



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

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1. IRAQ

• Supreme committee of KDP and PUK to hold weekly meetings

ERBIL, August 8 (AKnews) – A supreme committee of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) decided to make its meeting weekly from now on.

KDP vice president Nechirvan Barzani and PUK deputy secretary Kosrat Rasul held their first meeting in Erbil yesterday.

The meeting was suggested by the Kurdistan Region's President Massoud Barzani in an earlier meeting between both politburos of the two parties.

In the meeting, the work, principle and mechanism of the committee were organized. The formation of a secretariat for the committee was also decided, said a statement from the committee.

The committee members discussed a number of local topics in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/320769/>

• National Alliance meets with Kurdish coalition leaders Shawais and Zebari

ERBIL, August 8 (AKnews) – The head of the National Alliance (NA) Ibrahim al-Jafari met with two leaders of the Kurdistan Blocs Coalition, Rozh Nouri Shawais and Hoshiar Zebari.

The leaders discussed the NA's reform plan in Jafari's office, said a statement from the NA.



Shawais, Iraq's deputy prime minister, Zebari, Iraq's foreign minister and Jafari, former Iraqi prime minister, talked about the current political crisis in Iraq and ways to overcome the disputes.

Jafari started negotiations some time ago with political parties in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region and organized some arrangements to discuss the mechanisms for solving the political uncertainties in the country.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/320775/>

- **Iraq decides to “review” relations with Turkey following Davutoglu’s Kirkuk visit**

ERBIL, Aug. 7 (AKNews) – The Iraqi cabinet has decide to review it relations with neighboring Turkey following a surprise visit by the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to the disputed oil-rich city of Kirkuk, Iraqi Government Spokesman said in a statement.

Davutoglu visited Kirkuk last week where he met with the Turkmen community in the city. His visit angered the Iraqi officials in Baghdad as well as some Kurdish officials.

Ali al-Dabbagh, Iraqi cabinet spokesman, said in a statement that the council of ministers has decided to review the Turkish-Iraqi relations “in light of the recent developments in a new cabinet meeting”

Part of the measures by the Iraqi government includes the formation of a committee headed by deputy Prime

Minister Hussein al-Shahristani to look into the circumstances of the Turkish’s FM’s Kirkuk visit and to come up with recommendations.

The Iraqi government harshly criticized Davutoglu’s visit and described a “blatant interference” in the Iraqi internal affairs.

Turkish officials have defended Davutoglu’s visit and have described the visit as a peaceful one with no hidden agendas for the oil-rich multi-ethnic city.

Kirkuk is a disputed provinces between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Baghdad. The city is populated by Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs as well as other Christian minorities. The provinces claimed b each of the three ethnic groups.

Kurds have been trying to incorporate the province into the semi-autonomous Kurdish region claiming it was historically a Kurdish majority province and part of the Kurdistan Region before being subjected by the former Iraqi regime to an Arabization policy.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/320729/>

- **National Alliance meets with Kurdish coalition leaders Shawais and Zebari**

ERBIL, August 8 (AKnews) – The head of the National Alliance (NA) Ibrahim al-Jafari met with two leaders of the Kurdistan Blocs Coalition, Rozh Nouri Shawais and Hoshiar Zebari.



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<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/320775/>

- **Duz Khurmatu decides to return newcomers from Diyala**

ERBIL, August 8 (AKnews) – The mayor of Duz Khurmatu town announced that the town council unanimously decided to return the newcomers to the town from Diyala district to their origin.

Shalal Abdul said: "This is second time members of the town council voted to return Arab citizens to the area, who came from Diyala province.

"The Iraqi government and Diyala province were against the decision earlier but now Salahaddin Provincial Council joined them."

With regard to the reason behind this decision, Abdul commented: "Due to a large number of Arab newcomers in the town, house prices are up and the unemployment rate is increasing. Also the security situation is not stable in the town."

According to unofficial statistics 1,500 Arab families migrated from Diyala province after 2003, citing security uncertainties in their area.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/3/320826/>

- **Kurdistan Region restarts oil exports-source**

PNA-Aug 7 (Reuters) - Oil exports from Iraq's northern Kurdistan region restarted on Tuesday at 100,000 barrels per day (bpd), a senior Kurdistan Regional Government official told Reuters.

Exports were halted in April due to a payment dispute between Iraq's central government and the autonomous northern region.

"As we promised, today at around 12pm we restarted pumping oil at around 100,000 barrels per day as a goodwill gesture towards the central government in Baghdad," the official said.

<http://www.peyamner.com/English/PNAnews.aspx?ID=284944>

- **White House on Syria: We learned from Iraq**

PNA - The White House urged Syrian rebels on Tuesday to leave key governmental institutions "intact" when they topple President Bashar al-Assad. Press secretary Jay Carney said the plea was partly rooted in what is widely considered one of the worst errors of the Iraq War.

Amid high-level defections from Assad's regime and opposition forces seemingly gaining ground, "it is certainly the case that contingency planning is the responsible thing to do," Carney told reporters at his daily briefing. The spokesman declined to discuss "specifics" like possible aid.

"We have to think about what we can do to support a Syrian-led democratic transition that protects the rights of all Syrians," he said. "We have to figure out how to support the return of security and public safety and how to get the Syrian economy up and going.

"I can say that in this transition we think it's essential to make sure that the state's institutions stay intact and that we send

very clear expectations about avoiding sectarian warfare," he said.

After the March 2003 U.S.-led invasion, Coalition Provisional Authority administrator L. Paul "Jerry" Bremer banned members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party from holding influential government posts and disbanded Iraq's military—a pair of decisions widely blamed for fueling what became a bloody insurgency.

Asked whether that example had shaped the message to Syria's rebels, Carney replied: "That precedent is useful to look at." "There are other precedents also to look at--and the experience that we've had, and that the region has had, in various countries that have been affected by the Arab Spring," he said.

"But it is also true, as I have said or tried to say frequently, that each country in the region is different. So I would not suggest that any other country's past experience is identical to what we can expect or what we could expect in Syria if various decisions were made about the transition.

And Carney said Washington hoped "for a transition that brings about a government that is inclusive, that is responsive to the Syrian people and that acknowledges and enforces the liberties and rights of all Syrians."

<http://www.peyamner.com/English/PNAnews.aspx?ID=284991>

- **Army forces gather in al- Saadiya and Jalawla**

Iraqi army forces arrived in al- Saadiya and Jalawla sub- districts, a security source told PUKmedia.

The forces imposed a curfew in Saadiya sub- district, the source added.

Iraqi army forces are on alert for three days in Saadiya and Jalawla, he clarified.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/index.php/77/kurdistan-region/1926-army-forces-gather-in-al-saadiya-and-jalawla>

- **Shootings and a bombing killed seven people in Iraq on Tuesday**

Shootings and a bombing killed seven people in Iraq on Tuesday, security and medical officials said, bringing the number of people killed in violence this month to at least 69.

Gunmen with silenced weapons shot dead a justice ministry worker in the Jamiyah area of Baghdad and killed an agriculture ministry employee in Adil, both in the west of the capital, according to an interior ministry official.

Two soldiers were also shot dead at a checkpoint in Baghdad Jadida in the capital's east, the official said.

A medical official said four people were shot dead in Baghdad on Tuesday.

In the village of Al-Qayara, south of the northern city of Mosul, gunmen killed police Colonel Abdel Monam al-Juburi, while others shot dead one person in eastern Mosul, police First Lieutenant Khaled al-Juburi and Dr Mahmud Zeidan of Mosul General Hospital said.

In Baiji, 200 kilometres (120 miles) north of the capital, a motorcycle bomb killed one policeman and wounded four others,

a police lieutenant colonel and a medical source said.

At least 69 people, among them 47 security forces members, have been killed in attacks this month, according to an AFP tally based on security and medical officials.

Meanwhile, Adel al-Sumaidai, a Salaheddin provincial council member, told AFP his house in a village called Al-Sadeh was hit by a rocket from a helicopter about 4:00 am (0100 GMT), killing one of his sisters and wounding three others.

He did not specify whether he believed the strike to be accidental or not.

A police lieutenant colonel said Iraqi forces attacked "the hideout of those suspected of killing 15 Iraqi soldiers" in an attack on a military base on July 23, but did not give further details.

While violence has decreased from its peak in 2006 and 2007, attacks remain common across Iraq. There were attacks on 27 of the 31 days in July.

Official figures put the number of people killed in attacks in July at 325, the highest monthly death toll since August 2010.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/index.php/77/iraq/1919-iraq-attacks-kill-seven>

- **Genel Energy: Bina Bawi could be another Taq Taq**

The field, where three wells have been drilled, is currently believed to contain between 500 and 1 billion barrels of oil equivalent

The Bina Bawi exploration licence in Iraqi Kurdistan could be another 'Taq Taq' for Genel Energy, suggests broker Oriol, which rates the stock a 'buy'.

Yesterday, it emerged the firm had upped its stake in the asset, which lies adjacent to the producing Taq Taq field, to 44 per cent from 23 per cent.

The field, where three wells have been drilled, is currently believed to contain between 500 and 1 billion barrels of oil equivalent.

Through a US\$240 million deal with Hawler Energy, Genel purchased the additional stake and chief executive Tony

Hayward told investors the acquisition gave the firm a material interest in a third major oil and gas development (alongside Taq Taq and Tawke) and reinforced the company's leading position.

"Bina Bawi could be another Taq Taq for Genel. The most recent well, Bina Bawi-3 encountered a gross hydrocarbon column of more than 800 metres in the Jurassic zone and two Jurassic reservoir intervals tested separately achieved an aggregate flow rate of more than 4,000 bbls a day of light, 44 to 47-degree API oil," said analyst Richard Griffith.

The analyst added that a further column reckoned to be over 1,000m at Bina Bawi-3 remained untested.

He also added that overall results at Bina Bawi-3 continued to be reviewed and an extended well test will begin towards the end of the year. Two further appraisal wells are planned on the block this year.

Genel shares rose 3.03 per cent, at 698 pence.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/index.php/economy/1918-genel-energy-bina-bawi-could-be-another-taq-taq>

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/iran-vp-cairo-invite-morsy-summit>

2. IRAN

• Iran VP in Cairo to invite Morsy to summit

Iranian Vice President Hamid Baqai arrived in Cairo Tuesday on a private jet from the Iranian capital Tehran for a two-day visit to Egypt.

During the visit, Baqai will deliver Egyptian President Mohamed Morsy an official invitation from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to attend the Non-Aligned Movement summit to be hosted by Iran on 30-31 August.

Baqai was received by Environment Minister Mostafa Hussein upon arrival at Cairo airport.

Egypt is currently the president of the Non-Aligned Movement but the office will be passed to Tehran in this year's session. 118 countries are members of the organization.

• Turkey, Saudi, and Qatar may fall victim to al-Qaeda terrorism'

TEHRAN, Aug. 6 (MNA) – A top military commander warns that Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar may fall victim to al-Qaeda-minded terrorism as these three countries have been supporting terrorists in the fight against the Syrian government. “God forbid that Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar become victims of al-Qaeda terrorism, and thereby we warn our friends about this,” Hassan Firouzabadi, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Monday.

Pointing to the killings in Syria, Firouzabadi said, “Al Saud (Saudi Arabia), Qatar and Turkey are responsible for bloods being shed on the Syrian soil.”

The top military chief lamented the fact that Syria’s neighbors have been helping the U.S. warmongering plans in the region

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1667485>

- **Iran, South Korea close to deal to resume crude exports**

A South Korean government source has said that his country is close to a deal with Tehran to resume buying Iranian crude as soon as September, Reuters reported.

South Korea, the fourth largest buyer of Iranian oil, stopped buying Iran's crude in July because insurers, primarily based in London, had stopped covering tankers carrying Iranian oil.

The deal will require Iran to use its own tankers to transport the oil to the East Asian country, thereby shouldering the insurance risk.

EU insurers underwrite most maritime shipping, and insurers elsewhere have been unable to offer cover for the billions of dollars in claims that could stem from a spill.

The deal is being struck between South Korean refiners and the National Iranian Tanker Company.

SK Energy and Hyundai Oilbank are the only two South Korean refiners that import Iranian crude.

"Refiners have requested Iran to deliver crude, and the deal is almost reached," a government source told Reuters.

The refiners would buy a similar quantity of oil as they had prior to the July stoppage, sources said. There may be some variance month by month due to the size of vessels available for imports from the National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC), the source said.

Tehran offered to provide up to \$1 billion of insurance cover to Iranian vessels shipping oil to South Korea, Reuters reported last month.

The EU sanctions came into force on July 1, after new U.S. sanctions targeted at financial transactions for oil purchases took effect in late June.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1669159>

- **Iran Trying to Free Kidnapped Nationals in Syria through Turkey's Help**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said Tehran is trying to

free the Iranian pilgrims recently abducted in Syria through Turkey's assistance, and added that he has held meetings with Turkish officials to ask them to do their best to help secure freedom of the Iranian nationals.

On Saturday, armed insurgents in Syria kidnapped 48 Iranian pilgrims who were traveling on a bus from Damascus International Airport to the shrine of Hazrat Zainab (AS) on the outskirts of Damascus.

Speaking to reporters upon his arrival at Tehran airport after a visit to Turkey, Salehi pointed to his talks with his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu, and noted that the short visit came after his phone conversation with Davutoglu over the fate of the kidnapped pilgrims in Syria.

"All our efforts are aimed at the immediate release of the abducted pilgrims through Turkey's assistance given Turkey's contacts with some groups in Syria," Salehi stated, adding that Turkey had previously helped Iran free some of its nationals in Syria.

"This time, too, we try to obtain result through Turkey's help," Salehi stated.

As regards the fate of the Iranian nationals kidnapped in Libya, Salehi said that Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular, Parliamentary and Expatriates' Affairs Hassan Qashqavi will pay a visit to Libya to pursue their case.

The Libyan Red Crescent said in a statement last 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=9104253393>

- **Iran to Hold Int'l Conference on Syria Thursday**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian announced that Tehran is due to hold an international conference on the developments in Syria on Thursday.

"The Thursday's consultative meeting to study the Syrian developments will be held in Tehran with the participation of a remarkable number of interested and influential regional and world states," Amir Abdollahian told FNA on Wednesday.

"The Tehran conference will be held to strengthen and stress pervasive regional and international efforts to help the Syrian people come out of the current crisis," he added.

Iran has adopted an active policy to settle the crisis in Syria which has been sparked and aggravated by a number of foreign countries. In relevant development,

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili earlier this week visited Beirut and Damascus to discuss the crisis with the Lebanese and Syrian officials.

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

hope of stirring unrests in Syria once again.

The Zionist regime along with the US, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar have been supporting terrorists and rebel groups in Syria and have practically brought a UN peace initiative into failure to bring President Assad's government into collapse.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104253397>

- **Iran Renews Preparedness to Host Talks between Syrian Gov't, Opposition**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi on Wednesday once again underlined Tehran's support for a negotiated solution to the current crisis in Syria, and said Iran is ready to host talks between the Syrian government and the opposition.



Speaking to reporters upon arrival at Tehran airport on Wednesday, Salehi pointed to his consultations with Turkish officials over the Syrian crisis, and noted, "We have announced several times that Iran is prepared to host the (Syrian) opposition, and we called on Turkey to talk with those groups that are in contacts with Ankara to come to Iran for consultations."

The Iranian minister stated that Iran is against violence and advocates talks in Syria.

Salehi further said that Tehran has called on the Turkish officials to cooperate with Iran so that the developments in the region continue moving on a normal track free from the solutions imposed from outside.

In similar remarks on Tuesday, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili voiced Tehran's

opposition to foreign imposed solutions to the current disputes in Syria, and said Iran seeks new ways to end the crisis.

"Iran does not support the solutions which are imposed by foreigners," Jalili told reporters upon his arrival at Damascus airport on Tuesday.

"We believe that a new path should be followed in which national and internal talks and dialogue provide a basis for a solution to this crisis," the senior Iranian security official said, and noted that Tehran will use all of its capacities to help attain this solution.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104253399>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Abbas: Liberman is 'killing the peace process'**

PA president responds to FM's condemnation, renews threat to take statehood bid to UN General Assembly.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman is "killing the peace process," PA President Mahmoud Abbas retorted Wednesday

after Liberman blamed the PA president for responsibility in the failure of the peace process. Abbas also renewed the Palestinian threat to take the issue of statehood to the United Nations General Assembly, where his bid is nearly guaranteed passage.

"Liberman's statements reveal a mentality interested in killing the peace process and fueling conflict and wars," Abbas's spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh was cited as saying by official PA news agency WAFA.

Abbas, speaking at Al-Najah National University in Nablus on Wednesday, warned of the diplomatic repercussions of a continued stalemate in peace talks with Israel.

"Israel neither halted settlement activities, nor recognized the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 as occupied territory," he said, according to the Ma'an news agency. "Thus, the only choice we have is to go to the UN equipped with a united Arab stance."

Abbas also mentioned "noble Jerusalem" as being the future capital of a Palestinian

state. The PA is planning to ask the UN General Assembly in September for observer status as a non-member state.

Israel, according to diplomatic sources, is interested in combating the Palestinian narrative that they are going to the UN because nothing is moving in negotiations, by countering that nothing is moving because the Palestinians are unwilling to enter talks.

“The whole Palestinian position is that they are going to the UN because things are going nowhere. We want to make clear that the reason the peace process has stalled is because the Palestinians have refused to engage,” one government official said.

Israel’s hope, he added, was that countries important to the Palestinians would send them a message that this move would be counterproductive, and that they would oppose it.

On Tuesday, Liberman said that there will be neither diplomatic progress nor an accord with the Palestinians as long as Abbas remains in power. Liberman, in a meeting with visiting Australian Foreign

Minister Bob Carr, slammed the PA for a letter it sent to the EU on July 24, urging it to reconsider its relations with Israel.

The letter, coinciding with the annual EU-Israel Association Council meeting, urged the EU not to grant Israel “any upgrade whether it be official or practical,” and not to give the country any preferential treatment, nor allow further integration into the EU.

Liberman termed the letter “slanderous,” and said it accused Israel of theft and exploitation of natural resources, closing off the Gaza Strip, destroying projects in Israeli-controlled Area C of the West Bank and settler violence.

The letter also accused Israel of changing the demographic situation in Jerusalem, prolonged use of administrative detention, and the practice of “extrajudicial killings and torture.”

The style and spirit of the letter, Liberman said, according to a statement his office issued, was “better suited to The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and Der Sturmer.”

Liberman complained that the letter came even though Israel in recent months “has gone to considerable lengths to improve the relationship with the Palestinians,” and took a number of steps aimed at improving the overall atmosphere.

Among those steps, he said, was a July 14 decision to provide work permits to 5,000 additional Palestinian workers and to advance to the PA – so it could pay salaries before Ramadan – NIS 180 million against future tax transfers.

Liberman also noted an agreement signed between the Israel Electric Company and the Palestinian Energy Authority for the building of four electric power substations in the West Bank; that Jerusalem had authorized infrastructure industrial and infrastructure projects in Area C; and that it had also removed additional roadblocks in the West Bank.

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=280511>

- **Galilee residents suspected of smuggling Hezbollah explosives**

Twelve Israelis from Ghajar, Nazareth arrested on suspicion they smuggled 21 kg of demolition blocks, weapons and narcotics from Lebanon to Israel. Ibtin resident also arrested. Suspects may have been waiting for orders from Hezbollah

Cleared for publication: Thirteen northern Israel residents were arrested last month on suspicion they planned terrorist attacks. Police and Shin Bet forces seized 21 kg of C4 explosives, advanced explosive mechanisms, weapons and narcotics. The suspects were on orders from Hezbollah and were meant to target Israelis. Serious indictments have been filed against 10 of the suspects.

An investigation was launched in early July after Israeli intelligence officers received information regarding the smuggling of a large quantity of explosives.

The information was relayed to the Shin Bet and a joint investigation revealed that 24 demolition blocks had been smuggled from Lebanon to Israel via the village of Ghajar on June 5. Advanced operating systems had been utilized in the operation.

Security forces apprehended two separate cells – a Ghajar cell responsible for smuggling the weapons, and a Nazareth cell that was meant to receive the explosives, hide them and transfer them to terrorists. One of the suspects is a resident of Ibtin.

Police sappers who examined the devices found they were ready to be detonated and unlike other devices could cause multiple mass-casualty attacks. The explosives had been hidden in the backyard of one of the suspects in Nazareth.

Police added that an M-16 rifle stolen from a high ranking IDF officer had been found buried in another backyard where a two-barrel machine gun was also found buried under concrete floor. The suspects from Ghajar apparently engaged in drug smuggling and trafficking.

A police official said that the Lebanese explosives supplier, George Nimer, is a member of Hezbollah and a drug dealer also known as Abu Ali. Nimer worked with Saed Kamhuz, an Israeli citizen charged with various security and drug charges who had escaped to Lebanon.

Police explained that the Lebanese contacted a person named Shahid Ibrahim of Ghajar who transferred the explosives to another resident who arranged that they be delivered to Kafr Kana, where couriers named Abdullah Zoabi and Arafat Byumi collected them.

Byumi is suspected of transferring the explosives to the head of the Nazareth cell, Abdel Bassat Zoabi. Funds and SIM cards were later transferred to the Hezbollah contact person via Jordan. This was done to arrange a secure line between Abu Ali and Bassat.

Police uncover terrorist operation in Ghajar

Police said that another person, yet to be identified, was meant to collect the devices and carry out terrorist attacks. A police official said that more than NIS 400,000 were transferred to Lebanon in exchange for the explosives.



According to the police, the Ghajar smugglers are drug dealers who exploited the village's special geographical location. "Some of the weapons were possibly meant to be used for criminal purposes and are not necessarily connected to terrorist plans."

A total of 13 suspects in their 30s and a 17-year-old were arrested. Ten suspects are still in custody and have been charged with serious security offences.

Abdel Bassat is being charged with aiding an enemy at a time of war, contact with a foreign agent, possession of weapons, conspiracy to commit a crime, and drug trafficking offences.

Northern District Police chief Ronny Atiya said that the operation prevented large-scale terrorist attacks. Police said that Hezbollah is highly motivated with the aim of harming Israeli and Jewish targets and is collecting intelligence in preparation for a large-scale attack.

'State tries to humiliate Arabs'

Ghajar spokesman Najib Khatib said that the arrest caught everyone in the village by surprise. "I think the arrest was out of place," he said. "I find it hard to believe they are involved in security offences, the residents here are quiet and are not looking for trouble."

One of the defendants' relatives said, "We live in a country that tries to humiliate the Arab population at any cost."

He further added, "My relative has nothing to do with this affair. Had we sensed he was involved with anything we would have warned him not to get involved with anything against the state."

He claimed that the family had not been allowed to contact the suspect. "This is a

failed, disappointing state and the police are arresting innocent people as a hobby."

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4266093,00.html>

- **Livni to CNN: Netanyahu sold Israel to haredim**

In interview with news network, former Kadima leader talks about tension between Israeli religious, secular Jews; slams PM for granting ultra-Orthodox 'monopoly on Jewishness of Israel'
Yitzhak Benhorin

WASHINGTON – Is former Israeli Foreign Minister and leader of the centrist Kadima Party Tzipi Livni making her first steps back into politics? Livni, who is in the United States for a series of official meetings, gave an interview to CNN's Christiane Amanpour in which she slammed the Likud and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for "selling the state to the ultra-Orthodox."

In the interview , Livni attacked the Likud party for "surrendering to the haredim"

and granting them a monopoly on the Jewishness of the State of Israel.

"Politically speaking, Israel is being sold to the ultra-Orthodox," Livni told Amanpour, adding that "the ultra-Orthodox represent a small portion of the Israeli society. They represent part of our history and tradition, but unfortunately they now have more power than they should."

"Netanyahu said himself, that for him politically, the ultra-Orthodox are his natural partners. And I believe that the raison d'être of the State of Israel is to be the homeland of the Jewish People," she said adding that "for me being a Jewish state means something from a national perspective, not a religious one."

Addressing the issue of the haredi military draft, Livni said that "each and every Israeli citizen needs to contribute to the society in which we live in. Unfortunately, because of political reasons, the State gives them (haredim) the monopoly, and this must be changed."

"In order to change reality, you need the willingness of the prime minister to make the change. Unfortunately, Netanyahu's

coalition doesn't want to make the change, and this," Livni said "will be part of Israel's future elections."

Asked whether Israel needed a formal separation between State and synagogue, Livni said that "I believe that what we need is a constitution and a clear definition of the Jewish state. The majority of Israelis understand and believe that Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people by its own nature, but it's also a state with equal rights to all its citizens. The idea of a Jewish state is from a national perspective and not a religious one."

Since Livni's resignation from the Knesset, a number of Knesset members from Kadima have considered the possibility of resigning from the party to form a new political movement headed by Livni.

Meanwhile, Haim Ramon, who was one of Kadima's founders and had left it following the election of Shaul Mofaz as chairman, revealed that he is currently in the midst of forming a new political party which will be positioned in the center of the political spectrum.

Ramon confirmed that the new party will be, among others, a new home for the former Kadima chairwoman.

Livni has officially distanced herself from Ramon, but continued to hold talks and meetings with Kadima MKs. In recent closed meetings, she stated that "her freedom is over," indicating that her return to Israeli politics is nearing.

One Kadima MK said a number of party members turned to Livni even before she resigned and asked that she form a new political movement. "She didn't say she'd do it, but there are those who hope she will," the lawmaker said. "The party is going to be cut in half in the next elections."

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4265955,00.html>

- **Haniyeh's brother-in-law was treated at Israeli hospital**

Husband of Hamas PM's sister received urgent heart treatment at Petah Tikva

hospital four months ago; couple returned to Gaza after his condition stabilized

The sister of Hamas Prime Minister in Gaza Ismail Haniyeh recently entered Israel along with her husband, who received urgent treatment at the Beilinson Hospital in Petah Tikva, Ynet has learned.

Four months ago the husband of Suhila Abd el-Salam Ahmed Haniyeh suffered a serious cardiac episode which could not be treated at any hospital in Gaza. After the couple filed an urgent entry request with Israeli authorities, a Palestinian ambulance transported the husband to the Erez Crossing, where he was moved to a Magen David Adom vehicle and taken to the hospital in Petah Tikva along with his wife.

The husband was hospitalized in Israel for about a week, during which his condition was stabilized. Following the treatment, the couple returned to Gaza.

Ismail Haniyeh attacks Israel at every opportunity, and the terror group he heads does not recognize Israel's right to exist. On Monday he led a mass prayer session outside the Egyptian Embassy in

Gaza in solidarity with the victims of last weekend's terror attack in Sinai. During the gathering, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood in accusing Israel of orchestrating the attack.

"The attack's method confirms some sort of Israeli involvement aiming to achieve political and security goals, cause tension on the border with Egypt and destroy joint efforts to end the Gaza blockade," he said.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4265787,00.html>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Police cars attacked in South Sinai**

Masked men stole a car belonging to the head of investigations at the Al-Tor police department in South Sinai on Tuesday when it was parked near an industrial zone for repairs, a source at the department said.

Sixteen new police cars were also attacked at the Wadi Firan checkpoint according to a source with the South Sinai security directorate. Security patrols protected the

cars, which are to be used for new security measures in Sinai following the border attack in Rafah, the source added.

A car was also stolen in Abu Redis, and another car belonging to the Education Ministry was shot at in Ras Sidr en route from Cairo.

Hundreds of taxi drivers in Sharm el-Sheikh demonstrated Tuesday, saying that they have had to pay money to armed men. Security was heightened in the South Sinai Governorate and police were deployed in different parts of Sharm el-Sheikh following the Rafah attack.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/police-cars-attacked-south-sinai>

- **Morsy briefs political forces on Sinai investigation**

President Mohamed Morsy met on Tuesday with Egyptian political and economic figures to brief them on the investigation of the attack on the Egyptian army at the border in Rafah, North Sinai.

The meeting was intended to inform political forces of the current situation,

the ongoing search for the attackers, and preventative measures against further attacks, presidential spokesperson Yasser Ali said.

Interior Minister Ahmed Gamal Eddin and the head of military intelligence participated in the meeting, which was attended by Ghad al-Thawra Party head Ayman Nour, Wasat Party head Abul Ela Mady and spokesperson for the Jama'a al-Islamiya's Construction and Development Party Safwat Abdel Ghani. Acting Freedom and Justice Party head Essam al-Erian and Central Bank President Farouk al-Oqda were also in attendance.

Morsy's absence from the soldiers' funeral was criticized on social networks. Ali said that the president did not want attendees to be affected by the increased security that would accompany his presence.

President Morsy preferred that the funeral be public, Ali said, adding that, "The grief inside the heart of every Egyptian and the heart of the president is felt by us all."

Ali said that it is not yet clear if the assailants were Egyptian or foreigners as

the information circulating about them is not complete or entirely accurate.

A joint operation room for all security bodies is working around the clock to apprehend the perpetrators, Ali assured, adding that the presidential office is closely following the investigation and will announce more information when it becomes available.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-briefs-political-forces-sinai-investigation>

- **Morsy says international treaties will be respected**

President Mohamed Morsy reiterated through his spokesperson Egypt's respect for international obligations and the treaties it has signed.



Morsy's statement came in response to calls for the amendment of the Camp David Accords with Israel, presidential spokesperson Yasser Ali said Tuesday evening.

An attack on an Egyptian military checkpoint in Rafah, North Sinai on Sunday night left 16 soldiers dead and seven others wounded. Some of the assailants, whose identities are still unknown, drove an armored vehicle over the border into Israel, where they were killed by the Israeli military.

Former Arab League chief Amr Moussa was among many public figures who asked Morsy to amend the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel so that Egyptian troops could operate in greater numbers in the Sinai Peninsula.

The Muslim Brotherhood held Israeli intelligence agency Mossad responsible for Sunday's attack, saying on its website that Mossad has wanted to abort the Egyptian revolution from the beginning.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-says-international-treaties-will-be-respected>

- **Experts slam state TV for insufficient coverage of border attack**

Media experts criticized Egyptian state television for its insufficient coverage of the Sinai border attack that killed 16 soldiers and wounded seven others.

They said it was slow in following up on the incident, did not change the schedule for TV series or the commercials, depended on Israeli media in obtaining information, and was late in broadcasting reactions and clarifications by Egyptian officials.

In contrast, Egyptian private channels worked hard to relay information through the Israeli media or newspaper correspondents at the scene, experts claimed.

“There is no clear information policy,” said Safwat al-Alem, professor of information at Cairo University, while Farouk Abu Zeid, dean of the Faculty of Mass Communication at the University of Science and Technology, opined that there are no correspondents that state television can rely on.

“Even the president was not well-informed,” Abu Zeid said.

Tarek al-Fatatri, president of the Al-Mehwar channel, said Sinai is a sensitive area. “Officials do not like to divulge information about this place,” he said.

Ali Abdel Rahman, head of state television’s specialized channels, banned commercials containing dances or songs, in consideration of the public state of grief.

Al-Masry Al-Youm could not reach Information Minister Salah Abdel Maqsood or Ibrahim al-Sayed, the head of the news department, for comment, as they did not answer their phones.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/experts-slam-state-tv-insufficient-coverage-border-attack>

- **A failing state: In Sinai, the people protect the army**

Those living in Rafah have military forces responsible for securing the border at their doorsteps. While this should be extra protection for the locals, on Sunday, it was

the locals who struggled to save the soldiers undergoing a brutal attack.

The failure to prevent an attack on a military checkpoint that unknown militants carried out and the slow response of both forces on the ground and officials stand as a staggering demonstration of the ongoing security vacuum in Sinai, Egypt's strategic eastern gate.

While local media and politicians alike are dramatically mourning the deceased soldiers, slamming the terrorist playground that Sinai has reportedly become, there is little attention to the incumbent state failure in the peninsula, as manifest in this incident, locals say.

As they were getting ready to break their Ramadan fast, leaving the watchtower vacant, soldiers at a military checkpoint situated two miles away from the Karam Abu Salem border crossing and surrounded by residential houses were attacked by unknown militants, killing 16 soldiers and injuring seven others.

Witnesses said the attackers came in three cars, and in 10 minutes shot the

soldiers at the site and stole a military tank. Carrying four of the attackers, the tank headed toward the Israeli border and was destroyed by Israeli aircraft seconds after crossing into its territory.

Those residing near the attack site and those who rushed to the scene to help the injured soldiers said they had to act on their own, and faced a lack of cooperation from military forces stationed at checkpoints set up every few miles inside Rafah.

Bassam Ouda, who was among the locals who transported the bodies of the soldiers to Rafah Hospital in their personal cars, said the military forces in nearby checkpoints refused to help them.

"We told the officers to come secure us while we got the injured soldiers. They refused, saying that they didn't receive such orders and couldn't desert their posts," Ouda said.

Ouda and many of the volunteers were still haunted by the image of the soldiers, whom they found lying face down on the food they were getting ready to break their fast with.

Witnesses said ambulances arrived after locals had already transported most of the bodies and the injured soldiers to Rafah Hospital, and that military forces arrived at the site after the attack had finished and the perpetrators had escaped.

Mohamed al-Moattar, a shop owner who lives near the site, said Monday that members of different tribes were still chasing the attackers on the loose. He said this has always been Sinai's version of law enforcement, which lacks any reliance on the police. According to tradition, each tribe can sacrifice up to five people.

Indeed, locals who witnessed the attack grieved the loss of the soldiers whom, according to Bedouin traditions, they considered themselves responsible to protect.

The day after the attack, only one tank with three soldiers was at the site, and despite official reports that additional forces would be deployed in the area, the military presence in Rafah was limited to the usual checkpoints.

Slow action on the ground was mirrored by similarly slow reactions on the official level.

President Mohamed Morsy only issued standard statements following the attack. After announcing a visit to Rafah, Morsy only went as far as Arish almost a day following the attack, and failed to show up to the soldiers' military funeral, which took place Tuesday.

Similarly, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces only reacted publicly to the incident Monday, issuing a statement that said 35 people carried out the attack, with the help of agents from Gaza who fired on the Karam Abu Salem crossing.

A failing state

Many who witnessed the attack are saddened by the difference between the slow reaction on the Egyptian side and the swift reaction on the Israeli side, especially with reports in the Israeli paper Haaretz that Israeli officials had warned the Egyptian government of possible attacks. There are reports that Israel evacuated its citizens from the area two days in advance.

Saleh Abu Lefeita, a car dealer and a Rafah community leader, said the government had evacuated some residents on the border 20 days prior to the attack.

“They had prior knowledge, but no will to resist. If there was resistance, there would have been at least some injuries on the side of the attackers,” Abu Lefeita said, regretting the fact that 16 soldiers were killed and a tank stolen without one bullet fired in defense, while the Israeli forces shot down the tank seconds after it breached its territory.

Many locals complained this is not the first time military forces have failed to take the necessary action. Locals said the many military checkpoints inside Rafah seem to be only for show, as extremist groups train out in the open and goods smuggled into Gaza through illegal tunnels pass right through the checkpoints.

Last month, two soldiers were shot at another Rafah checkpoint, and in August last year, Israeli forces killed five Egyptian security officers on the border, triggering a diplomatic crisis that gradually died down.

Israeli authorities said the Egyptian officers were killed by mistake in a chase of Palestinians who had crossed over from Sinai to carry out an attack in the Israeli city of Eilat days before that resulted in eight deaths and 30 injuries.

In another demonstration of the loose security grip in Sinai, unknown masked men have bombed the pipelines delivering gas to Israel 15 times during the course of the last year and a half, without getting caught. The most recent attack occurred last month.

Sunday’s attack escalated security fears that Sinai residents were already struggling with. Sawsan al-Ayesh, who lives next to the attack site, was terrorized into leaving her house with her children, and moved in with her mother.

When the attackers threw what seems to have been a smoke bomb before taking off with the tank, Ayesh thought her house was going to be blown up with her and her children in it.

“We used to feel safe, that the military is around us. Now we’re scared and we can’t

go back to our homes. We're scared that we'll get blamed for this while we are on the line of fire. These soldiers are family for us," she said.

The incident has caused renewed calls for the modification of the three-decades-old peace treaty with Israel, which allows Egypt only a limited number of soldiers on the border, with meager arms.

Whoever's the attacker, we're in charge

Locals vehemently denied early reports that the operation was a joint effort between Palestinian factions and Sinai Bedouins, saying that while Bedouins could have been hired by the perpetrators to help them, they couldn't have been involved in planning the attack.

"This operation is new to us and it's strange for people here. People here may get involved in individual acts of violence related to revenge, but this kind of organized operation is alien to this area," Abu Lefeita said.

The incident has also triggered some anti-Palestinian sentiment among Bedouins in Sinai who blame Palestinian factions —

sentiments that were quickly grabbed by the media and presented in an increasingly nationalistic rhetoric.

Many witnesses said they recognized the perpetrators' Palestinian dialect and that they were repeating jihadist chants as they carried out the operation.

On Monday, a few dozen locals closed off the Sheikh Zuwayed main road with burnt tires, demanding that the tunnels through which people and goods are smuggled in and out of Gaza be destroyed and that the Rafah crossing be closed. They also called for police activity to return the area.

Morsy has been criticized for opening up the Rafah crossing, a decision that was reversed following the attack.

"This was a Palestinian operation targeting Israel, but we won't allow this to happen through our lands while the military does nothing," said Nasser Abu Ekr, a Sheikh Zuwayed community leader who participated in the protest. "What's more precious than the Egyptian soldiers? This means that they can spill the blood of any of us next."

Saeed Hamad, an elderly Bedouin man whose house is across from the attacked military site, cried as he recounted how the locals were unable to come to the rescue of the soldiers after they were shot.

“These are our children that died. This is an Israeli plot, we would be fools to think otherwise,” said Hammad.

Hammad believes the second scenario, prevalent among some residents who refuse to blame Palestinians for the incident, that the attack was an Israeli plot aiming to force Egyptian authorities to close the Rafah crossing and destabilize Sinai.

Hopeless that authorities will ever provide the necessary security in Sinai, Hammad asked them to let locals take up arms and defend themselves and their army if necessary.

“We are the pillars of security here. The residents of the area know it best, they should support us and arm us or let us arm ourselves,” said Hammad. “We want the government to treat us like people, not terrorists. This is our country and

these are our homes, we won’t jeopardize them.”

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/failing-state-sinai-people-protect-army>

- **We knew of border attack beforehand, says Egypt spy chief**

The Turkish News agency Anatolia on Tuesday quoted Mourad Mowafy, head of Egyptian intelligence, as saying Egypt had received intelligence about the attack on the Egypt-Israel border before it took place.



“But this does not diminish the ability of our security agencies and their vigilance in Sinai,” he said, adding that preliminary information suggests that the alleged perpetrators belong to an extremist group in Sinai and Gaza.

The state-run MENA news agency quoted medical and security sources on Tuesday as saying that the bodies and body parts of the attackers were transferred from the Arish General Hospital morgue to the Department of Forensic Medicine in Cairo.

MENA quoted unnamed sources as saying autopsies would be conducted to identify the bodies.

The Israeli authorities on Monday handed over four bodies to their Egyptian counterparts through the Awja crossing, most of which were completely burned.

The official Al-Ahram newspaper quoted Assistant Chief Coroner Ashraf al-Refai as saying forensics would on Wednesday check five bags of scattered body parts and conduct DNA tests to identify them. “We did not receive intact bodies,” Refai said.

The armed forces had said in a statement on Monday that 35 gunmen attacked the military point at 7:00 pm on Sunday, seized an armored vehicle and used it to cross the Egypt-Israel border through the Karm Abu Salem crossing in southern

Gaza, where Israeli forces confronted them and destroyed the vehicle.

The statement added that elements from the Gaza Strip at the same time bombarded the Karm Abu Salem crossing with mortars.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/we-knew-border-attack-beforehand-says-egypt-spy-chief>

- **UPDATED: Egyptian troops strike hard in North Sinai after multiple attacks**

Forces from Egypt’s army and the police seem to have waged a war against armed men who have been targeting security personnel in North Sinai this week

Members of Hamas security forces patrol on the border between Egypt and the southern Gaza Strip, near Rafah August 6, 2012

Tension in Egypt's North Sinai have reached new heights after Egyptian security forces – from both the army and police – have engaged with masked gunmen in different areas in the early

hours of Wednesday, shortly after unknown assailants had opened fire on three joint military-police checkpoints.

Many checkpoints, especially in the city of Arish, have witnessed fire exchange between both sides as Egyptian troops and helicopters are combing the eastern area of El-Halal Mountain, hunting down masked gunmen.

According to eyewitnesses quoted by Al-Ahram's Arabic-language news portal , many of the gunmen were killed and injured in the raids as several soldiers were allegedly injured too. Accurate tolls are yet to be revealed.

Other eyewitnesses also confirmed that Egyptian military jets have pounded several spots in the Sheikh Zuweid town while chasing the outlaws.

Earlier in the late hours of Tuesday, masked gunmen attacked three joint military-police checkpoints in North Sinai, two days after 16 border guards were killed by unidentified assailants in an incident that has left the Sinai Peninsula in a state of serious disarray.

A resident in Al-Arish City was accidentally injured after being caught out in the fight as the gunmen attacked Al-Risa checkpoint and two others on the main road between Al-Arish and Rafah, the city that was at the center of Sunday's deadly attacks on Egyptian border guards. No deaths were reported at the time.

The fire exchange lasted until the early hours of Wednesday, before military and police armoured vehicles materialized in an attempt to contain the situation, eyewitnesses told Al-Ahram's Arabic-language news portal.

It is the 29th attack on Al-Risa checkpoint since the 2011 uprising.

Sinai has sunk into a state of lawlessness since last year's 18-day uprising that overthrew former president Hosni Mubarak.

The situation has taken a severe turn for the worse since Sunday, when a vicious attack by unknown assailants at the Egypt-Gaza border left 16 guards dead and seven injured.

Many parties have traded accusations over the deadly attack that took place near the Gaza strip, which is governed by Islamist faction Hamas. No one has claimed responsibility yet for the terrorist operation.

The Muslim Brotherhood, from which Egypt President Mohamed Morsi hails, has accused Israel's intelligence agency Mossad of carrying out the attack to "hinder Egypt's progress."

Hamas and Israel have both distanced themselves from the attack, with the latter's defence minister Ehud Barak saying he hoped it would serve as a "wake-up call" to Egypt, which has been struggling to assert control over Sinai.

Morsi has declared three days of mourning for the slain soldiers. A military funeral service was held for them on Tuesday.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49906/Egypt/Politics-/UPDATED-Egyptian-troops-strike-hard-in-North-Sinai.aspx>

- **Sinai on the brink: Arms trafficking and the rise of Egypt's Jihadist groups**

A deadly attack on Egypt-Israel border Sunday adds to growing fears of security vacuum in the Sinai Peninsula, as evidence mounts of terrorist activity among local marginalised groups

Egyptian soldiers stand guard at a checkpoint in Rafah city on the Egyptian border (Photo by: Reuters)

Sunday's bloody attack by unknown assailants on Egyptian border guards in the Sinai Peninsula is being heralded as another example of the deterioration of Egyptian state control over the volatile region since the fall of the Mubarak regime.

Following emergency meetings with military, governmental and intelligence officials, President Mohamed Morsi briefly visited the Egypt-Israel border town of Rafah Monday afternoon in a bid to restore people's confidence in the country's security situation.

Presidential spokesperson Yasser Ali's reiterations earlier Monday that Egypt had

control over the explosive area did little to reassure the public when the Egyptian army admitted in an audio statement a few hours later that a group of 35 "terrorists" had managed to kill 16 security officers and wound seven others, commandeer a military APC and penetrate the heavily-guarded Egypt-Israel border.

This led Israel Defense Minister Ehud Barak to comment that "once again" there was a "need for Egyptian operation to instil security and prevent terror in Sinai" in a statement published on the Israeli army official website.

The Muslim Brotherhood responded Monday evening with a statement blaming Israeli intelligence agency Mossad for the violence, backing up its allegations with the fact that the self-proclaimed Jewish state had warned citizens to leave Sinai days earlier.

Whoever is responsible, Sunday's explosion was not an isolated event. The attack is preceded by the alleged rise of jihadist groups and increased reports of the seizure of smuggled arms in the Sinai region over the course of the last 18 months.

Islam Qudair, a young political activist from the Sinai, recounts the origins of the problem in the peninsula. He traced the security breakdown along the border strip from Rafah to Mahdiya, Jafiya and Wadi Amr to former security officials under the Mubarak regime.

"[Security officials] used the route for arms smuggling from which they raked in huge profits. They introduced the Bedouin tribes to the trade. Anyone who defied these officials would at the very least face arrest," Qudair explained. "Following the security breakdown in the wake of the revolution and easy access to Libyan arms Bedouins took over the trade in north Sinai. It is so lucrative that they not only earn a living but can amass fortunes. Now it will take more than just governorate security forces to deal with the trade. Any remedy will have to involve national agencies."

Mohamed Hamad, the son of a tribal chief in Beer Al-Abad, has a similarly bleak prognosis.

"We were shocked at the huge quantity of arms. They came from different sources. Some we know came from Gabal Al-Halal

after being smuggled from Israel. Others came along the north coast road from Libya. What is frightening is that guns now speak loudest and are having the last say."

Particularly ominous, in Hamad's opinion, is the growing domestic market for arms. Until recently smuggled weapons mostly ended up in the hands of armed groups in Gaza which had agents in Sinai to take care of the supply operations.

Recently, however, a parallel market has arisen in the form of increasingly active jihadist groups which are attempting to build up arsenals in the peninsula.

Egyptian State TV has speculated that these organisations, possibly colluding with Gaza-based groups, are behind Sunday's border attack. Although presidential spokesman Ali affirmed in his Monday statement that military and civilian intelligence have yet to discover who is responsible.

Hamad explained that before the security vacuum jihadist groups were marginal elements in the tribes.

"They were isolated and ignored because of their ossified ideas. Post-revolution they found a fertile environment emerging in tandem with the rise of political and organisational structures which has allowed them to surface.

"Today they feel they are beyond tribal rule, which jeopardises social structures that have long defined Sinai society. The traditional authority of tribal sheikhs is being undermined by those spouting political and religious catchphrases."

Qudair agrees. "They have formed a network that infiltrates the major tribes and they now have the power to threaten anyone who touches them."

Tribes like the Azazna have been fingered as a source of current tensions in northern Sinai. Half the tribe's members are not recognised as Egyptian citizens. Their identity cards read "nationality unknown", though the tribe has a record of loyalty to the Egyptian state, including being on the front line of defence against Israel in the 1967 defeat and providing valuable logistic support during the 1973 War. Following the peace treaty with Israel the

Egyptian government has steadfastly refused to acknowledge them.

In fact, a government report in 2010 said a quarter of all Sinai's population of some 600,000 did not carry national ID cards. The Bedouin account for the majority of this number; they are not allowed to own land or serve in the army and do not benefit from local tourism revenue.

"We don't feel like Egyptian citizens," said Sheikh Ahmed Hussein of the Qararsha tribe, one of the biggest in southern Sinai, to Ahram Online. This feeling of disenfranchisement and state neglect many say has contributed to the problem.

Sensing the urgency of the problem, the former government of ex-premier Kamal El-Ganzouri, granted amnesty to some jailed extremists and called for the revival of several local development projects, including a railway and canal to supply water to central Sinai.

Growing tensions and the spread of arms are also connected with tribal disputes.

"There's an arms race between the tribes who boast of the arms they possess and

use them to settle their disputes," says Ahmed Abu Dara from Arish, a coastal city near Rafah, which is reportedly renowned for its jihadist elements.

There is an economic dimension to the problem. Many speak of the oppression young Bedouins face, including arbitrary arrest. One elder from a Suraka tribe told Ahram Online that while he did not expect the government to care much about the Bedouin he also "didn't expect them to leave us living off scraps of land while they built skyscrapers around us."

The streets of Arish are now punctuated with roadblocks, some equipped with tanks, especially outside governorate buildings and the courthouse. In the daytime the security measures may give the impression of stability but not at night, when the gangs prowl.

Interestingly, luxury cars have made their appearance among Arish youth. The word is that they are being paid for from the profits of arms trafficking.

26-year-old Egyptian journalist and resident of Arish, Mohamed Sabry, who has befriended many of the local militants,

told Ahram Online he believed that post-revolution more people joined these armed movements as “they no longer fear the consequence of jihad.” Such groups, he added, do not recognise democracy as a means of change.

"Sometimes violence is the only way to achieve your objectives," a self-proclaimed Salafist jihadist from the area, preferring to remain anonymous, told Ahram Online, "We do not believe in democracy; we do not vote. Democracy is atheism."

Observers believe there are two principal jihadist movements in Egypt, both based in Sinai but with countrywide reach: Takfir Wal Hijra and Salafist jihadism. Both factions adhere to an extreme Salafist interpretation of Islam, following Al-Qaeda's philosophy and goal of re-establishing an Islamic Caliphate.

Hamad agrees that through these jihadist groups do not necessarily belong to a large Islamist organisation, “we are hearing ideas that could come straight from Al-Qaeda.”

However, experts believe that Al-Qaeda itself does not exist in Egypt.

"I guarantee there is no Al-Qaeda presence in Sinai, but the Takfiris are in the thousands," the head of North Sinai security was recently quoted as saying. North Sinai Governor Abdel Wahab Mabrouk, who also denied the presence of Al-Qaeda, also affirmed the presence of extremist religious groups.

"We often don't have a name for jihadist groups, so we put them all under the same 'Al-Qaeda' umbrella to simplify matters," explained Mohamed Kadry Said, a military expert with the Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Takfir Wal Hijra is one of the initial radical Islamist groups founded by Shukri Mustafa to have emerged in Egypt in the 1960s as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. According to the group's radical ideology, even Muslims that do not share its beliefs are infidels.

"I feel they may be planning to do something with Al-Qaeda in the future. Our intelligence is most likely watching them very closely," asserted Said.

Sabry, however, believes Salafist jihadism poses a bigger threat to national security. The salafist jihadist member who spoke to Ahram Online agreed: "Takfir Wal Hijra are not a threat; they just label atheists; they do not employ violence. We, on the other hand, do."

Salafist jihadism, as termed by renowned scholar Gilles Kepel, was first identified as a threatening phenomenon in the mid-1990s. Experts claim Salafist jihadists are in the thousands and constitute the largest jihadist force in Egypt, openly embracing violence as a means to reach political goals.

"In order to get freedom, innocent people must die," continued the young Salafist jihadist, claiming that his movement had a following of 10,000 in Sinai and a million around Egypt. "Check out our Facebook page: we have 100,000 likes."

Experts, nevertheless, deny these figures.

Notably, some Salafist jihadists were jailed on charges of participating in the Sinai attacks in 2004 and 2005 that killed some 125 people at the Red Sea beach resorts of Sharm Al-Sheikh, Dahab and Taba. No

evidence of their involvement in the attacks, however, was ever produced.

Salafist jihadists were also accused last year of launching an attack on a police station in Al-Arish in which five Egyptian security personnel were killed.

When questioned about Salafist jihadism's ideology and goals, the primary issues listed include liberating Palestine and establishing an Islamic emirate in Sinai, which many believe has been partially realised in some areas.

"We're following Al-Qaeda's strategy for establishing an Islamic Caliphate by 2020 designed by Osama Bin Laden, God rest his soul," said the young jihadist. "The plan predicted the Arab uprisings, out of which an Islamic state will be born."

Across the border, Tel Aviv is worried about these armed groups which may subscribe to Al-Qaeda-like programme.

"By the end of this year Israel will have completed the construction of the electronic fence along the border with Egypt. This will put a stop to most cross-border infiltrations," explained military

expert general Safwat El-Zayatline. "Although Israeli government spokesman Mark Jeff has said that the purpose of the wall is to prevent the illegal transit of persons, we believe that it will minimise the danger of major operations, certainly those involving missiles that individuals can carry."

Israeli research centres, think tanks and government agencies based in the capital are busy assessing the situation in Sinai and drawing up scenarios to deal with what is increasingly seen as a hotspot.

In February, the Director of the Begin Centre Ephraim Anbar, a prominent academic close to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, issued a report on the security impact of the Arab Spring on Israel.

One recommendation was for Israel to create a border zone. Some observers took this as a sign that Israel is planning to reoccupy parts of Sinai.

While it would not venture to repeat an occupation the whole of the peninsula the fact that the idea of even a partial occupation was floated suggests that

Israeli policy planners are considering a wide range of military options.

"The implications are very serious if the situation [in the Sinai] grows worse," says Said Okasha, managing editor of Mukhtarat Israiliya (Israeli selections), published by Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. "But Israel's current government is not inclined to unilateral military solutions. It would prefer a joint Israeli-Egyptian solution. Signs of this tendency emerged in the phase following the revolution when the Israelis allowed more Egyptian forces in the border area."

Whether terrorist organisations are behind Sunday's attacks or it is, as the Brotherhood and Hamas have claimed, a Mossad attempt to hinder Egypt's democratic process, security in the peninsula is a pressing issue for President Morsi.

Views on how Egypt should tackle the problem vary. Following the trend of past Islamist waves in Egypt, some experts claim that heavy-handed police crackdowns have only aggravated the problem.

Others previously believed that the situation would calm down once Egypt's new president was elected – a hope surely dispelled by the deaths of 16 Egyptian border guards at the hands of a terrorist group well over a month into Morsi's presidential term.

The issue of domestic security was one of the key points of the presidential 100 day plan – a promise that many are holding the president to. Some political groups and figures are now calling for amendments to the 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel to allow a greater Egyptian security and military presence in the Sinai.

In the coming days as Morsi navigates this political minefield, securing the peninsula, reassuring the public that the state has control of area and possibly renegotiating decades-old accords with Israel, are sure to top of the president's growing agenda.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49807/Egypt/Politics-/Sinai-on-the-brink-Arms-trafficking-and-the-rise-o.aspx>

- **Egypt president's absence from military funeral draws fire from critics**

Morsi's absence from Tuesday funeral for slain border guards gives detractors another opportunity to denounce Egypt's beleaguered president

Egypt's Morsi skips funeral to allow public to mourn: Presidential spokesman

President Morsi's no show at slain Egyptian soldiers' funeral to be explained in a press conference shortly

Sinai on the brink: Arms trafficking and the rise of Egypt's Jihadist groups

A military funeral open to the public in the absence of the president surprised many Egyptians mourning the deaths of 16 border guards killed on Sunday near Egypt's border with the besieged Gaza Strip.

President Mohamed Morsi, who had been expected to attend the funeral, did not show up for "security reasons," while his newly-appointed prime minister, Hisham Qandil, was attacked by angry protesters after attending funeral prayers. Protesters shouted chants against the Muslim Brotherhood, the president and the new

government, accusing Qandil and "his people" of killing the slain soldiers.

Qandil was not the only one attacked before the funeral. Nader Bakkar, spokesman for the Salafist Nour Party, was also assaulted, as were some other activists known for their pro-Brotherhood sympathies. Among the latter were Asmaa Mahfouz and Ahmed Doma of the 6 April Youth Movement. Abdel-Moneim Abul-Fotouh, former presidential candidate and former leading Brotherhood member, was also attacked.

The same protesters hailed former MP and writer Mustafa Bakry, known for his critical stance regarding the Brotherhood and the president and his support for Egypt's military council. Bakry was seen chanting against the president and the Brotherhood only minutes before Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, head of the military council, former prime minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and other political figures began leading the funeral.

Although Bakry has led a campaign against Morsi, he did not go so far as to claim that Morsi's sympathy with Gaza-based resistance group Hamas had been the

reason for the death of the Egyptian soldiers. Others in his camp, however, did.

Former liberal MP Mohamed Abu-Hamed and media figure Tawfiq Okasha were considerably more vocal. On Monday night, Okasha, owner of the Fareen satellite television channel, went so far as to threaten Morsi if he dared show up at the soldiers' funeral. Okasha, Abu-Hamed and others are calling for a million-man march against Morsi and the Brotherhood on 24 August.

Many critics of the Muslim Brotherhood point their fingers at Morsi, accusing him of serving the interests of Gaza at the expense of the safety and welfare of the Egyptian people. In July, a rumour that Palestinians would be granted entry into Egypt without visas raised an uproar, as did Morsi's pardon of a group of Islamists jailed for militancy during the Mubarak era. The pardon granted to 26 Islamists, many of them held since the 1990s, was seen as a gesture to hardliners who supported Morsi's presidential bid.

Those who criticised Morsi's attempt to release members of Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya, jailed during the group's armed

insurrection against the Mubarak regime in the 1990s, along with members of the Islamic Jihad, the movement allegedly behind the 1981 assassination of president Anwar Sadat, seemed to have forgotten that hundreds of members of the same groups had been released by the military council in the weeks following Mubarak's ouster last year.

Those released by the military council included Aboud and Tarek El-Zomor, who had been directly involved in killing Sadat. The El-Zomor cousins subsequently formed a political party that managed to win seats in Egypt's first post-Mubarak parliamentary polls.

"Trying to blame Islamists for the Sinai border attack is unacceptable," Tarek El-Zomor told Ahram Online. "Those who do so want to divert attention from the real killer, Israel. They want to blame Morsi for what happened, and we all know this isn't true."

But whether the president is to be held accountable for Sunday's border attack is not the only question now. Morsi's supporters from outside the Islamist

political current are now questioning his ability to exert his presidential authorities.

"There is more to what happened than just the president's promises that those involved in the border attack will be severely punished or that security will be restored to the Sinai Peninsula," said Mohamed Abdel-Aziz of Egypt's Kefaya protest movement. "No matter who perpetrated the attack, it is clear that Egyptian intelligence, army and police lack the capability to deal with such incidents."

Abdel-Aziz went on to point to the fact that Israel's Counter-Terrorism Bureau had issued a statement only days before the border incident warning its citizens of an imminent attack in Sinai. "It is the role of the president to punish those responsible for ignoring such warnings, or who were not able to deal with it," he said.

On Tuesday, when the president failed to show up for the funeral for "security reasons," prominent columnist Belal Fadl declared on Twitter: "If Morsi did not attend the funeral for security reasons, he has to punish all the [security] leaders who fail to secure their president or else

he has to resign as this would be more dignified than this fiasco."

Fadl reminded his followers that the same president who failed to attend the funeral swore his presidential oath in Tahrir Square weeks earlier telling tens of thousands of supporters that he was not afraid of the counter-revolution.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49868/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-presidents-absence-from-military-funeral-dra.aspx>

- **Egypt launches first air strike on militants in Sinai since 1973, killing 20**

Strikes follow clashes between armed men and security forces at several security checkpoints in the Sinai region, and deaths of 16 border guards last week.

Egypt launched air strikes in the Sinai region close to the border with Israel on Wednesday, killing more than 20 suspected Islamic militants, the state-run Ahram news website said.

The air strikes on positions in the town of Sheikh Zouaid followed the deaths of 16 border guards last Sunday in an attack blamed partly on Palestinian militants.

The incident marks the first time the Egyptian Air Force has been called into action in Sinai since 1973. As per peace agreements, Egyptian Air Force activity in Sinai must be coordinated with Israel.

The Egyptian General Intelligence Service, the body responsible for collecting information and thwarting attacks by foreign entities, reported that according to information in the agency's possession, the attack in which 16 Egyptian border guards were killed was carried out by rebel groups from Gaza and Sinai.

Murad Muwafi, head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, stated that his agency held information concerning a possible terrorist attack prior to the attack on Sunday night. According to Muwafi, the Egyptian General Intelligence Service is not an operational organization, and as such the information was passed on to the appropriate operational entities.

Witnesses in Sheikh Zouaid, about 10 km (six miles) from Gaza, said they saw two military jets and heard sounds of explosions. Other witnesses in a nearby area said they saw three cars hit.

The strikes follow clashes between armed men and security forces at several security checkpoints in the Sinai region.

Armed men opened fire on several checkpoints in Arish and in the nearby town of Rafah on the border with Israel, according to a Reuters reporter and state media.

A Reuters reporter said one policeman and one resident had been confirmed wounded in these attacks.

Lawlessness in the rugged desert region bordering Israel has spread since the fall of autocratic leader Hosni Mubarak in an uprising 18 months ago and the election of an Islamist successor whose commitment to security cooperation with the Jewish state has yet to be tested.

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Lebanon PM: Cabinet backs any electoral law approved by parliament

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Miqati said on Wednesday that the cabinet would back the implementation of any electoral law approved by the parliament, Acting Minister of Information Wael Abu Faour said.

“[I commend] the approval of the electoral law by the cabinet after discussions that lasted weeks, [and I also] point out that the government will implement any form of electoral law that would be the result of discussions and consensus in the parliament,” Abu Faour quoted Miqati as saying following the ministers’ session at the Grand Serail in Beirut.

The cabinet on Tuesday approved an electoral draft law based on proportionality and dividing Lebanon into 13 electoral districts.

Asked about the reaction of Miqati regarding the remarks of Future Movement leader MP Saad Hariri and Progressive Socialist Party leader MP

Walid Jumblatt on the electoral approved by the cabinet, Abu Faour said: “Miqati didn’t address these remarks... but the premier underlined the constitutional work achieved by the cabinet especially when it comes to the positions adopted by most political forces regarding proportionality... but he also stressed that the ultimate decision is for the parliament to take.”

On Tuesday, Hariri rejected the electoral draft law approved earlier by the cabinet and said it will not pass in parliament, according to a statement issued by his press office.

Jumblatt also voiced his rejection of the electoral draft law, “especially amid the disgusting sectarian atmosphere.”

Abu Faour also said that Miqati addressed the issue of the abducted Lebanese pilgrims in Syria, saying that the efforts were all focused “on taking courageous steps in order to secure [the release] of the abductees before Eid al-Fitr holidays” which follow the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

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

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=426135>

- **March 14 calls for “permanent peace” between Lebanese, Syrians**

The Western-backed March 14 alliance called Wednesday for a “permanent peace” between Lebanese and Syrians, and for the region.

The group added in a statement issued following its weekly meeting that the Lebanese-Syrian “permanent peace” needed to be based on brotherly ties – a stance echoed in a letter sent by the opposition Syrian National Council on January 25, 2012 and embraced by the March 14 group on different occasions.

Moreover, the statement said that peace among Lebanese people should be founded “on the national consensus document of the Taif Accord – which has not yet had the chance to be truly implemented.”

As for the “enduring peace” in the region, the March 14 alliance said it needed to be based on “the legitimate international resolutions and the Arab peace project.”

Turning to Syria, the Western-backed coalition said that the downfall of the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad was “inevitable,” adding that its fall would “serve as a historic opportunity for Lebanese to move forward toward their “long-lasting peace.”

The March 14 alliance is a vociferous critic of Assad’s regime.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=426099>

- **King to visit Doha, to take part in Mecca conference**

AMMAN (JT) – His Majesty King Abdullah will pay a short working visit to Qatar on Friday for talks with Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifah Al Thani, a Royal Court statement said on Wednesday.

The statement said the talks are scheduled to tackle bilateral ties and regional developments.

The King will also take part in an extraordinary Islamic summit in Mecca on Tuesday convened by Saudi King Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz under the motto “Islamic Solidarity”.

The summit will be preceded by a meeting of the foreign ministers of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

<http://jordantimes.com/king-to-visit-doha-to-take-part-in-mecca-conference>

- **Syria heading to abyss without political solution, King Abdullah warns**

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah has voiced concern over the continued conflict in Syria, warning that if no political solution is found soon, the country will be pushed to the abyss.

In a wide-ranging interview with CBS’ Charlie Rose, that will also be broadcast by BPS and Bloomberg, His Majesty said: “I’m worried about the longer we take to find a

political solution and the more the chaos continues then we may be pushing Syria into the abyss,” noting that “there’s a reality on the ground that’s catching us up, if it hasn’t already”.

Asked on Syria’s arsenal of chemical weapons he said, these are “something that scares everybody. What scares most of us is the chemical weapons” falling into the wrong hands.

On the Syrian refugees hosted by Jordan in camps, he said that there are 145,000 Syrians who crossed the border into the Kingdom.

He noted that there has been “a major spike over the past three months. We’re averaging anywhere between 300 to 1,000 an evening, mainly coming over at night. We have 30,000 Syrians that we have treated in our medical facilities. We have 25,000 children that we’ve inoculated under the age of five. There’s 8,000 students now going into our school system. So it is a pressure on us. And, you know, the numbers look like they’re increasing”.

Highlighting the close ties between the Jordanian and Syrian people, the King pointed out that around half a million Syrians are connected with Jordanians through marriage. He said that more Syrians prefer to come to Jordan than to other countries because of language and culture and because they feel more comfortable here.

He described the international community’s response to the refugee crisis as “fantastic”.

“The king of Spain called me several days ago, so did the king of Morocco. They’re trying to provide assistance. We just got a message that the French are sending a military field hospital to help build the refugee camps. So, the international community are responding tremendously to the northern border.”

On the US efforts to push the peace process forward, the King said President Barack Obama has “done as much as he could” to advance Israeli and Palestinian peace efforts in the face of distracting international economic challenges.

King Abdullah said one of his goals this year was to keep Israeli and Palestinian peace talks part of American politicians' dialogue during an election year. He said that while other international issues, such as the Arab Spring, Syria and Iran, might dominate headlines, those are "sideline issues" to a larger problem, which is the Palestinian issue.

<http://jordantimes.com/syria-heading-to-abyss-without-political-solution>

- **Jordan wants donors to coordinate aid to refugees**

Syrian refugee children play in front of UNHCR tents at the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Mafraq, near the border with Syria, on Monday (AFP photo by Khalil Mazraawi)

AMMAN — Jordan on Tuesday asked international donors interested in helping Syrian refugees to coordinate with the government.

During a meeting with UK Secretary of State for International Development Andrew Mitchell, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh called on international donors and relief agencies to coordinate with the Kingdom for better handling of the

refugees' issue, which he said has added to Jordan's burdens, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

He thanked Mitchell for his government's decision to donate a new package of aid worth £10 million for international relief agencies offering humanitarian services to the Syrian refugees in Jordan and Turkey.

The new donation was unveiled Tuesday during a visit by Mitchell and the British Ambassador to Amman Peter Millett to the Zaatari Refugee Camp near Mafraq, 80 kilometres northeast of the capital, during which the former said that around half of the £10 million donation will be given to relief agencies offering humanitarian aid for the Syrian refugees in Jordan, Petra said.

Expressing thanks to the Jordanian government for hosting the Syrian refugees, Mitchell called on international donors to help Jordan in this humanitarian mission it is undertaking, according to Petra.

Mitchell also said with the additional £10 million, the value on humanitarian aid the British government has offered so far to

the Syrian refugees has totalled £27.5 million.

In addition to presenting infrastructure and consultation services to the Syrian refugees in Zaatari, Mitchell said, the British government will also provide food items to 11,000 Syrian children in the camp and mental healthcare to other children.

The British minister also noted that emergency cash contributions will be secured to 1,000 Syrian families residing outside the camp in local communities and more than 18,000 Syrian refugees will be given emergency food supplies, according to Petra.

Mitchell and Millett toured the refugee camp and were briefed by Andrew Harper, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) representative in Jordan, about the health and nutrition services offered to the Syrians who fled the ongoing violence in their country.

Also yesterday, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Jafar Hassan discussed with Mitchell and an

accompanying delegation the economic difficulties facing the Kingdom.

During the meeting, which Millett also attended, Mitchell expressed his country's keenness on helping Jordan deal with the influx of the Syrian refugees to its territories, Petra said.

<http://jordantimes.com/jordan-wants-donors-to-coordinate-aid-to-refugees>

6. SYRIA

• Syrian regime claims control of Aleppo district, rebels deny

Syria's regime forces have seized full control of Aleppo's Salaheddin district, state news agency SANA said on Wednesday, a claim the rebel Free Syrian Army denied.

"Our brave armed forces have taken full control of the district of Salaheddin," SANA said.

FSA Colonel Abdel Jabbar al-Oqaidi told AFP via Skype that "it is not true the regime army has seized control of the district."

"It is true that there is a barbaric and savage attack."

SANA news agency said troops had "inflicted heavy losses on groups of armed terrorists, killing or wounding a large number of them."

"Dozens of other terrorists were arrested, and some surrendered and put down their weapons."

A security source in Damascus said the army has seized control of Salaheddin's main streets.

"The elimination of pockets of resistance should continue until Thursday morning," the source said. "The army's intention is to then seize the adjacent district of Seif al-Dawla, to the east."

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=426098>

- **Turkey's nightmares coming true in Syria**

US expert says most troubling scenario for Turkey may also be the most likely one: protracted chaos and sectarian conflict,

leaving a security vacuum across the border

Turkey's worst nightmares are beginning to come true in Syria - a protracted sectarian civil war on its long southern border with the emergence of a de facto Kurdish-controlled region friendly to its main domestic foe.

The Syrian conflict is also poisoning Ankara's sensitive relations with Iran, Syria's vital regional ally, and Iraq and complicating ties with Russia, undermining a declared policy of "zero problems" with the neighbors.

"Syria has turned Turkey's neighborhood policy on its head," said Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat now at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Brussels. "Ankara's approach to the Syria conflict has been a radical departure from traditional Turkish caution."

Yet despite bellicose statements, political support for the Syrian opposition and growing covert aid to opposition fighters, there is little Turkey can do alone to shape the outcome.

"We will not allow a terrorist group to establish camps in northern Syria and threaten Turkey," Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan told a news conference on July 26, referring to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has waged a bloody armed struggle since 1984 in southeastern Turkey.

"If there is a step which needs to be taken against the terrorist group, we will definitely take this step."

It was the latest of a string of warnings that have so far had little traction on the course of a conflict that has wrong-footed Turkish diplomatic ambitions in the region.

Before the crisis, Erdogan cultivated a friendship with President Bashar Assad, in stark contrast to Turkey's tense relations with the Syrian leader's father, veteran strongman Hafez al-Assad. The ruling couples even vacationed together.

After a Syrian uprising inspired by the "Arab Spring" pro-democracy movements in Tunisia and Egypt erupted in March 2011, Erdogan tried to use those personal

ties to persuade Assad to embrace reform and open a dialogue with the opposition.

He was rebuffed and felt slighted. From November, he began calling for the removal of Assad and Turkey helped the opposition Syrian National Council organize on its soil.

But the Syrian leader is still there, albeit weakened. He is part of a Shiite Muslim axis spanning Iran and Iraq and his own minority Alawite sect, uncomfortable for mainly Sunni Turkey.

The faction-ridden SNC, dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, has yet to provide a credible alternative, and international diplomacy is deadlocked and largely irrelevant for now.

"They haven't really thought this through," Gareth Jenkins, an Istanbul-based researcher on Turkish security policy, said of Turkey's leaders. "It's been 'let's get rid of Assad' without enough thought as to what comes next.

"Now their two nightmare scenarios are starting to materialize: the emergence of some form of Kurdish entity in northern

Syria that would clearly be an asset to the PKK and embolden Turkish Kurds in terms of autonomy, and the Lebanon-ization of Syria with a long-running ethnic and confessional civil war with different groups controlling different regions," Jenkins said.

Some 45,000 Syrian refugees have poured into Turkey, straining resources and security in some border areas. With fierce fighting raging in Syria's second city, Aleppo, near the Turkish frontier, a bigger influx looms soon.

Military defectors have set up bases of the Free Syrian Army in southern Turkey, and some are trained and coordinated by Turkish, Qatari and Saudi officers operating from a secret "nerve centre" near the city of Adana, Gulf sources have told Reuters.

Foreign Islamist terrorists are joining the Syrian fighters crossing the border from Turkey to fight against Assad, with the apparent acquiescence of the Turkish authorities, said Fadi Hakura, a Turkey analyst at London's Chatham House think-tank.

"They (Turkish officials) want to accelerate the downfall of Assad and his regime," Hakura said, when asked about Ankara's attitude to such fighters. "The Turkish government feels it can control the aftermath of a post-Assad Syria."

Turkey officially denies arming the rebels, but several sources say they are receiving Russian-made small arms on Turkish soil, although not the heavier weapons they would need to change the balance of power with Assad's superior forces.

"Looking ahead, the most troubling scenario for Turkey may also be the most likely one: protracted chaos and sectarian conflict, leaving a security vacuum across the border, with an ongoing risk of spillovers affecting Turkish security," Ian Lesser, a former US official and Turkey expert at the German Marshall Fund wrote in mid-July.

That future is already here.

Turkish analysts suspect Assad let the main Syrian Kurdish movement, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), take control of security outside the main cities in the northeast last week to prevent

them joining forces with the FSA while enabling him to redeploy state security forces to the main battle zones.

Ankara came close to war with Assad's father in 1998 over the presence of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in Damascus and alleged Syrian support for PKK activities in northeastern Syria.

If the PKK were to take root and launch attacks from that area, Erdogan would face strong nationalist pressure to launch military action.

"What could happen is for Turkey to carry out the kind of surgical strikes that it did in northern Iraq in past years if the government has intelligence that northern Syria is being used by Kurdish terrorists," Ulgen said.

But Jenkins said the border area was too flat to provide useful terrain for PKK fighters, who preferred to operate out of mountainous northern Iraq despite Ankara's much improved relations with the regional government of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Turkey talked earlier this year of possibly setting up a safe haven inside Syria for people displaced by the fighting, or establishing a military no-fly zone to protect civilians, but no such operation seems likely any time soon.

The United Nations Security Council is paralyzed over sanctions, with Russia and China blocking any resolution under Chapter VII of the UN Charter authorizing the use of force.

Ulgen said Turkey could not take such action alone without either UN backing or a strong "coalition of the willing" made up of its main NATO allies, which gave Ankara only lukewarm verbal support when a Turkish warplane was downed in disputed circumstances off the Syrian coast in June.

A NATO source said there was no realistic prospect of the alliance operating in Syria unless Turkey were to come under attack from Syrian forces.

Another constraint on Turkish action is domestic public opinion, which is strongly opposed to military intervention.

Opinion polls conducted by Ulgen's EDAM think-tank show public opinion is ill disposed to any armed involvement in Syria and unconvinced by the government's tough rhetoric, even after the warplane incident.

So despite Erdogan's public warnings, Turkey may remain a prisoner of events beyond its control across the border.

"The truth is that they are stuck," said Henri Barkey, another former US official and Turkey specialist at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania.

"They cannot and will not intervene militarily. All they can do is help on the edges, i.e. allow insurgents free passage, train them, help them organize politically," Barkey told Reuters. "Still this is more than what many others are doing."

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4265867,00.html>

- **Syria's Assad returns to public eye with ally Iran**

Syrian President Bashar Assad made his first appearance on state TV in nearly three weeks Tuesday in a show of solidarity with a senior Iranian envoy even as the US secretary of state urged stepped up international planning for the regime's collapse.

The contrasts couldn't have been more vivid: Assad and Iran's Saeed Jalili vowing to defeat the rebels and their backers, while Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton predicted Assad's regime was quickly unraveling, with high-level defections such as his prime minister's switch to the rebel side.

It also highlighted Assad's deepening reliance on a shrinking list of allies, led by Tehran. Assad — seen on state TV for the first time since an 18 July bombing in Damascus killed four of his top security officials — used Jalili's visit to portray a sense of command and vowed to fight his opponents "relentlessly."

Jalili, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, promised Iran would stand by Syria against its international "enemies" — a clear reference to the rebels' Western backers

and others such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

While there were no public pledges of greater military assistance to Assad, the mission by Jalili appeared to reflect Iran's efforts to reassure Syria of its backing and ease speculation that Tehran also could be making contingencies for Assad's possible fall.

On a visit to South Africa, Clinton described Assad's regime as splintering from Monday's defection of Syria's prime minister, Riad Hijab, and other military and political figures breaking away in recent months. She urged international leaders to begin work on a "good transition plan" to try to keep Syria from collapsing into more chaos after Assad.

"I am not going to put a timeline on it. I can't possibly predict it, but I know it's going to happen as do most observers around the world," Clinton told reporters.

A post-Assad Syria presents a host of worrisome scenarios, including a bloody cycle of revenge and power grabs by the country's patchwork of factions. They include the Sunni-led rebels and Assad's

minority Alawite community, an offshoot of Shia Islam and part of its close bonds with Shia power Iran.

A growing humanitarian crisis is already taking hold.

More than 1,300 Syrians fled to Turkey on Tuesday as rebels tried to expand their hold inside Aleppo, Syria's largest city, despite two weeks of withering counterattacks by Assad's troops. Close to 48,000 Syrians have already taken refuge in Turkey, which has served as a staging ground for rebels. Even more refugees have crossed into Jordan and Lebanon.

And at least 22,300 Iraqis who fled to Syria several years ago have streamed home in the past three weeks, said UN officials in Baghdad as they prepared for more refugees.

In Geneva, meanwhile, the World Health Organization said the fighting has severely hit Syria's health services, including closing down 90 percent of pharmaceutical plants in Damascus and other main cities and leaving critical shortages of medicine. WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic cited a Syrian Health Ministry report that 200

ambulances were lost in recent weeks to theft or clashes.

Aleppo-based activists said clashes were going on Tuesday near the historic city center. That suggested the rebels were making some inroads in Aleppo, which lies some 25 miles (40 kilometers) from the Turkish border.

Intense government bombardment of the Syrian town of Tal Rifaat closer to the border sent scores of people spilling into Turkey for safety, according to the activists.

A Turkish government official said 1,328 Syrian refugees had crossed the border Tuesday — nearly double the number of the previous day. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with government rules.

Ahmad Saleh, a Tal Rifaat resident who fled to Turkey, said the town was shelled Monday from the nearby air base of Minnegh, killing at least two people. "We had to choose between dying in Syria and coming to Turkey," he said.

A video posted online by activists Tuesday showed a large group of Free Syrian Army rebels in military fatigues and carrying rocket-propelled grenades and automatic rifles. The fighters were seen announcing that they were joining the "Unification Brigade," the main group of rebels in Aleppo, to assist in the "liberation" of the city.

"They have Satan on their side, we have God on ours," one rebel shouted. "We are coming, Aleppo," shouted another. The authenticity of the video could not be independently verified.

Despite a ferocious crackdown, rebels in Syria have grown more confident and are using increasingly bolder tactics both in Aleppo and in the capital, Damascus.

In a daylight attack, rebels on Saturday abducted a group of 48 Iranians near Damascus, branding them as spies assisting in Assad's crackdown.

Iran says those captured when their bus was commandeered were pilgrims visiting a Shia shrine on the outskirts of Damascus, and Jalili said Tuesday that Iran

would spare no effort to secure their release.

"We believe that the abduction of innocent people could not be accepted by any rational person. We believe that the parties that support those terrorist groups to commit such disgraceful acts, are their partners," he said.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Ministry said it holds the US responsible for the fate of the abducted Iranians.

Iran's state IRNA news agency said the ministry summoned the Swiss envoy in Tehran late Monday to stress that Iran expects Washington to use its influence to secure the Iranians' release. The Swiss look after US interests in Iran since Tehran and Washington have no diplomatic relations.

The Iranian Embassy in Turkey said Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi was traveling Tuesday to Turkey, where he was to meet with his Turkish counterpart to discuss Syria and the abducted Iranians.

Syrian rebels claimed three of the Iranian captives were killed on Monday during

shelling by government forces in Damascus and its suburbs, and threatened to kill the remaining Iranians unless the army stopped its bombardment.

"The Syrian regime is responsible for anything that happens to the Iranians," a representative of the Baraa Brigades, which claimed responsibility for the group's abduction, told The Associated Press on Skype.

The representative's claim that three were killed could not be independently verified. An official at the Iranian Embassy in Damascus said he had no information on the subject.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/syria-s-assad-returns-public-eye-ally-iran>

- **Russian general denies reports he was killed by Free Syrian Army**

A video released on YouTube by the armed opposition's Damascus Area Military Command claimed the killing of a Russian advisor to the Syrian defense minister and identified him as General Vladimir Khodzhev. (Al Arabiya)

A Russian general Wednesday denied reports he had been killed by rebels in Syria during an operation against President Bashar al-Assad's top security men.

General Vladimir Kuzheyev told reporters at a hastily arranged press conference at the Russian defense ministry in Moscow that he was flattered by the attention and happy to report he was well.

"I thank the media for devoting such great attention to my humble persona," Kuzheyev said in comments also posted on the defense ministry's official website and replayed on state television.

"As a general, I understand that this information was not just a provocation aimed against me but also -- and most importantly -- against my country."

A video released on YouTube by the armed opposition's Damascus Area Military Command claimed the killing of a Russian advisor to the Syrian defense minister and identified him as General Vladimir Khodzhev.



The post showed a document with a photograph of a man resembling the Russian general who emerged in Moscow on Wednesday. It added that his local translator had also been died in the rebel attack.

"This proves the involvement of the Russians in the humanitarian crimes against our people and our nation," the rebel commander said in the post.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) said the killing of the general, along his private translator, Ahmed Aiq, was evidence that Russia was embroiled in the "humanitarian crimes" against Syrians.

"We warn all the snakes to go back to their dens whether it is Russia, Iran and Iraq or Lebanon," a FSA officer said in the video.

The rebel group said, the operation was conducted by its Ghotu Western Brigades

from Damascus along with FSA countryside forces.

The Syrian opposition accuses Russia of fomenting the violence in Syria by refusing to join calls on Assad to leave power and continuing to provide weapons to its Soviet-era ally

Russia, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon's Hezbollah have long opposed foreign intervention in Syria and the toppling Assad. Russia and China have blocked U.N. Security Council's resolutions that seemed to be against Assad regime.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/08/231005.html>

- **FSA insists former Syrian PM defected to Jordan, Amman again denies**

The United States has said that the defection of former Syrian prime minister Riyad Hijab (L) shows that President Bashar al-Assad's government was crumbling. (Reuters)

A brigade of the Free Syrian Army insisted on Tuesday that former Syrian Prime Minister Riyad Hijab and 35 other top

figures had indeed defected to neighboring Jordan, but authorities in the kingdom again denied the allegations.

The al-Yarmouk brigade said the Hijab and other top figures in the Syrian regime, including high-ranking army officers, had crossed to Jordan "before hours." But a Jordanian official quickly dismissed the claims, according to Al Arabiya television.

The Syrian state television said last week that Hijab was fired less than two months after taking post.

President Bashar al-Assad appointed Hijab, a former agriculture minister, as prime minister in June following a parliamentary election in May which authorities said was a step towards political reform but which opponents dismissed as a sham.

Omar Ghalawanji, who became Syria's caretaker prime minister after the reported defection of his predecessor, held a cabinet meeting on Sunday in a session attended by all ministers, state TV reported.

The meeting, footage of which was shown on Syrian TV, appeared to be a response to claims by the opposition Syrian National Council that two ministers had defected along with Hijab.

The United States said the defection of Hijab showed that President Assad's government was "crumbling from within."

"This is a sign that Assad's grip on power is loosening. If he cannot maintain cohesion within his own inner circle, it reflects on his inability to maintain any following among the Syrian people that isn't brought about at the point of a gun," White House spokesman Jay Carney told a news briefing.

"The momentum is with the opposition and with the Syrian people. It's clear that these defections are reaching the highest levels of the Syrian government and Assad cannot restore his control over the country because the Syrian people will not allow it," he said.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/08/230987.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• **MPs warn Kuwait against Iran meet on Syria**

Kuwaiti lawmakers on Wednesday warned the government of the Gulf state against taking part in a meeting in Iran over the Syrian crisis, accusing Tehran of aiding the Damascus regime.

"Kuwait's participation in Tehran meeting is rejected because Iran hands are stained with the blood of the Syrian people," opposition Islamist MP Waleed al-Tabatabai said in a statement.

"In addition, this meeting aims to rescue the regime of [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad," the lawmaker said.

A top aide to the Iranian foreign minister visited Kuwait on Sunday and handed a letter to Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Sabah.

Local media said the letter invited Kuwait to take part in the meeting on Thursday that was called by Tehran for countries having a "realistic position" on Syria.

Kuwait has not so far officially confirmed or denied its participation.

Iran is the main ally of the beleaguered Syrian regime which since March 2011 has been waging a battle against an increasingly armed opposition.

Another opposition Islamist MP Jamaan al-Harbash said "Kuwait's participation in the meeting would be a betrayal for the blood of the [Syrian] martyrs."

Mubarak al-Waalan, an independent opposition lawmaker charged that Iran is politically and militarily involved in "killing our brothers in Syria."

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=426104>

- **Bahrain court cuts jail terms against soldier assailants**

A Bahraini court on Wednesday cut jail sentences against 11 people convicted of attacking a soldier and acquitted four others, a lawyer said.

The appeals court reduced the main charge against 15 defendants from

attempted murder to "physical attack" on the soldier, while charges of taking part in illegal assemblies and rioting during a month of Shiite-led protests last year remained unchanged.

Five of the defendants had their sentences reduced to two years. The sentences against two other defendants were dropped to one year and six months respectively, the lawyer said requesting anonymity.

The 16th defendant lost his right to appeal for remaining at large, he said.

Bahrain's interior ministry says more than 700 people, including some police officers, have been injured in the protests since the beginning of the year.

Sporadic demonstrations have intensified since a March 2011 crackdown ended month-long protests in Pearl Square demanding democratic reforms.

Meanwhile, the kingdom's prosecution referred two adolescents to a juveniles center after charging them of burning tires to block a street in a Shiite village.

Protesters from the archipelago's majority Shiite community tend to block main roads in their villages outside Manama with burning tires and garbage containers.

"The prosecution questioned three defendants, including two adolescents, over burning tyres on a main road," said Nawaf al-Awadi, the public prosecutor in the Northern Province, in a statement.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=426105>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Sending PM home will hurt democratic process, warns ANP**

ISLAMABAD: In a reaction to the Supreme Court's issuance of a show-cause notice to Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) coalition partner Awami National Party (ANP) said if the apex court dismissed another prime minister, it would hamper the democratic and economic process in the country, DawnNews reported on Wednesday.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Supreme Court issued a show-cause notice to the prime minister over his failure to implement its

directive of writing a letter to Swiss authorities to reopen graft cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

Acting President of ANP Haji Adeel said that the government has written to the Swiss authorities once, now the judiciary should opt for a middle way to solve this issue.

He claimed that the judiciary has an option to form a commission to write the 'Swiss letter'.

Critics of the judiciary and members of PPP's main ruling Pakistan People's Party accuse the court of over stepping its reach and waging a personal vendetta against the president.

Experts say Ashraf will be asked to explain his position on August 27. If the court is not satisfied, he risks being summoned to be indicted for contempt, precipitating the second contempt trial against a sitting prime minister in just months.

Former President of the SC Bar Association Qazi Anwer

Former President of the Supreme Court Bar Association Qazi Anwer said that the apex court did not have any option but to issue the notice to the prime minister.

He said that it was most probable that the present prime minister would face the same fate as his predecessor.

Imtiaz Gul

Analyst Imtiaz Gul told AFP that Wednesday's decision showed the court was refusing to back down. "The logical consequence of the court's position is the disqualification of any prime minister who refuses to write the letter," he said.

Abdul Hafeez Pirzada

A prominent Pakistani lawyer Abdul Hafeez Pirzada said Ashraf might also be disqualified from office if he did not write the letter to Swiss authorities, but still did not expect him to do so.

" I don't think they (the government) are in a mood to write the letter," he said.

Fawad Chaudhry

An advisor to the Prime Minister, Fawad Chaudhry, said Ashraf had been informed about Wednesday's court ruling, and he would consult with his political allies before making any decision. Chaudry said the court ruling could further deepen political instability as a time when the country was facing multiple challenges.

Asma Jahangir

Former President of Supreme Court bar association and Chairperson of Human rights commission Pakistan (HRCP) Asma Jahangir said that she feels that there was some planning behind the SC's hasty decision.

<http://dawn.com/2012/08/08/sending-pm-home-will-hurt-democratic-process-warns-ang/>

- **PPP to resist new centres of legislative power**

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan People's Party expressed its determination to resist, within the bounds of law and constitution, the emergence of new centres of legislative power other than parliament. It said lawmaking is the sacred responsibility

of legislature, which will not be abandoned at any cost.

This was expressed during a meeting of federal ministers and senior PPP leaders, co-chaired by President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf, at the Presidency on Tuesday.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, former prime minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, Commerce Minister Makhdoom Amin Fahim, Defence Minister Naveed Qamar, Interior Minister Rehman Malik, Law Minister Farooq Naek, Religious Affairs Minister Syed Khursheed Shah, Information and Broadcasting Minister Qamar Zaman Kaira, former health minister Makhdoom Shahabuddin, Water and Power Minister Chaudhry Ahmed Mukhtar, Senator Mian Raza Rabbani, leader of the House in the Senate Jahangir Badr and Sardar Ali Khan attended the meeting.

The president's spokesman Senator Farhatullah Babar said the meeting discussed the current situation of the country with focus on preparation for elections, overcoming energy crisis and

the legal challenges the government was faced with.

He said the president called upon the party leadership to step up preparations for the upcoming elections, which the president emphasised, would be held on time in accordance with the constitutional and legal dictates and in consultation with coalition partners.

He said the Election Commission of Pakistan had announced completion of electoral rolls that were on display, and advised the party leadership to ensure every MNA, MPA and ticket-holder thoroughly checked the voter lists so that no one was left out, and to report any discrepancy to the ECP for rectification.

The president said the PPP believes in the people's power and was never shy of reverting to the people for endorsement of its policies. He said the party believed in free, fair and transparent elections for which it was important that electoral rolls should be devoid of errors and no eligible voter was left out.

The president said holding of next general elections on time by the present

assemblies would be another important milestone in the nation's journey towards strengthening of democracy, and further strengthening of the political process. He also asked the party leaders to reach out to masses and address their problems.

The spokesman said Water and Power Minister Chaudhry Ahmed Mukhtar briefed the meeting on the energy situation in the country. He said in view of the critical nature of the power issue and the problems faced by the people, repair work of high-voltage pylons in Muzaffargarh was done on war footing and the suspended power restored to the national grid. He said power generation would further improve with necessary financial resources being utilised for fuel and expected rise in water level in the dams.

The meeting was informed about the progress with regards to implementation of the cabinet's decision about zero duty on the import of solar panels. He said solar energy would significantly reduce pressure on the power sector. In addition to this, work on small dams in various parts of the country was also being done on priority basis.

Law Minister Farooq H Naek also briefed the meeting about various legal challenges and the strategy adopted to confront the challenges. The meeting expressed satisfaction with the strategy. The meeting also reposed full confidence in the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf.

<http://paktribune.com/news/PPP-to-resist-new-centres-of-legislative-power-252234.html>

- **No Pak-US joint operation in North Waziristan: Pak Army**

RAWALPINDI: A military official on Tuesday rejected a Wall Street Journal (WSJ) report about a Pakistan-US agreement for a joint operation in North Waziristan.

Coordinated actions on respective sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, being part of routine, should not be mistaken for "joint operations", the official said.

He further stated that targeted action in operation "Tight Screw" by Pakistan Army against terrorists in the North Waziristan was an ongoing process. This was being

undertaken for some months now to squeeze terrorists and there was no new operation as claimed in the report, he added.

<http://paktribune.com/news/No-Pak-US-joint-operation-in-North-Waziristan-Pak-Army-252233.html>

When, where and how to carry out operations within our territory is up to Pakistan alone to decide, the official concluded.

The WSJ had reported that "the US and Pakistani officials are considering joint counterterrorism campaigns in Afghanistan and Pakistan, say officials familiar with the proposals, in what would mark an upturn in cooperation after more than a year of rancorous relations".

**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.*

"The proposed campaigns would target the Haqqani network, which has mounted several attacks on US soldiers, as well as Taliban who have launched attacks on Pakistan", the officials said.

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The campaigns would be intended to help stamp out major security threats facing each country, targeting what the US says are sanctuaries for the Haqqani network in Pakistan, and what Pakistan says are sanctuaries for the Pakistani Taliban in Afghanistan," the journal had reported.