regrets” Annan's resignation**

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

Annan said on Thursday he was quitting as international envoy for Syria, complaining that his April peace plan had not received the support it deserved from major powers.

He also hit out at "continuous finger-pointing and name-calling" at the UN Security Council which he said had

prevented coordinated action to end the bloodshed.

His resignation sparked a new round of recriminations among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, with Washington blaming Beijing and Moscow's vetoing of three separate resolutions on the Syrian conflict.

Beijing, which has consistently opposed international intervention in the Syrian conflict, said it understood the difficulties Annan had faced, and that it would continue to work for a "political resolution" to the issue.

"China expresses regret at Annan's resignation. We understand the difficulty of Annan's mediation work, and respect his decision," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei in a statement.

"China supports the UN playing an important role in the appropriate resolution of the Syrian issue."

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=424611>

- **UN assembly to vote on Syria resolution**

Arab nations have dropped an explicit demand for President Bashar al-Assad to quit from a resolution on the Syria conflict to be voted at the UN General Assembly on Friday.

With the international community reeling from the resignation of UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan, the Arab League and their Western supporters are confident the resolution will be passed in the 193-member assembly. But they have toned it down in a bid to get as big a majority as possible.

Faced with opposition from some Arab and Latin American countries, the resolution, drawn up by Saudi Arabia, has been stripped of the demand for Assad to stand down and for the wider application of sanctions ordered by the Arab League.

Russia and China, which have vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions that could have led to sanctions against Assad's government, are expected to vote against the text.

No country can veto a resolution in the General Assembly, however. A resolution passed by 137 votes to 12 on February 16 led to the creation of the special envoy's post that Annan was named to.

The draft resolution condemns the Syrian government's use of "heavy weapons" and its failure to withdraw troops and artillery from towns in line with the peace plan that Assad agreed with Annan but has never carried out.

Syrian activists say that more than 20,000 people have been killed since an uprising against Assad erupted in March 2011.

The text demands that Syrian authorities stick to their "obligations" under international law which ban the use of chemical weapons and that all sides in Syria "implement rapidly" a political transition plan agreed by the international powers on June 30.

"The aim is to increase pressure on the Assad government. We want as many people to back this which is why some changes have been made," one Arab diplomat told AFP ahead of the vote.

Other diplomats said the initiative is a reflection of the international frustration and anger felt at the failure of moves to put pressure on the Syrian government, particularly the vetoes by Russia and China.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has already offered his "strong" support to the Arab moves at the United Nations.

France's UN Ambassador Gerard Araud, who is serving as Security Council president for August, said the resolution would show that Russia and China are a "tiny minority" at the UN General Assembly.

The draft text deplores "Security Council failure to agree on measures" on Syria and the growing use of tanks, helicopters and other heavy weapons by the Syrian authorities.

It calls for the establishment of a "consensus transitional governing body" in Syria, which hints at the need for Assad to stand down, and for free elections.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=424612>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Saudi Arabia leader nation in e-readiness: U.N. report**

Saudi students attend a class at the Technology College in Riyadh. The U.N. e-government readiness survey makes a comparative assessment of global e-government development in 193 countries every two years. (Reuters)

Saudi Arabia has joined Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates in the elite club of 21 nations holding crucial components of e-readiness for effective e-government and various e-services in public and private sectors, according to U.N. study released in Riyadh on Thursday.

“The presence of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain appearing in the top 21 rank is a feat,” according to the U.N. e-government survey

The U.N. e-government readiness survey makes a comparative assessment of global e-government development in 193 countries every two years. It includes indicators, strategies and best practices as well as measurement of governments’

transparency based on their online activity status. This year the survey revealed that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states emerged as leaders in e-readiness. “This feat is attributed to their surge in digital literacy and online presence,” the U.N. report said, referring to GCC states.

The Kingdom has invested heavily and taken several measures to improve the e-government program and to promote e-literacy among students and general public.

But the survey highlighted Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in particular, saying that the two countries “devoted especial attention to expanding and consolidating online services in the last few years and now offer online services close to those of global leaders such as Norway and Denmark.”

On top of this, Saudi Arabia also recently won two prestigious U.N. awards in the area of communications and IT and a third for its extraordinary achievement in rendering government e-services.

The U.N. survey said the e-government initiatives generally include embracing ICT

within its public sector and the attempt to be more efficient, inclusive, sustainable and transparent. It goes on to say however, “having a foot in the digital door is not enough, for the countries that hit the high ranks of this poll are ones that took their initiative to another level and subsequently moved further than the basic integration of systems and links.”

Offering a single point of contact to the public represents one of the major keys to progress in e-readiness according to the survey and that is where the “GCC states have excelled.”

In a bid to boost transparency and enable a partnership approach to public policy making, governments have started consulting more with citizens. They provide policies and information on when participatory events are available, where citizens can give feedback, the results of the e-participation is then considered in its decision making process. The survey makes note to the fact that the United Arab Emirates is one of only two countries that scored 100 percent on whether the government takes citizen’s views into decision-making.

Although the use of social media may not represent one of the e-readiness pillars, it can’t be ignored as a major factor in governmental transparency. The use of social media is surprisingly quite common in the GCC, and the growth in terms of use of social media in the Gulf is higher than any region of the world.

“With the use of consultation tools, including social media, other developing countries have caught up to the developed countries as e-leaders. Notable among these are Bahrain, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates,” the survey stated

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/03/230116.html>

- **Saudi aid convoy for Syrian refugees leaves Riyadh**

The 43 aid trucks assembled in a shopping mall car park in northern Riyadh before the sunset prayer, loaded with food, medicine and clothing under orange tarpaulins. (Al Arabiya)

A convoy of trucks left Riyadh for Syrian refugee camps in Jordan on Thursday evening carrying the first batch of aid from

a 10-day national appeal that has so far raised \$125 million.

Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter and birthplace of Islam, has led Arab diplomatic efforts to isolate the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad over his suppression of a 16-month-old rebellion against his rule.

The predominantly Sunni Muslim kingdom has accused Assad of targeting civilians, but is also mindful that his government is the closest Middle East ally of Saudi Arabia's big regional rival, Shiite Iran.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal previously has backed the idea of arming rebel forces and last week Reuters reported that Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey had established a base in southern Turkey to aid Syria's opposition.

In a statement on Saturday Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry did not directly deny the report, but said its position was to extend to the Syrian people "financial and humanitarian assistance."

It also called for Syrians to be enabled "to protect themselves" if the international

community proved unable to protect them.

Syria and Iran have accused Saudi Arabia of fuelling the violence in the country.

The Saudi Press Agency reported late on Wednesday that the campaign, which was launched by King Abdullah with a \$5.3 million donation last Monday, had raised 468 million riyals (\$125 million).

The 43 aid trucks assembled in a shopping mall car park in northern Riyadh before the sunset prayer, loaded with food, medicine and clothing under orange tarpaulins.

The drivers, mostly Pakistanis, wore white T-shirts bearing the campaign logo, along with matching baseball caps.

To one side a tent had been erected with a buffet inside for the sunset breaking of the Ramadan fast, after which they would set off on the roughly six-day journey to the camps along Jordan's border with Syria.

Campaign director, Mubarak Said al-Baker, said dozens of volunteers were travelling

with the trucks to assist in the distribution of the aid.

The trucks were marked with the slogan “Saudi kingdom of humanity” in English and Arabic along the sides, while the cabs were decorated in more ornamental style with flags, stickers, plastic flowers and the Muslim invocation ma shaallah, or “God has willed it.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/02/230044.html>

- **Qatar-Yemen talks on ties**



HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani welcomes Yemeni President Abd

Rabbuh Mansour Hadi on his arrival in Doha yesterday HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani held a session of talks with Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi yesterday evening at Al Wajbah Palace. Talks during the session dealt with prospects of co-operation between the two countries and means of bolstering and developing them in various fields. The talks also touched on a number of issues, foremost of which was the situation in Yemen. The session was attended by HE the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani and a number of Their Excellencies ministers. On the Yemeni sides, the session was attended by member of the official delegation accompanying the Yemeni president. HH the Emir hosted an Iftar banquet in honour of the Yemeni president and his accompanying delegation. The Yemeni delegation later left Doha. They were seen off at Doha International Airport among others by HE the Minister of Economy and Finance Yousef Hussein Kamal.

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Pakistan welcomes hostages freed by Somali pirates**

Released Pakistani crew members of a Malaysia-owned ship seized by the Somali pirates, gather upon their arrival in Karachi on August 2, 2012. – Photo by AFP

KARACHI: Families and government officials in Karachi welcomed home on Thursday seven Pakistani crews' members released by Somali pirates following a \$1.1 million ransom payment after being held hostage for 20 months.

The Pakistani crew along with 14 other South Asians and an Iranian on a Malaysia-registered ship were captured by the pirates in the Gulf of Eden in November 2010.

The 15 other crew members – included seven Sri Lankans, six Bangladeshis and one each from India and Iran – are still in captivity.

“The pirates had initially demanded over 10 million dollars – our team negotiated through intermediaries and settled for over a million dollars,” Ishratul Ibad Khan,

governor of Sindh province, told reporters.

“We generated the funds through our philanthropists, who were too generous to donate for the cause,” he added.

Javed Saleem, captain of the ship MV Albedo, which was seized en route to Kenya, said the Pakistan government “made all-out efforts to give us freedom, something that had become impossible even in our dreams.

“Those 20 months were the worst, we passed the most horrible time in our life,” he told reporters.

Hira Mujtaba, 11, daughter of chief officer Mohammad Mujtaba, said she would now celebrate the coming Eid with zeal.

“I had prayed to Allah for the safety of my father. I hadn't celebrated Eid since he was taken hostage,” she said.

Last year Pakistan paid \$2.1 million dollars to Somali pirates for the release of four of its crew along with 11 Egyptians, six Indians and a Sri Lankan.

Piracy has surged in recent years off Somalia, a lawless, war-torn country that sits alongside one of the world's most important shipping routes.

<http://dawn.com/2012/08/03/pakistan-welcomes-hostages-freed-by-somali-pirates/>

- **Zulfiqar Khosa quits PML-N over differences with leadership**

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senator and senior adviser to the Punjab chief minister Zulfiqar Ali Khan Khosa on Thursday resigned from his PML-N membership over differences with the party leadership.

According to sources, Zulfiqar Khosa had conveyed his reservations to the PML-N leadership on several issues, including a case against his son Dost Muhammad Khosa.

He was not happy with the Punjab administration for taking action against his son in the Sapna murder case, said the sources.

They further said that due to grouping in the party, differences began sprouting a couple of years ago, which turned into a tug of war, adding that Zulfiqar Khosa had expressed his grievances time and again, but never reacted strongly.

The differences had started after former Punjab chief minister Dost Khosa no longer remained in Shahbaz Sharif's good books and relations between them went sour, the sources said.

Dost Khosa resigned from his cabinet post after the Lahore High Court (LHC) charged him in a case regarding the kidnapping and murder of actress Sapna.

Khosas, who belong to Dera Ghazi Khan, have decades-old ties with the Sharifs and got elected for provincial and national assemblies' seats several times on PML-N ticket.

According to sources, PML-N leadership is trying to contact Zulfiqar Khosa to persuade him to take back his resignation.

Talking to our sources, Punjab Minister for Planning and Development Chaudhry Abdul Ghafoor admitted that Zulfiqar

Khosa had some reservations over certain issues, which resulted in differences with the party leadership. He said the PML-N chief would meet Zulfiqar Khosa to discuss the issue. "I hope the differences will be resolved soon and Khosa will be back in the party," he said.

Ghafoor further said that Zulfiqar Khosa was committed to the party, but his son might be pushing him away. "Khosa has rendered great services for the PML-N, so he is an asset for the party," he added.

Reacting over the resignation, opposition leader in the Punjab Assembly Raja Riaz said that Zulfiqar Khosa was forced to leave the PML-N due to dictatorial thinking of Shahbaz Sharif. He said the resignation would prove to be the last nail in the PML-N's coffin.

<http://paktribune.com/news/Even-united-opposition-cant-defeat-PPP-in-election-PM-Ashraf-252090.html>

- **Pakistan, US see 'progress' in ties**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the United States on Thursday acknowledged progress in ties between the two countries, in the wake of a recent MoU signed regarding transportation of NATO supplies to Afghanistan through Pakistan, and subsequently the US releasing \$1.1 billion to the latter.

This was discussed during a meeting between Chief of Army Staff Gen Ashfaq Pervaiz Kayani and ISAF commander Gen John Allen at the GHQ on Thursday. Kayani said the meeting helped improve strategic and operational understanding between Pakistan's military and NATO forces. He said the Pak-US relationship should be based on mutual trust, respect and transparency.

General Allen said, "I look forward to these visits and am pleased with the upward spiral in our relationship they represent. We are making significant progress toward building a partnership that is enduring, strategic, carefully defined, and that enhances the security and prosperity of the region."

According to ISPR, this meeting was another in a series of opportunities for the

commanders to continue building upon the growing operational cooperation between the Afghanistan National Security Force, the Pakistan military and ISAF.

A joint statement released later, however, made no mention of the specific problems and difficulties that have increasingly characterised relations between Afghan, Pakistani and NATO troops.

All three parties have many shared interests, including their respective commitments to expanding opportunities for coordinated action against terrorists on respective sides of the border who threaten Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the region, and supporting Afghanistan's security, stability, and efforts towards reconciliation.

ISI chief Lieutenant General Zaheerul Islam is also currently in the United States, the first visit by a head of the Inter-Services Intelligence agency to Washington in a year.

<http://paktribune.com/news/Pakistan-US-see-progress-in-ties-252087.html>

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

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