



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

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1. IRAQ

- **Arab political council: Kirkuk remains an Iraqi city.**

Kirkuk / NINA / Arab Political Council in Kirkuk rejected annexation of Kirkuk to Kurdistan, confirming that the council with the shared administration.

The council said in a press statement: "Kirkuk remains an Iraqi city despite all attempts to combine it with Kurdistan, we, the Kirkuk's Arabs and the Arab political Council and our representatives in the provincial council and the Parliament, confirm that the Iraqi constitution had set a time limit to Article 140, which ended on 31 December, 2007."

The council stressed in the statement that "Kirkuk's Arabs with the formation of Tigris Operations Command within the purview of the federal authorities because it guarantees the security and stability of the people in Kirkuk and enhances their unity and history, and in a response to the suffering of our people in Kirkuk to the programmed and ugliest oppression, deprivation and exclusion."

The Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution set a roadmap to address the disputed areas in the city of Kirkuk and set a time limit to be applied. And the executive authority is responsible to do so in accordance with the Constitution.

The main responsibilities are: first to perform operations of normalize the situation in Kirkuk and other disputed territories, secondly to conduct the census, and thirdly is to end the duty of the executive branch by doing referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories to determine the will of its citizens, in accordance with the time period stipulated in the Constitution and the maximum end is of 31, Des.-2007.

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

- **IIP, Ahrar bloc stress necessity for all to participate in drawing Reform Paper**

Baghdad (NINA) – Leadership of Iraq Islamic Party (IIP), represented by its Secretary General, Ayad al- Samara'e, received on Sunday evening, Sep. 16, a delegation representing Parliamentary Ahrar bloc, headed by Baha al-Araji.

A statement by the IIP said that both side discussed current political developments in Iraq, and means to get out of the long lasted political crisis and has resulted in negative effects on the local arena.



It added that in a joint press conference, both sides stressed the necessity for all political blocs to participate in writing the Political Reforms Paper that the National Alliance intends to present.

Members of the IIP Politburo, Rasheed al-Azzawi and Bahaldeen al-Naqshabandi and Ahrar bloc lawmakers, Jawad al-Shihaili and Rafi Abdul Jabar attended the meeting.

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

- **Jafari, Babair, stress necessity for joint efforts to safeguard Iraq**



Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of the National Alliance (NA), Ibrahim al-Jafari, discussed with the Emir of Kurdistan Islamic Group, Sheikh Ali Babair, latest development concerning the political process.

A statement issued on Sunday, Sep. 16, by the NA Media Bureau said that Jafari received Babair and the delegation accompanying him. In the meeting, the two stressed necessity for joining efforts to safeguard Iraq's unity and its sovereignty in all its components.

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

- **Talabani is to arrive Sulaimaniyah tomorrow**

Sulaimaniyah / Nina / An official of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) said that President Jalal Talabani will arrive in the Kurdistan region on tomorrow coming from Germany.

Abdul Razak Sharif the media director of the Political Bureau of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan told the National Iraqi News Agency /NINA/: "President Jalal Talabani is supposed to arrive tomorrow and there will be a private ceremony to receive him."

Talabani left on 17, June to Germany for the purpose of treating his left knee.

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

- **KBC hoping Talabani will put an end to disputes in Iraq upon his return from Germany**

BAGHDAD, Sept. 16 (AKnews) - The Kurdish Blocs Coalition (KBC) is hoping that President of Iraq Jalal Talabani will put an end to months of disputes between Baghdad and Erbil upon his return from Germany where he is receiving treatment after his health deteriorated.

Deputy Chairman of the KBC Muhsin Sadoun said "The reform paper has not had any effects so far ... Talabani can call for convening the national meeting"

The reform paper was submitted by the State of Law Coalition (SLC) in an attempt to bring together all political parties in the country to agree on ending disputes. The paper however was not welcome by rival parties.

The disputes between Baghdad and Erbil increased over the past few months due to tensions over the pending issues between the central and the regional governments since the adoption of the country's constitution in 2005.

The disputes are related to the management of oil wealth and disputed areas - that the former regime changed demographically in the favor of Arabs at the expense of the Kurds - in addition to the budget of the Kurdistan Regional Guard – Peshmerga.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/326588/>

- **MP: Committee of Article 140 will begin its work soon**

BAGHDAD, DUHOK, Sept. 15 (AKnews) - The Acting Committee of Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution will begin its works soon, said the chair for the acting committee.

The acting committee voted on Sept.3 to elect Mohsen Saadun from the Kurdistan Blocs Coalition as its chair and Mushreq Naji for Ahrar Bloc in the Sadr Current as Saadun's deputy.

The Kurdish Gorran (Change) Movement Bloc recently demanded to re-elect the committee of article 140, saying the new committee was formed unconstitutionally.

Saadun said the acting committee will begin its work soon to decide about holding its meetings in the Council of Representatives, meeting with the government committee and following up the performance of government agencies in relations to implementation of article 140.

"The objections to the formation of the committee will not have any legal effect.

All objections are illegal and unconstitutional," Saadun said.

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution sets a roadmap for ending the dispute between Baghdad and Erbil governments over the ownership of the ethnically diverse areas like Kirkuk province and parts of Diyala, Salahaddin and Nineveh provinces.

The article had to be fully implemented by end of 2007 but the related officials have failed in finishing the first stage of the three stages the article has set forward.

The article proposes resettling the original residents of the disputed areas and reimbursing their damages as well as resettling the Arab settlers in their original areas, conducting a public census and finally conducting a public referendum for people to decide on being run by Baghdad or Erbil governments.

Saadun urged the authorities in disputed area, especially in Kirkuk province, to not allow for the Arab settlers who have been compensated to return to the disputed areas for residence.

Each family of the Arab settlers who were led to the disputed areas in 1968 or earlier have been issued 20m IQD after it was proved through their records of the food ration cards that they were non-native citizens to Kirkuk.

"They are supposed to return to their areas as they have nothing in Kirkuk....", Saadun said.

In a statement the mayor of Kirkuk Kamel Sala Baho warned about the return of the Arab families to Kirkuk who benefited from the compensation provided by Article 140.

He added "we addressed Committee of Article 140 in Kirkuk Provincial Council in this regard and did not get any answer."



Saadun said although the Iraqi constitution allows for movement of Iraqis in all provinces of the country and for their purchase of real estate wherever they wish, the situation of Kirkuk is different.

He added "Kirkuk and other [disputed] areas are covered by Article 140 because of the demographic changes that have occurred during the era of the former regime.

"The law prevents them [Arab settlers] from returning to Kirkuk after they received their compensation and the local authorities and the Provincial Council must observe the law and the Constitution and not to allow for the transfer of their [Arab settlers'] records or their ration cards to Kirkuk again."

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/326398/>

- **Maliki arrives at the Council of Representatives**

malikiBAGHDAD, Sept.15 (AKnews)- Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki arrived in the Council of Representatives today for

expanding on his government's opinion about the economic infrastructure bill.

Maliki, accompanied by a number of his advisors arrived in the Council, said a media officer from the Council of Representatives who demanded anonymity.

Council Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi and two of his deputies were waiting for Maliki who headed directly to Nujaifi's office when he arrived.



Maliki himself demanded that he attends this session for ratification of the economic infrastructure and complementary budget bills.

Some factions have opposed Maliki's hosting for ratifying the bill, saying he needed to appear in the Council for expanding on the political and security situation.

Besides, they deem Maliki is seeking political achievement through the economic infrastructure bill which demands licensing \$37b projects to investors who will be paid back in installments.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/326342/>

- **Kurdish MPs criticize Maliki's attendance session for ratifying bill**

Iraq Parliament, parlamani iraqSULI, Sept.15 (AKnews)- A number of MPs from the Kurdistan Blocs Coalition (KBC) believe that now the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki should appear in the Council of Representatives for expanding on the security and political situation of the country rather than ratifying a bill.

Maliki will attend today's session of the Council of Representatives only for expanding on the view of the government about the economic infrastructure bill, said Khalid Shwani, from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), a rank of the KBC.

He added the bill demands licensing \$37b projects to investors and their fund will be reimbursed in installments.

"This hosting session for Maliki has been criticized by many factions in the Council who have not even given their consent for Maliki to express his view to the Council," Shwani said.

The MP thought it's not unlikely for the MPs to take the discussions to talks over political crisis in the country.



Shwani continued "those who oppose the economic infrastructure bill also believe Maliki eyes political achievements through this bill.... Therefore I believe the session will be nothing but [talks over] political issue."

Mahmoud Othman, an old-hand MP from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), said Maliki's coming to the Council of Representatives is only for ratifying the economic infrastructure bill.

Othman added "Maliki had to come to the Council earlier, not for a bill but for security, political, social and diplomatic situation of the country."

Ashwaq Jaf, another KBC MP at the human rights committee, also believed that the PM's hosting session had to be for expanding on the security and political situation.

"What Iraq is undergoing now is a catastrophe with all these bombings in the country," she said.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/326339/>

- **Nusayif warns from negative impact of Mubarak port debris**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Aliya Nusayif, of the Iraqiya Hurra Coalition warned from the negative impact of the debris of Mubarak port that Kuwait casts towards Um Qasir Iraqi port.

She stated to AIN "The technical committees formed by the Council of Minister are responsible for any consequences resulted by the huge amounts of debris thrown daily towards the Iraqi port."

"The debris has negative impact on the environment and the Um Qasir port," she added.

"The Iraqi officials and leaders are also responsible for what is going on due to their negligence for this crucial issue," she concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18699:nusayif-warns-from-negative-impact-of-mubarak-port-debris-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Most political blocs oppose Infrastructure Law, says Kilani**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Jamal Kilani, of the Iraqiya Slate pointed out that "Most of the political blocs are opposing the Infrastructure Law because it will create a future financial crisis for Iraq."

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The law needs more details and guarantees as well as more explanations for the mechanisms of its implementation."

"The Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, had to discuss the security file while hosted by the parliament due to its priority at the current time especially due to the terrorist attacks targeted the provinces recently," he stressed.

Earlier, the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, has attended the parliament session to discuss the infrastructure law draft where he expressed his surprise over the objection of some blocs over this law draft, but he admitted some corruption cases to be involved with this law draft.

The parliament identified Monday session to vote the Infrastructure Law but it was postponed till further notice.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18698:most-political-blocs-oppose-infrastructure-law-says-kilani-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Security violations important to discuss with Maliki – MP**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: Al-Iraqiya Bloc MP Khalid Abdulla al-Alwani stated today that it was necessary to discuss the security violations with Premier Nouri al-Maliki, rather than the infrastructure law.

In a press statement, he noted the security situation is the most important topic in need of discussion, in comparison to any other topics.

Most Iraqi provinces have witnessed a security upheaval over the past two weeks with an increase in car bombs and other forms of explosions which left to hundreds of casualties, according to governmental sources.

The Parliament is hosting Premier Maliki today to discuss the deferred payment law which is meant to deal with with Iraqi infrastructures.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28yiqs2245clztby45do3yvfvv%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150504&l=1

- **Parliament's speaker condemns anti-Islam film, attacks on embassies**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: Speaker of the Parliament, Osama al-Nujiefi, condemned on Friday the anti-Islam film that depicted Prophet Muhammad in an unfavorable light, slamming the recent attacks on US embassies in the world.

A film was allegedly produced by an American-Israeli real-estate developer, and defames the Prophet.

The film portrays the Prophet as a fool, philanderer and a religious fake.

Massive demonstrations covered Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Tunisia protesting this film that resulted in killing US ambassador to Libya.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28yiqs2245clztby45do3yvfvv%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150502&l=1

- **Barzani expected to leave for Turkey, newspaper**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Turkish Hurriyet daily expected today that Kurdish region president Masoud Barzani will attend the

ruling Justice and Development Party Congress due in Istanbul at the end of this month.

The semi-official daily added that Barzani received an invitation to attend the congress.

It regarded this move as a development of relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, where hundreds of Turkish companies and tradesmen work in the region.

The paper added that Barzani agreed to attend, but no official confirmations were reported or whether will meet Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Dawood Oglu during the visit.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28yiqs2245clztby45do3yvfvv%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150500&l=1

- **Dawa party denounces anti-Islam film**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Islamic Dawa Party denounced "the intentional defamation against Prophet Mohammed, which represents a spirit of hatred among

the peoples and aggression against their human rights and religious feelings".

In a statement, the Party added that this move is "a Zionist Jewish project to ignite religious wars between the Islamic and Christian worlds and give impetus for new terrorist attacks against each other".

It called all Muslims to "unite against Zionist Jewish plans and follow the ethics of Prophet Mohammed to counter such schemes".

The film aroused Muslims' wrath all over the world, which was produced by Israeli businessman, having US nationality.

Demonstrations waved a number of Islamic countries, including Egypt, Tunisia, Palestine, Yemen, Iraq and Libya where the US ambassador was killed in a riot.

In 2002, a US caricaturist depicted drawings against Islam, while another Danish made similar drawings against Prophet Mohammed in 2005 which led to great wave of resentment in the Islamic world, then followed by US Bishop Terry Jones who burnt the Holy Quran in Florida.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28yiqs2245clztby45do3yvfvv%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150499&l=1

- **Car bomb explosion near the entrance of the Green Zone**

Shafaq News / A security source said some people were killed others were injured by a car bomb explosion near the entrance of the Green Zone in central Baghdad.



The source told "Shafaq News", that "The car bomb was placed near the suspension bridge in central Baghdad near the entrance of the Green Zone and has exploded this morning, causing the death of two people and wounding nine others.

The Green Zone located in central Baghdad is considered of the most protected places with security forces in the country, as it contain the government headquarters, Arab and foreign embassies

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3553-car-bomb-explosion-near-the-entrance-of-the-green-zone-.html>

- **Source: government cannot change the security situation**

Shafaq News / A source revealed on Monday, that the Iraqi government will not be able to change the security reality and will spend the allocated money in this aspect to improve the service and living reality in the country.

The source said in an interview to "Shafaq News" that "the Iraqi government has planed recently to improve services and the living standards of the individual and has left the security situation for the specialized ministries as interior and defense ministry."

The source, who asked not to be named, said that "the Iraqi government has reached to a conclusion that the security situation is impossible to be more improved in light of the existing political differences and that any financial expenses and efforts outside the ministries of interior and defense would not work out."

"This result has put the government in front of a solution that lies in directing efforts toward services while Ministries of Interior and Defense continue to plan and spend their budget to improve security," noting that "the infrastructure law before the parliament of is only a part of this trend."



The parliament has hosted Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki on Saturday, at the request of the latter to discuss the infrastructure law, as al-Maliki has reviewed in front of the parliament what can be achieved by this private law, specially the paragraph of payment on credit in improving the service reality in the country.

The parliament has decided to postpone the approval of the draft law of the infrastructure to further notice, at the request of the heads of the relevant committees to make a thorough study, as

well as what it can achieve of economic feasibility.

Baghdad and a number of central and southern provinces are witnessing from time to time series of armed attacks by roadside bombs and car bombs that target the elements of the security services of the army, police and civilians that leave dozens of victims.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/3552-source-government-cannot-change-the-security-situation-.html>

- **500 regional companies involved in Erbil's second international Trade Fair**



Shafaq News / Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced on Sunday, that the Second International Trade Fair of energy will take place in Erbil city that will start on Monday with the participation of 500 regional and international companies.

A statement by the KRG in which "Shafaq News" received a copy of it states that , "The second International Trade Fair for Energy will be opened on Monday in Erbil, under the supervision of the Ministry of Electricity in the KRG with the participation of 500 of regional and international companies," stressing that " Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia , Syria the United Arab Emirates, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Turkey, Thailand, China, France, Finland, Britain, Hindustan and Greece will participate in the exhibition. "

The statement added that "the companies participating in the exhibition will display their products in the electricity, lighting, water , ventilation, oil and gas fields, as well as to offering other products, it is expected to signed several agreements between the companies and businessmen," adding that "the exhibition will last for four days."

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3551-500-regional-companies-involved-in-erbils-second-international-trade-fair-.html>

- **Leader of Turkmen Front: Unless We Know the Purpose of Maliki's Dija Forces, We Won't Support it**

Arshad Salehi is the head of the Turkmen Front. In an interview with Rudaw inside his Kirkuk office, he pointed to better relations with the Kurds and said that his group is ready to enter an alliance with "native Arabs [to Kirkuk] and real Kurds" for the next election. But, due to an unclear "map of political alliances," he refused to comment on whether his front will join the Kurdistan Alliance or not.

Rudaw: Do you think Iraq's reaction to the Turkish foreign minister's visit to Kirkuk was appropriate?

Arshad Salehi: It was an official visit to the Kurdistan Region. Two days before the visit, I met with the Iraqi prime minister and he said that Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish FM, would visit the Kurdistan Region and meet with [President] Barzani to discuss the Syrian situation, the PKK and several other issues.

Since the Kurdistan Region is part of Iraq and the Iraqi government was aware of the visit, not to mention the fact that Mr. Davutoglu had expressed his willingness to

visit Kirkuk several times, I think the visit was normal.

Moreover, the visit was not a political one, and so the Iraqi government shouldn't be too sensitive about it. On the contrary, the visit was to support the Iraqi government and Kirkuk's local government. It was aimed at supporting both governments by strengthening economic relations between Kirkuk and several [Turkish] provinces. Due to the large number of Turkish companies and high trade volume with Turkey, we have almost all been Turkified.

Rudaw: Davutoglu had a meeting with you. Did he make any promises to the Turkmen?

"As the Turkmen Front, we have very good relations with the Arab states, too."

Arshad Salehi: Davutoglu met with all the ethnic groups in the city. He started by meeting the governor who represents an important segment of this province. He also met with the head of the provincial council, who represents the Turkmen, and the deputy governor who represents the Arabs. He met with all the ethnic groups.

His meeting with the Turkmen Front and the Turkmen is nothing new. We have always said we support establishing good relations with all neighboring countries. As the Turkmen Front, we have very good relations with the Arab states, too. I hope these relations serve Iraqi interests.

Our meeting with Mr. Davutoglu was not a secret meeting. We met in front of TV cameras. He called Kirkuk the backbone of Iraq and clearly pointed to the importance of all ethnic groups in Kirkuk. He did not make any special promises to us.

Rudaw: Why did he visit Kirkuk in particular? Mosul has different ethnic groups too.

Arshad Salehi: In fact, the people of Kirkuk have been waiting for his visit for a long time. Davutoglu has visited Mosul in the past; he has visited other Iraqi provinces like Karbala, Najaf, Baghdad and Erbil, but only when he visits Kirkuk do different interpretations of his visit appear.

Rudaw: Why was the Iraqi government worried about his visit?

Arshad Salehi: I believe that if the Iraqi government had had a good relationship with the Kurdistan Region at the time of the visit, it would not have made such a commotion about it and would not have exaggerated the issue. The crisis in relations between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region greatly influenced the visit.

Rudaw: You said you met with Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki two days before the Turkish FM's visit to Kirkuk. Did Maliki know Davutoglu was going to visit Kirkuk?

Arshad Salehi: No. In his meeting with the political factions, Maliki said that Davutoglu was going to visit Erbil. So they knew he would be visiting there, but his visit to Kirkuk was unexpected.

Rudaw: After Davutoglu's visit, your group went to Turkey and met with Turkish officials. Did the Turkish officials advise you to build better relations with the Kurds?

"Turkey advises us to build better relations with everyone; they do not insist on any particular party or group."

Arshad Salehi: Frankly, the Turks, and I hope everyone else, will always try to move closer to all Iraqi ethnic groups equally. I have criticized them and told them that I believe they should build better relations with us. I have told them that they have to look at the Iraqi Turkmen's situation -- they are facing extinction. But they remain within the same distance as they are with all Iraqi ethnic groups.

In my meetings with the Iranians, I have often told them that Turkey stays the same distance from every ethnic group and that I wished they would do the same. If all the regional states treated Iraq as Turkey does, then everyone could relax.

As for your question, Turkey advises us to build better relations with everyone; they do not insist on any particular party or group. When I assumed the leadership position of the Turkmen Front, some conflicts emerged between us and the Kurdistan Region. There are still some unresolved issues. But these will not hinder building better relations. This is normal in politics. Our Kurdish brothers have a different view on important issues

like Kirkuk, and Article 140, and this is normal.

When Mr. Massoud Barzani came to Kirkuk, the leaders of the Turkmen Front met several times to discuss what to speak to him about and whether to meet with him or not. We concluded that whatever the conflicts were, we needed to meet and discuss the issues. When he visited Kirkuk, I was abroad, but he met with the Turkmen Front's leadership who handed him a letter with their demands. Prior to this visit, there was a lack of frankness between us. [The visit] was positive in strengthening relations.

Rudaw: How is your relationship with the Kurdistan Region now?

Arshad Salehi: We are waiting for positive steps from them. We do not want words without action. In some areas, trust building is necessary. Our people have suffered at the hand of Kurdish parties. From 2003 until recently, the city's administration was run by one political party. Kurdish political parties imposed their hegemony on government offices in the city. We were afraid of the security agencies that report to the political

parties. There were some assaults on Turkmen land in Kirkuk. Mr. Barzani promised to solve that problem. We showed many documents that proved our side of the story when it came to those lands.

Rudaw: What Kurdish political party do you have the most problems with?

"We do not have to form an alliance with the Kurds."

Arshad Salehi: Frankly, since the establishment of the Turkmen Front, we have had good relations with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). We have never cut off relations with the PUK. But when we were based in Erbil, we had many issues with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). However, now our brothers in the KDP are also opening up to the Turkmen Front.

Rudaw: What is your reaction to Prime Minister Maliki's order for the formation of an armed forces division in Kirkuk, the Dijla Operations Command?

Arshad Salehi: If this case was two years ago, we would have had a different

reaction, but now we look at it in a different way. Unless we know who is going to be leading the division, what its tasks are, the basis on which it operates and who its soldiers will be, we will not support it. Will the commanders and officers of the division be from Kirkuk?

Kirkuk cannot afford being the arena for political disputes. If the disputes between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region transform into conflict between the Peshmerga and Dijla forces, Turkmen will suffer. That is why the Turkmen group in Kirkuk's provincial council did not support the formation of the division.

Rudaw: Is it true that you might enter an alliance with the Kurds for the next election?

Arshad Salehi: The map of political alliances for the next election is not clear yet. Now a radical nationalist Arab group is cooperating with a radical religious group -- they may form an alliance in Baghdad and middle Iraq -- for the next election. Also the Sunni tribes and a religious incumbent party are getting closer. However, the map is not clear yet.

As for us, we do not have to form an alliance with the Kurds. We will be very glad to form an alliance in Kirkuk with the real Kurds and native Arabs [to Kirkuk].

Rudaw: What does "real Kurds" mean?

Arshad Salehi: Real Kurds are those who have not moved to Kirkuk with fake documents, those who have been living with us since the '50s and are originally from Kirkuk.

Rudaw: Recently, in a case related to the Ministry of Education, Kurds and Turkmen raised their voice together. Both said their rights had been violated in the employment ratio. In many other issues, Kurds support you, but you lean more and more towards the Arabs. Why?

Arshad Salehi: Let me be frank. Since 2003, we have been in agreement with the Arabs on strategic issues such as Article 140 and some other issues. But now we have reached the conclusion that we will not be siding with any particular group against any other group. We want to keep the balance. If we support the Arabs, then we have to stand against the

other party, and this does not serve the interests of our nation.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/interview/5195.html>

- **Iraq's Ousted Minister: PM Maliki Halted Major Internet Project for "Security Reasons"**

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region -- Muhammad Allawi was recently removed from his post as minister of communication by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. The move came after Allawi complained about the management of the ministry and refused to annul a contract with Newroz Telecom as instructed to by the PM. Rudaw spoke with Allawi about the issues surrounding Newroz Telecom, who had been awarded a project to connect the Internet in Iraq to Turkey through the Kurdistan Region. Maliki halted the project due to "security reasons."

Rudaw: Can we say that you were sacked from your post because you refused to obey an order from Maliki to give an Iranian company the right to work on the Internet in Iraq?

Muhammad Allawi: It was for many reasons. I believe the main reason was a political one, like my being a member of the Iraqiya List, although I have carried out my duties professionally and never mixed my political views with my job. I have never made a political statement to the media. But unfortunately, in Iraq's current political reality, everything is interpreted politically. I have attended meetings in Najaf and Erbil as a member of Iraqiya and this seems to be the cause.

The Internet project that has been halted had great potential to benefit all of Iraq because it was going to bring a lot of income to the country and was going to connect the web from east to west. Halting this project will harm Iraq because it could have earned \$10 to \$20 million in profit every month.

"The whole world is connected through Internet lines and terminating the project for security reasons was uncalled for."

Rudaw: Were there any pressure on Iraq from Iran to terminate the contract on this project?

Muhammad Allawi: I don't think so. I don't believe giving the contract to an Iranian company was the reason.

Rudaw: Many committees were formed in order to audit the Newroz Telecom contract. These committees could not find any sort of corruption, so why did Maliki insist on terminating the contract?

Muhammad Allawi: Security was Maliki's excuse. I was very clear with him about this issue and told him that there would be no security issues with the project. It was a communication cable and had to pass through many countries. If you want to protect the information of your country from hacking, there are special passwords provided by specialists in this field. All the embassies in the world and the Iraqi Embassy are now protecting their own information with such passwords. The same kind of cable exists between China, the United States, Russia, and they are all protected.

The whole world is connected through Internet lines and terminating the project for security reasons was uncalled for. As I mentioned earlier, this project had financial advantages for Iraq and the

Kurdistan region as it was a joint project. By terminating this project, Iraq will be the most affected party.

Rudaw: What is meant by security threat? A threat from the Kurdistan Region or another country?

Muhammad Allawi: Those who have advised Maliki against this project have misinformed him. The safest communication method in the world right now is underground fiber optic cables. Not having underground cables and depending on satellites is the riskiest way to transfer information, which is what Iraq does currently. Every country in the world can intercept telephone communications via satellite, but doing that to underground fiber optic cables is extremely difficult because these cables transfer millions of telephone calls and emails every second.

They are lying when they give security as a reason for halting this project, because neither Turkey nor the Kurdistan Region has such advanced spying devices. If they are worried about Iraqi government communications, they can use special passwords.

The MPs of the State of Law Coalition, who claim that neighboring countries can eavesdrop on Iraqi intelligence phone calls, are actually speaking out of ignorance because the Iranian cables are passing through Turkey as well. Iraq is using Internet lines that pass through Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait. Are these countries safer than Turkey?

Also, this is the route to communicate with the rest of the world so it must pass through other countries. I believe they are just fooling Iraqi citizens with such excuses and nothing more. This project will allow the communications of 99 percent of Asian countries to pass through Iraq to Europe. The information from Iraq that passes through this cable does not constitute 1 percent of the overall data of those Asian countries which will pass through the same cable. Is Iraq more protective of its data security than countries like China and Japan?



“I know that Maliki is not knowledgeable in this field, but have no doubt that the people he consulted on this issue were ignorant.”

I know that Maliki is not knowledgeable in this field, but have no doubt that the people he consulted on this issue were ignorant.

Rudaw: How did Newroz Telecom win this contract? Were there any other competitors?

Muhammad Allawi: Before awarding this contract to Newroz Telecom, I personally visited the Kurdistan Region and spoke with the Ministry of Communications of the Kurdistan Region and told them about the importance of this project for both of us. They told me that they had no objection and were willing to continue with the project, but we had an ongoing 10-year contract with Newroz.

For the sake of transparency, we announced the project and asked all the interested companies to present their proposals. Only Newroz Telecom stepped forward at that time.

Rudaw: Some MPs say that they will not accept your resignation. Are you willing to go to Iraqi Parliament and speak out?

Muhammad Allawi: Yes, next month I will visit parliament and tell them everything.

Rudaw: As you explained in your letter to Maliki, it has been said that he is employing an individual in your ministry as an advisor but one who is more influential than the minister himself. Is it the same in all ministries?

Muhammad Allawi: Yes, this is true and unfortunately he has given a lot of authority to some individuals. I mentioned this problem and said that the ministry must be directed by the minister. An honorable minister does not allow his advisors to take over. I myself will not accept being a minister just on paper. They will either let me do my job as a minister or else I will not accept this job.

I told Maliki in my letter that I would not continue as a minister and would resign if that advisor kept doing my job. Instead of attempting to solve the issue in our

ministry, Maliki's answer to my letter was "I accept your resignation."

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/interview/5190.html>

2. IRAN

• Iranian MP: Russia under Putin Beneficial to Regional Security

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior member of the Iranian parliament stressed that Putin's presidency over Russia will strengthen Moscow's role as a regional actor serving peace and stability in the region.

Rapporteur of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Seyed Hossein Naqavi made the remarks in a meeting of the commission members with Iran's Ambassador to Russia Mahmoud Reza Sajjadi.

The meeting was aimed at exploring new avenues for the expansion of bilateral relations between the two countries.

During the meeting, Naqavi said that Russia under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin acts as an independent and

strong actor, serving regional peace and security in the long run.

"Iran's envoy to Russia explained about Iran-Russia ties and answered to the questions raised by the members of Iranian Parliament," Naqavi added.

In similar remarks, Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said, approximately a month ago, at a meeting with Russia's Ambassador to Tehran Levan Dzhagaryan, "The existing capacities in the two countries should be utilized for the establishment of durable security and stability in the region, and this requires continued consultations between the two countries' political and parliamentary officials."

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106240584>

- **Official: Iran's Insurance Industry Prospering despite Sanctions**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's insurance industry is continuing its progress and prosperity despite the sanctions imposed on Tehran by the western states, an Iranian insurance official underlined on Monday.

"Iran's insurance industry is moving to improve the country's economy with smart mechanisms and without being affected by sanctions," Deputy Head of Iran's Bimeh Markazi, (Central Insurance of the Islamic Republic of Iran) Seyed Kazzem Delkhosh said.

"According to the laws (which serve as its roadmap), Iran's insurance has been 100% successful this year in trade, export and import and has no problem," he said, describing the Iranian insurance industry as "a growingly strong backup for those active in economy and trade".

There are 25 insurance companies in Iran today and all except one are privately owned.

Head of Iran's Bimeh Markazi Seyed Mohammad Karimi said earlier this month that the country's insurers are ready to offer coverage to ships traversing through Iranian waters.

"Iran will provide insurance for all vessels lacking insurance in Iran's (territorial) waters," Karimi said.

"Fortunately, the Iranian insurance companies did well in providing necessary coverage for Iranian oil tankers and airplanes (despite the western sanctions) and even we have announced that we can provide insurance cover for foreign vessels in Iranian waters if approved by the oil and commerce ministries," he added.

Karimi's remarks came after the EU stopped insuring tankers carrying Iran's oil as part of its sanctions against Iranian crude sales.

Also earlier this month, Karimi downplayed the effects of enemies' sanctions on Iran's Insurance Industry, and said the country's insurance industry is earning hundreds of millions of dollars since the EU banned Iran's oil cargos.

"The illegal sanctions imposed on Iran's insurance industry are ineffective, and domestic insurance companies have insured oil tankers and petrochemicals carrying vessels up to the highest international standards," he said.

Karimi also said a consortium of Iranian insurance agencies is providing P&I

(protection and indemnity) insurance to the Iranian tankers.

He further pointed to Iran's saved \$700mIn as a result of US ban on marine insurance coverage for Iran-bound oil tankers and said, "The sanctions have caused a big leap in Iran's insurance industry and currently domestic insurance companies are faring well in insuring oil tankers besides refineries and power plants."

"Domestic insurance companies are ready to provide coverage to foreign tankers operating in Iran's waters after the necessary permit is obtained from Iran's Oil Ministry and good negotiations are underway with the Oil Ministry to that effect," he added.

In relevant remarks a couple of months ago , a senior Iranian official voiced Iran's preparedness to provide insurance cover for all foreign and Iranian ships and oil tankers, in a move to push back the US-engineered EU embargos against Tehran, and said Iran has managed to break Europe's monopoly on the shipping insurance industry.

"The sanction imposed by the foreign insurance firms made us launch Iranian insurance of P&I and this has been gifted to us by the sanctions," Managing Director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines Mohammad Hossein Dajmar told FNA.

"Before this, the Europeans had the monopoly of shipping insurances and a few number of countries owned the insurance firms and coverage but we have now succeeded in starting Iranian shipping insurance through government's cooperation," he added.

The EU imposed a full embargo on Iranian oil imports and insuring tankers which carry Iranian oil from July 1.



Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to

substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106240582>

- **Iran's Top Negotiator to Meet Ashton in Istanbul**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's top negotiator Saeed Jalili arrived in Turkey on Monday

to meet with senior Turkish officials on the latest developments in the negotiations between Iran and the six world powers before a Tuesday meeting with EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton.

Jalili, who is also Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), arrived in Ankara on Monday and is planned to meet President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as well as Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.

On Tuesday, the Iranian top security official will hold bilateral talks with Ashton, who represents the Group 5+1 powers (the five permanent UN Security Council member states plus Germany) in negotiations with Tehran.



Michael Mann, an Ashton spokesman, had earlier informed the media of an

impending meeting between the two top negotiators.

Speaking to FNA on August 30, Mann said the talks that were due to be held by August 31 had been postponed to a date in the near future.

Earlier reports said that Jalili and Ashton were due to exchange views over the latest stances expressed by the two sides' experts in their July 3 meeting in Istanbul.

After a 15-month hiatus, Iran and the Group 5+1 held several rounds of talks this year, with the latest one in Moscow on June 18-19.

At the end of the Moscow talks, Jalili and Ashton announced that they would hold a meeting after talks between their deputies and also a meeting between the two sides' experts.

In early July, Iran and the six world powers ended two days of talks by technical experts who discussed the details of the two sides' proposals to end the nuclear standoff between Tehran and the sextet.

Later in July, the deputy lead negotiators of Iran and the six world powers, Ali Baqeri and Helga Schmidt, met in Istanbul to exchange views over the results of the experts' talks.

Also, Jalili and Ashton had a phone conversation on August 2, during which the former reminded the constructive and initiative stances presented by Tehran in Istanbul, and urged Group 5+1 to provide a clear response in this regard.

In response, Ashton hailed Iran's practicable proposals, and pledged to discuss Iran's viewpoints with the representatives of the world powers to prepare a justifiable response.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106240580>

- **Iran: Current Oil Prices No Threat to World Economy**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Governor at the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Mohammad Ali Khatibi said current oil prices are no threat to the world economy.

Khatibi told the oil ministry's website that most oil consuming countries and even those countries that traditionally look for "conservative prices" consider 100-dollar prices fair, therefore current oil prices that are just a few dollars above the figure hardly can affect large economies of the US and Europe.

He continued that at the time being the US and European countries' economies are facing fundamental problems, including huge budget deficits.

If we take into account that the total oil revenue of OPEC members is less than the US budget deficit then rising oil prices by a few dollars cannot harm their economies and they should try to solve their structural problems in lieu of blaming others.

"Current oil prices represent nominal prices of the commodity and by considering inflation rate and other economic issues, it could be argued that real oil prices are between 70 to 80 dollars or 10 to 15 dollars respectively when we consider the year 2000 or the 1970s as the reference," Khatibi noted.

Calling the current upward trend of oil prices natural, the official said, "Current oil prices are the result of natural developments in the world oil markets and fixing oil prices based on "command economy" is not possible.

Referring to some who express concern on high oil prices and find it a threat to the world economy, Khatibi said that those views are related to presidential elections in the United States.

He added that on the verge of the presidential elections in the country, Americans are trying to bring down prices artificially either through their agents or by encouraging some oil producing countries to raise their oil production.



In reaction to some secondary sources' figures on the level of Iran's oil production, Khatibi said, "The Oil Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the only source of official figures and it is not

responsible for those figures released by secondary sources.

"We are responsible towards those figures we present directly to OPEC Secretariat, the figures that show Islamic Republic of Iran maintain its position as the second biggest oil producer in OPEC.

He added that Oil Ministry sends monthly reports on its oil production to OPEC Secretariat and is responsible for the figures it sends.

Elsewhere in his remarks he said an especial committee that had been set up to evaluate four OPEC Secretary General nominees' qualifications, is going to hold a session in OPEC Secretariat in 22nd and 23rd October with the presence of candidates from Ecuador, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

According to Khatibi, the candidates will express their capabilities and the committee will evaluate their qualifications by holding interviews.

"Under the ratifications of OPEC ministerial meeting, the committee has been set up just to evaluate candidates'

capabilities and has nothing to do with choosing new OPEC's Secretary General," said Khatibi, who is also the National Iranian Oil Company's director for international affairs.

The committee just gives advice to the ministers on the candidates and finally the ministerial meeting should reach consensus on choosing one of the candidates as secretary general.

Asked about the latest developments of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), Khatibi noted that the forum would hold a meeting under the chairmanship of Equatorial Guinea in November, adding that the exact date of the meeting is yet to be fixed.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106240536>

- **Israel will be demolished if it attacks Iran: IRGC chief**

TEHRAN, Sept. 16 (MNA) – The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps has said that if Israel attacks Iran, IRGC missiles will leave nowhere intact in Israel and nothing will remain of the country.

Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari made the remarks during a press conference in Tehran on Sunday.

He also stated that Iran would reconsider its nuclear commitments if international organizations cannot prevent Israel from carrying out its military threats against the Islamic Republic.

"Iran's nuclear capability is at an acceptable level, and such actions cannot deal a serious blow to it. But if international organizations cannot prevent the Zionist regime from taking such an action, Iran will reconsider its commitments in this regard, and the situation will change," Jafari said in response to a question by an Associated Press correspondent about the possibility of Israel launching a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities.

"But it does not mean that we will move toward developing nuclear weapons," he added.

He also said, "The Zionist regime sees its existence in danger, and in view of its criminal nature and the fact that it is in

the habit of killing, of course it tries to resolve its problems through taking military action and issuing threats. But it is a remote possibility that the Zionist regime would take such an action without the permission of the United States because it is aware that in that case it would achieve nothing.”

The United States will not support an Israeli military action against Iran because its forces and bases in the vicinity of Iran are within range of IRGC missiles and Muslims in the region and the rest of the world support the Islamic Republic, he stated.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1697694>

- **Iran’s Jalili to visit Istanbul on Monday**

TEHRAN, Sept. 17 (MNA) – Saeed Jalili, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council who acts as Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, will travel to Istanbul on Monday.

Jalili is set to meet senior Turkish officials including President Abdullah Gul.

There are rumors that while in Istanbul Jalili will meet European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton who represent the major powers in nuclear talks with Iran.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1698068>

- **IAEA resolution casts doubt on benefit of NPT: Iran**

TEHRAN, Sept. 16 (MNA) -- Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani has said that the most recent resolution issued against Iran by the International Atomic Energy Agency raises doubt about the benefit of being a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Larijani made the remarks in a speech during an open session of the Majlis on Sunday in reference to the resolution that the 35-member IAEA Board of Governors adopted in Vienna on Thursday, which condemned Iran’s refusal to meet international demands to curb uranium enrichment and its alleged failure to allay international concerns about its nuclear program.

The Iranian parliament speaker said, “The recent resolution by the Board of Governors raises this question for the public: What is the benefit of the NPT and membership in the International Atomic Energy Agency for countries?”

“If Iran had not been committed to the NPT, would Western countries have taken other measures?”

He stated that IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano has a responsibility to encourage the world’s countries to join the NPT, adding, “Will Mr. Amano be able to succeed in his job through such high-handed decision-making?”

“If the path taken by the West and the United States is the adoption of resolutions and sanctions against Iran, then why are they seeking negotiations between Iran and Western countries? However, these countries must be aware that the result of the negotiations is predetermined with the adoption of such an attitude,” Larijani noted.

He also said, “The main text of the resolution was definitely drafted by a few Western countries. It seems that certain

tyrannical countries made their intention to make excessive demands at the 5+1 talks more public with (their) insistence on the adoption of the resolution.”

The latest round of high-level talks between Iran and the 5+1 group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany) over the country’s nuclear program was held in Moscow on June 18 and 19.

After the Moscow talks, both sides agreed to hold expert talks, the most recent round of which was held in Istanbul on July 24.

No decision has yet been made on the next round of negotiations.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1697704>

- **'Iran may quit NPT if it is attacked'**

TEHRAN, Sept. 16 (MNA) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps said on Sunday that he thinks Iran will quit the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty if the country’s nuclear facilities come under attack.

"In case of an attack, Iran's obligations will change. My assessment is that Iran may leave the NPT," Mohammad Ali Jafari said.

However, the major general said it would not mean that Iran will develop nuclear weapons "because we have a religious decree from the Supreme Leader" against atomic weapons.

The IRGC chief also said in the case of an attack by Israel, Iran would close the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, and would target U.S. bases in the Middle East.

"This is a declared policy by Iran that if war occurs in the region and the Islamic Republic is involved, it is natural that the Strait of Hormuz as well as the energy (market) will face difficulties," Jafari told a press conference.

He also said he does not think Israel would attack Iran "without U.S. permission."

However, the senior general added, "Our response to Israel is clear. I do not think that anything will remain of Israel

considering the small size (of Israel) and vulnerabilities of this regime."

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1697621>

- **Iran keen to export technical and engineering services to Oman**

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has expressed Tehran's readiness to export technical and engineering services to Oman and transfer the Islamic Republic's capabilities and experiences to the Persian Gulf kingdom.



Salehi made the remarks during a meeting with Omani Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Masoud bin Ali al-Sunaidy on the second day of the 14th Tehran-Muscat Joint Economic Commission in Tehran on Sunday.

At the meeting, Salehi called for expansion of relations with Oman in economic, political, and cultural sectors, and voiced Iran's readiness to transfer capabilities, achievements, and experiences in various scientific, technological, industrial and economic fields.

“We hope that Iran and Oman could boost commerce, trade, and tourism ties even further thanks to the launch of air and maritime routes between the two countries,” Salehi said.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Oman have recently launched direct daily flights between their capitals.

Sunaidy, for his part, expressed hope for expansion of interactions, particularly in the economic and commercial fields.

The Omani minister, who is accompanied by a high-ranking trade and commercial delegation, is scheduled to meet with a number of other Iranian officials on the sidelines of the meeting.

The 14th Tehran-Muscat Joint Economic Commission kicked off in Tehran on September 15 and will run until

September 17. The 13th Tehran-Muscat Joint Economic Commission was held in Muscat in 2010.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/09/16/261999/iran-keen-to-export-technology-to-oman/>

- **Real oil price should be above \$150: Iran minister**

Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi says the real price for crude oil should be over USD 150 per barrel, noting the current prices stand “very low.”

The minister told ISNA on Sunday that the oil prices could potentially rise again. “During the winter, the oil prices always climb. This year too, it would be natural to see the oil prices rise.”

Qasemi said one reason behind the hike in oil prices was a 17-percent decline in the output from North Sea due to technical glitches.

The price of oil has hit a four-month high due to the illegal oil bans against Iran and in the wake of the US Federal Reserve’s announcement of new economic stimulus plan and the ensuing

demand for oil. It is as well due to the spread of unrest in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Brent crude prices have hit USD 118 per barrel while Iran's crude sells at USD 113 per barrel.

Last Wednesday, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said the demand for Iranian crude has increased despite sanctions imposed against the country's oil exports by the European Union (EU) and US.

The IEA reported that imports of Iranian oil increased from an estimated 930,000 barrels a day in July to 1.1 million barrels per day in August.

At the beginning of 2012, the US and the EU approved new sanctions against Iran's oil and financial sectors. The embargoes aim to prevent other countries from purchasing the Iranian oil or transacting with the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

Washington and the EU have declared that the bans are meant to force Iran to abandon its nuclear energy program,

which they claim to include a military component.

Iran has vehemently refuted the allegation, arguing that as a committed signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is entitled to use the nuclear technology for peaceful objectives.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/09/16/261958/oil-prices-should-be-above-150/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Official: 30 years after camp massacre, justice still elusive**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- On the 30th anniversary of the massacre of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon's Sabra and Shatila camp, a Palestinian official stressed that no one has been brought to justice.

"Those responsible for slaughtering thousands have not been punished and Palestinian refugees continue to be denied their homeland," PLO official Saeb Erekat said in a statement Sunday.

He urged the international community to ensure that the rights of Palestinian refugees to "return, restitution and compensation" are respected.

He continued: "In 1982, foreign reporters wrote: 'How many Sabras and how many Shatilas will be needed for the world to put an end to this injustice?' Since 1982, many Sabras and Shatilas have occurred and they all have the same components: blood and impunity."

The massacre took place after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, when Christian Phalangist militias entered the Beirut camp under Israeli military watch to wreak retribution for the alleged assassination of their leader Bachir Gemayel.

Over three days, Palestinian refugees were killed in droves. At the time, the number of dead was estimated at 700, but eyewitness British reporter Robert Fisk says the number is closer to 1,700.

The Palestinian Red Crescent estimates that 3,000 civilians were killed.

Israeli soldiers in control of the perimeter of the camps did not stop the slaughter,

firing flares overhead at night to aid the Phalangist gunmen.

An Israeli investigation found then defense minister Ariel Sharon guilty of failing to prevent the deaths of innocent civilians. He was demoted but later became Israeli prime minister.

The Phalangist leadership never apologized for their involvement in the massacre, one of the bloodiest events in Lebanon's 15-year civil war which claimed 150,000 lives.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=520717>

- **PA official: Man injured after settlers raid Nablus village**



NABLUS (Ma'an) -- A man was attacked by a group of settlers on Saturday in the Nablus village of Qusra, a PA official said.

Ghassan Douglas, who monitors settlement activity in the northern West Bank, told Ma'an that Akram Tayseer Quda, 35, was moderately injured when dozens of settlers from Esh Kodesh outpost raided the village.

He was taken to a Nablus hospital for treatment.

Last Sunday around 30 settlers from the same outpost raided the village, uprooting olive trees and destroying water wells, before injuring 15 villagers.

Qusra lies near several settlements and outposts and is the site of regular assaults by their residents.

Issam Kamal Odeh, 33, died from Israeli army fire in September 2011 after soldiers came to the village after a settler raid.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=520425>

- **Palestinian trade unions divided over strike action**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Palestinian trade unions are divided over whether to continue strike action in protest against rising living costs, unionists said Sunday.

Transport union leader Nasser Younis told Ma'an that strike action was not a goal in itself but a means to pressure the Palestinian Authority to listen to their demands.

Following a meeting with the PA Minister of Transport Ali Zeidan, Younis said that the union will suspend all strike action until negotiations come to an end, quashing rumors that strikes were planned over the next few days.



Meanwhile, head of the government employees union Bassam Zakarneh said

Sunday that employees will undertake strike action over the coming week.

On Tuesday, all workers will leave their offices at 2 p.m. and on Thursday employees will stop working at 1 p.m.

A meeting will be held on September 23 to discuss further potential strike action, Zakarneh said.

The union of Palestinian teachers also announced that classes in West Bank schools will be suspended after the third lesson on Monday.

"The union will start talks with the government to reach an agreement this week," Muhammad Suwwan, secretary-general of the federation of teachers, said.

The teachers union has been demanding change over several core issues, such as salary increases and the reduction of prices on basic commodities.

Frustrated by rising prices and high levels of unemployment, Palestinians took to the streets last week to protest the dire economic outlook.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=520696>

- **Hamis delegation meets Sudan president in Cairo**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- A delegation from Hamas met with the President of Sudan Omar al-Bashir in Cairo on Sunday night, a party official said.

Mousa Abu Marzouq, deputy head of Hamas politburo, wrote on his official Facebook account that the officials discussed ending the blockade on the Gaza Strip, the Rafah crossing with Egypt, and electricity supply.

Abu Marzouq and the other delegates, who were not identified, also discussed the stalled reconciliation process with party rivals Fatah.



Hamas' top officials -- Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh and Hamas chief-in-exile Khaled Mashaal -- are in Cairo to meet with Egyptian President Muhammad Mursi this week.

While the Sudanese president has faced an international arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court since 2009, both Fatah and Hamas leaders have made trips to Khartoum to meet the defiant leader.

Many in the Arab world agree with the president that he faces a politicized, Western double standard over the war crimes indictment.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=520819>

- **Rest of August Salary in Banks on Monday, says Ministry of Finance**

RAMALLAH, September 16, 2012 (Wafa) – Ministry of Finance announced Sunday that the rest of August salaries for over 170,000 public employees will be deposited in the banks on Monday.

However, it said those who get more than 4500 Israeli shekels (app. \$1100), will get the rest of their salary minus 10%-12%.

Minister of Finance Nabil Qassis stressed that the amount deducted from the rest of employees' salary is considered a debt on treasury and will be paid later.

The Palestinian Authority has been facing the most critical financial crisis in its history, forcing the treasury to either be very late in paying salaries or dividing them into two payments.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20687>

- **Abbas Condemns Film Insulting Prophet Mohammed**

RAMALLAH, September 16, 2012 (Wafa) – President Mahmoud Abbas, during a meeting with the Palestinian leadership at the presidential headquarters in Ramallah on Saturday, condemned the film insulting Prophet Mohammed.

Abbas said that this insult cannot be accepted religiously, humanly and morally or be tolerated as it is a blatant attack

against all the beliefs and feelings of more than one billion Muslims in the world.

He added that denigrating of prophets, religions, beliefs and religious symbols cannot be, in any way, part of freedom of speech, therefore, such acts that would further inflame extremism and hatred among followers of religions, as well as among civilizations and peoples, must be stopped.

Abbas called not to give extremists a chance to fish in troubled waters, as well as called not be drawn into responses that don't serve Arab and Islamic noble endeavors for coexistence by promoting dialogue between religions and worldwide peoples.

The film 'Innocence of Muslims' that mocks and insults Prophet Muhammad was produced in the United States.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20685>

- **Labor slams Netanyahu over August inflation data**

Yacimovich says picture will look even worse when 1% VAT increase is taken into account; inflation rises by more than 1%.

Labor party chairwoman Shelly Yacimovich
Photo: Marc Israel Sellem

Labor leader Shelly Yacimovich slammed the Netanyahu government over the August inflation figures Sunday, saying that the picture will look even worse in one month when the 1 percent Value Added Tax increase is taken into account.

Inflation rose by more than 1% in August to 106.2 points, the Central Bureau of Statistics reported on the weekend. The Consumer Price Index has risen by 2.1% in the year to date.

The largest price increases were for cigarettes (14.2%), fresh produce (7.9%), culture and entertainment (2%), transport (1.8%), housing (1.1%), food (0.9%) and furniture (0.6%). On the other hand, the price of clothing and footwear decreased by 6%, and communications devices fell by 1.1%.



Yacimovich argued that these figures and last week's State Comptroller's Report demonstrate Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's "archaic economic policy, which has caused the loss of control over the price of housing, health, gasoline, pasta, cheese, fruit and vegetables."

She added that only Netanyahu is capable of creating a situation in which on one hand there is an economic slowdown and shrinkage in purchasing power, while on the other hand monthly inflation breaks a 17-year record.

State Comptroller Yosef Shapira on Wednesday slammed the ministries of: Finance; Energy and Water; Industry, Trade and Labor; and Agriculture, for failing to control skyrocketing food and dairy prices during the years 2005-2011.

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=285263>

- **'Israel-US rift undesirable but it's not first time'**

Deputy PM says Washington-US alliance transcends lines of parties and establishments.

Clashes between Israel and the United States are not desirable, but the two allies have dealt with similar disagreements before, Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor said Sunday morning in relation to the Iranian threat.

In an interview with Israel Radio, the Intelligence Agencies Minister said that the alliance between Washington and Jerusalem crosses the lines of parties and establishments, and bears political, security and economic significance.

Meridor added that Israel has succeeded in bringing the issue of Iran's nuclear program to international awareness, and the sanctions have caused Tehran to fear the world's reaction to its nuclear program.

However, Meridor said, Iran has not halted its nuclear program and continues to enrich uranium. "It is important that Iran understand that the world is serious

and determined to stop it from acquiring a nuclear bomb."

On Thursday, Meridor spoke out against setting red lines for Iran, in remarks that contrasted with those recently asserted by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

"I don't want to set red lines or deadlines for myself," he told Army Radio, when asked how much time remained before force against Iran should be used.

Meridor urged the international community to intensify sanctions against Tehran, "so it understands that the price it is paying is mounting and that the only way to be rid of it is to stop the (nuclear) race, to arrive at an agreement, or an international understanding, that it is calling it quits."

"You always consider other options, for when everything else is exhausted. And I think that, for now, we have to continue with the pressure," he added.

Without mentioning names, Meridor lamented what he called "the excessive chit-chat of recent months" in Israel about how and whether to tackle its arch-foe.

<http://www.ipost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=285258>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

• **Armed Forces chief of staff visits Saudi Arabia**

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Sidqy Sobhy arrived for his first visit to Saudi Arabia Sunday to hold talks with his Saudi counterpart and other officials.



Sobhy will oversee the main phase of Egyptian-Saudi naval exercises, in which warships, missile boats, helicopters and naval commandos will take part.

The training began a few days ago and included meetings regarding coordination as well as lectures on submarines,

communications and the effects of weather on naval operations.

Hussein al-Kabil, the Saudi military chief of staff, welcomed the Egyptian forces taking part in the training, confirming the importance of exchanging tactical experience and training, command and control techniques, and cooperation to carry out both emergency operations and military plans.

“Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the pillars of the Arab world and shoulder the responsibility of safeguarding the Red Sea, because we have the longest coasts on the sea and have the troops,” Kabil said. “Threats to the Red Sea do not only affect the two countries but also affect the world, as the Red Sea is an important waterway for international community.”

The Egyptian presidential office also denied reports from the Qatar-based satellite channel Al Jazeera that a presidential decree had dismissed Sobhy from his office.

Sobhy was appointed after former Chief of Staff Sami Anan was sent to retirement on 12 August, as part of a cascade of

decisions that sacked Egypt’s top military leaders who took over after former President Hosni Mubarak was ousted from office.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/armed-forces-chief-staff-visits-saudi-arabia>

- **Activists launch signature campaign to disband Constituent Assembly**

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Protesters taking part in protest in front of headquarter of Shoura Council, Cairo, 2 September 2012, to refuse the current formation of Constituent Assembly, and demand President Mohamed Morsy to reassemble it.

Hazem Abdel Hamid

Some 500 activists on Sunday launched a campaign to collect 1 million signatures calling for the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, which they say does not adequately represent all segments of Egyptian society.

The assembly, which comprises 100 members and has a strong Islamist representation, was appointed by the People’s Assembly, which was disbanded

in June by a court order which said its elections were unconstitutional.

The courts are currently considering lawsuits challenging the validity of the Constituent Assembly, charging that it was illegal for the People's Assembly to appoint its own members to the constitution-writing body.



“We want a constitution that expresses the ambitions of the Egyptian people and the revolution,” said Mohamed al-Gilany, coordinator of the signature campaign, called A Million Signatures to Refuse the Constituent Assembly. He pointed out that President Mohamed Morsy had promised to reformulate the Constituent Assembly during his presidential campaign.

In the event the assembly is dissolved, the president is legally obligated to form a

new body that represents the entire spectrum of Egyptian society, according to the supplement to Constitutional Declaration issued in June.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/activists-launch-signature-campaign-disband-constituent-assembly>

- **A division of labor: Ultras wage parallel battles to shape Egypt's future**

Soccer fans of arch rival Cairo soccer clubs Al Zamalek SC, Al Ahly SC represent two sides of same coin in forefront of struggle for future of Egypt.

Militant soccer fans of arch rival Cairo soccer clubs Al Zamalek SC and Al Ahly SC represent two sides of the same coin in the forefront of a struggle for the future of Egypt.

Militants of the Ultras White Knights (UWK), the Zamalek support group, are locked near the US embassy in Cairo into vicious street battles with police and security forces, one of a string of confrontations since last year's toppling of president Hosni Mubarak. In the ultimate analysis, their struggle aims to force

reform of Egyptian law enforcement, the country's most despised institution, which is widely seen as the brutal enforcers of Mr. Mubarak's repressive regime, even if those on the battlefield often express their goal in simpler terms of revenge and settling scores.

On the other hand, Al Ahly militants, who together with UWK played a key role in ousting Mr. Mubarak as well as in subsequent street battles that have left scores dead and thousands wounded, have turned their ire on the management of their club in an effort to combat corruption in Egyptian soccer.

Neither battle is easy but achieving victory in the struggle in which UWK has taken the lead is likely to prove far more difficult than turning soccer into a model for the fight against corruption in Egypt and removing the remnants of the Mubarak era.

In a conciliatory move as violence raged around the US embassy in Cairo that no longer had anything to do with the bigoted, fringe US video clip that sparked mass protests across the Muslim world and everything with deep-seated ultras'

animosity towards law enforcement, Ultras Ahlawy, the Al Ahly militants, said they were satisfied with progress in a trial of 74 people, including nine security officials, accused of responsibility for the death in February of 74 of their colleagues in a politically loaded soccer brawl in Port Said.

The ultras' gesture in a statement late Thursday came days after they had stormed their club's training ground as well as the offices of the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) to protest the slow progress of the trial and the willingness of the club's management to acquiesce in the lifting of a seven-month old suspension of soccer imposed in the wake of the Port Said incident before justice for the dead had been achieved and that involved banning the fans from attending matches.

The statement was in stark contrast to repeated assertions by the ultras that the "real culprits" of Port Sid, the leadership of the military and the police and security forces, were not being held accountable for the worst incident in Egyptian sport history. The brawl, in which police did little to prevent the 74 deaths, is widely

believed to have been a failed attempt by the military and the police to teach the ultras, emboldened by the overthrow of Mr. Mubarak, a lesson. It is also widely seen as an effort to cut the ultras, one of Egypt's largest, most organized civic groups, down to size.

"Seven months have passed since the death of our dearest friends. Regardless of the postponement of trial proceedings to Sunday, [the court] has gone a long way towards realizing justice, which will mollify martyrs' grieving families," Ultras Ahlawy said on their Facebook page, which has some 577,000 followers.

They attacked Al Ahly's management for not doing enough to "safeguard the rights of the martyrs," singling out club chairman Hassan Hamdy. Mr. Hamdy, who doubled as head of advertising of Al Ahram, the flagship of Egypt's state-run media, has long been seen as a corrupt Mubarak crony. The ultras hold him responsible for a decision by the Switzerland-based Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS) to overturn a ban imposed by the EFA on Al Masry SC for the role its fans played in the deaths of the Al Ahly militants. CAS issued its ruling

after the EFA failed to attend a court hearing.

Fan fury was further fanned by Mr. Hamdy's endorsement of world soccer body FIFA executive committee member Hani Abou-Reida, a former member of Mr. Mubarak's National Democratic Party, for the EFA presidency. "We demand the resignation of Hassan Hamdy's corrupt board, which neglected the rights of the martyrs. Hamdy endorsed Abou-Reida merely to serve his own interests," the ultras said.

Ousting Mr. Hamdy and defeating Mr. Abou-Reida in the upcoming EFA election is likely to prove a walk through the woods in comparison to reforming the police and security forces with whom the ultras have been locked into battle in stadiums and on streets since their emergence in 2007 as the most militant force confronting the Mubarak regime.

Reforming the authoritarian police and security forces goes far beyond simply removing Mubarak era figures from their posts. It involves a top-to-bottom radical institutional change and introducing a new organizational culture. It means grooming

a community-oriented corps that is depoliticized, focused on protecting civilians and combating domestic violence rather than repressing opposition groups and trained in the respect of human rights and conducting real investigations instead of extracting forced confessions. It also means downsizing the corps which outnumber the military by a ratio of almost 2:1 as well as the bloated interior ministry that oversees it and rewriting laws that have turned the police and security forces into political executors.

All of that is easier said and done. But without it, taking the sting out of repeated, violent confrontations between the highly politicized, street battle-hardened ultras and the police and security forces in a bid to keep Egypt on a steady course of political transformation and economic recovery is likely to prove difficult at best, if not impossible.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54396>

- **‘Hardliners’ Spring’: From Tunisia to Egypt, Salafists stretch their wings**

Violence across Arab world could reflect growing strength of Salafist groups that

benefit from widening freedom in Arab Spring countries.

Violent protests across the Arab world triggered by a film insulting Islam could reflect the growing strength of Salafist groups that benefit from a widening freedom in Arab Spring countries, analysts say.

The Salafists, a group of Sunni Muslims who promote a strict lifestyle based on the traditions of early "pious ancestors", have made a surprising surge in their influence, mainly in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.

Although the majority of the Salafists are not violent, some groups now tend to believe in using force.

They have the "desire to create a balance of power in the street using the excuse of fighting the 'violations of the sacred'," said Jean-Pierre Filiu, a lecturer at Paris' Science Po university.

Religious television channels broadcasting from Saudi Arabia, the homeland of Salafism, are seen as the force behind augmenting the numbers of Salafists

across the Arab World over the past 20 years.

But although they have been kept under tight control in many Arab countries, some states have encouraged them in secret to "divide Islamists" and weaken mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, according to Basheer Nafi, senior researcher at Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies.

Other regimes, such as Syria, use the Salafist "scarecrow" and exaggerate their influence among armed groups as propaganda against popular uprisings demanding regime change in entrenched autocracies.

Unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, a well-structured organisation that is very political, the Salafists assemble in small groups around influential clerics and are focused on defending the beliefs, according to experts.

"Their political discourse remains in a state of infancy, and socio-religious reforms remain their main priority," according to Stephane Lacroix, the author of "Awakening Islam: The Politics of

Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia."

Filiu argued that the term Salafists is widely used to "distinguish Islamists backed by Saudi Arabia from the Muslim Brotherhood," adding that Qatar, which played a pivotal role in supporting Arab uprisings "is now more engaged with the Muslim Brotherhood."

Salafists are becoming more present in Arab countries where dictators who ruled with an iron fist have been removed by unprecedented uprisings.

In Libya, Salafists dared to destroy Muslim shrines, which they consider in violation of Islamic teachings, after strongman Moamer Kadhafi was toppled and killed last year.

Many of them have organised themselves in armed groups.



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But a Salafist armed group named Ansar al-Sharia Brigade denied this week that it was involved in an attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, which killed four, including the American ambassador.

The attack took place as protesters targeted the US mission, angered by a film titled the "Innocence of Muslims," excerpts of which were posted online, sending thousands across Muslim countries into the streets in protest.

In Tunisia, four protesters were killed and 49 injured as police clashed Friday with protesters, who appeared to be Salafists, attacked the US embassy.

Salafists were banned under the regime of ousted Tunisia president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who fled the country in January last year, bowing to the first uprising that triggered the Arab Spring wave of protest.

They are now divided into two branches: preachers who reject violence, and a jihadist line responsible for recent attacks on cultural events deemed in violation of Islam.

"A majority of Arab Salafists continue to reject meddling in politics" said Filiu, adding that they remain "ready to move violently" against an act they deem to be in violation of Islamic teaching.

And, they are more likely to indulge in excessive acts "in countries where they are not assimilated in politics," such as Libya and Tunisia, according to Lacroix.

But in Egypt where the Salafist Al-Nour party is now deeply involved in politics, the group has opted to "moderate its discourse," he added.

Salafists made a spectacular burst onto the political scene in Egypt, grabbing 25 percent of parliament seats in the first legislatures after the ouster of president Hosni Mubarak. They came second to the Muslim Brotherhood.

According to Nafi, the phenomenon will not last.

"The rise of the Salafists is a transitional phenomenon. Freedom and democracy will push them back to their real size," he said.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54393>

- **Libya 'arrests 50 people' over deaths at US consulate**

Parliament chief announces arrests of some 50 people over killing of US ambassador Chris Stevens in attack he says was planned by foreigners.

Libya's parliament chief announced in an interview with CBS News on Sunday the arrests of some 50 people over the killing of US ambassador Chris Stevens in an attack he said was planned by foreigners.

US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said, meanwhile, the American military has no major plans to bolster its forces in the Middle East despite a week of violent protests targeting diplomatic outposts, including at the US consulate in Libya's

eastern city of Benghazi in which Stevens died.

"The number reached about 50," Mohammed al-Megaryef, president of the Libyan National Congress, told CBS.

Stevens and three other Americans were killed on Tuesday when suspected Islamic militants fired on the US consulate in Benghazi with rocket-propelled grenades and set it ablaze.

Megaryef said "a few" of those who joined in the attack were foreigners, who had entered Libya "from different directions, some of them definitely from Mali and Algeria."

"The others are affiliates and maybe sympathisers," he added.

Megaryef said the government has learned the attack was not the result of a spontaneous outburst of anger over a US-made anti-Islam movie which has triggered sometimes deadly protests in the Arab and Muslim world.

"It was planned, definitely, it was planned by foreigners, by people who entered the

country a few months ago. And they were planning this criminal act since their arrival," he told CBS.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has said in a statement the attack was in revenge for the killing of the terror network's deputy leader Sheikh Abu Yahya al-Libi in a drone strike in June, and called for more attacks on US targets.

US officials have already deployed counter-terrorism Marine units to Libya and Yemen and stationed two destroyers off the North African coast.

Panetta told reporters before arriving in Tokyo on an Asian tour that with a substantial force already deployed in the region and now boosted by the extra Marine units, the military has the ability to respond as necessary to protect American diplomats.

"We do have a major presence in the region," he said.

"Having said that we've enhanced that with FAST (Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team) teams and others so that if they are

requested, they can respond more quickly."

Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Karti on Saturday flatly rejected a US request to send special forces to protect the Khartoum embassy, the official SUNA news agency said, quoting his office.

Hours later, US officials announced Washington would evacuate all non-essential staff and family members from Sudan and Tunisia, and warned US citizens against travel to the two countries.

Despite Tehran's hostility to Washington and its own condemnation of the movie, Iran's Revolutionary Guards commander General Mohammad Ali Jafari said the killing of Stevens was unjustified.

"Definitely this did not warrant killing," Jafari told a news conference in Tehran. He said that "due to their (protesters') anger, this incident happened."

In cities across the Muslim world protesters have since vented their fury at the "Innocence of Muslims" -- an amateur film produced in the United States -- by targeting symbols of US influence ranging

from embassies and schools to fast food chains.

Although the US government itself has condemned the film, protests erupted again on Sunday, with hundreds of students pouring into the streets of Kabul shouting anti-American slogans, as the Bangladesh government condemned the film as "reprehensible" and New Delhi said it was "offensive."

Belgian police said they detained 230 people in the northern city of Antwerp after clashes at a demonstration against an the film.

With Muslim anger boiling, AQAP on Saturday issued a call for more violence against US diplomatic missions in the Middle East and Africa, and urged attacks on American interests in the West, the SITE Intelligence Group said.

AQAP, Al-Qaeda's Yemeni offshoot, did not claim direct responsibility for the deadly attack in Benghazi.

But it said the killing of Libi in a June drone strike in Pakistan "increased the enthusiasm and determination of the sons

of (Libyan independence hero) Omar al-Mukhtar to take revenge upon those who attack our Prophet," according to SITE.

In Afghanistan, heavily armed Taliban fighters on Friday stormed a strongly fortified air base in Helmand province where Britain's Prince Harry is deployed, killing two US Marines in an assault the militia said was to avenge the anti-Islam film.

A NATO spokesman on Sunday revealed that six US fighter jets and three refuelling stations were destroyed and six aircraft hangars damaged in the attack.

Lieutenant Colonel Hagen Messer conceded that the scale of damage, carried out when more than a dozen attackers in US Army uniforms and armed with guns, rockets and suicide vests stormed the airfield, was unprecedented.

A total of 17 people have died in violence linked to the film, including the four Americans killed in Benghazi, 11 protesters who died as police battled to defend US missions from mobs in Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen, and the two US soldiers in Afghanistan.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54395>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• **Future bloc MPs slam Iran’s Guards remarks over presence in Lebanon**

Future bloc MP Amine Wehbe said on Monday that the remarks of the Commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Brigadier General Mohammad Ali Jafari regarding the presence of members of his forces in Lebanon and Syria would give Israel the pretext to strike Lebanon.

“I think that this is a very dangerous confession, since it puts Lebanon under Israeli [threat], and gives [it] the pretext that Iran is close by, and this is a pretext to strike Lebanon,” Wehbe told Free Lebanon radio station.

“This is a direct violation of Lebanon’s sovereignty and we should reject this interference,” he added.

Meanwhile, Future bloc MP Jamal al-Jarrah told Future TV that Jafari’s remarks “confirmed what is already [known]. We are aware that those who lead Hezbollah’s

military wing and oversee it are the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.”

“What is the point of national dialogue [which tackles the issue of Lebanon’s defense strategy and illegal arms issues], if [Iran’s] Revolutionary Guards are the decision makers?” he inquired.

On Sunday, The Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander said that members of his elite special operations unit, the Quds Force, are present in Syria and Lebanon but only to provide "counsel."

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

• **Charbel: All remaining abducted Shiite pilgrims should be released ‘at once’**

Interior Minister Marwan Charbel said on Monday that he insisted on the Turkish authorities to mediate for the release of the 10 abducted Shiite pilgrims in Syria “all at once.”

“I have insisted that the Turkish authorities should [mediate the] release of the 10 Lebanese abductees all at once,”

Charbel told Voice of Lebanon (100.5) radio station.

Meanwhile, Al-Jumhuriya newspaper reported on Monday that security sources said that recent negotiations would conclude in the imminent release of “at least” three of the abductees.

In May, 11 Shiite pilgrims were kidnapped in Syria while on their way to Lebanon from Iran.

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

One of the pilgrims, Hussein Ali Omar, was released late August.

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

- **Miqati’s office denies premier’s Tripoli residence targeted by gunfire**

Prime Minister Najib Miqati’s press office on Sunday denied media reports that gunfire targeted his residence in Tripoli.

“The protest in which protesters shot gunfire took place far from the premier’s residence,” the statement issued by Miqati’s office read.

However, the statement did not specify the nature or purpose of the protest.

Meanwhile, the National News Agency reported that several mobile protests kicked off in Tripoli in support of the Syrian uprising.

Lebanon's political scene is split between supporters of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, led by Hezbollah, and the Western-backed March 14 alliance.

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

6. SYRIA

- **Iran Guards present in Syria, Lebanon to counsel not to fight**

Commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards says members of Quds Force are present in Syria, Lebanon but only to provide 'counsel'.



TEHRAN - The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards said Sunday members of his elite special operations unit, the Quds Force, are present in Syria and Lebanon but only to provide "counsel."

"A number of Quds Force members are present in Syria and Lebanon... we provide (these countries) with counsel and advice, and transfer experience to them," Guards commander Brigadier General Mohammad Ali Jafari told a rare press conference.

"But it does not mean that we have a military presence there," he said.

This is the first time the Guards publicly acknowledge the presence of Quds members in Syria.

Several Western and Arab countries accuse Iran of giving military aid to the regime of its main ally in the region, President Bashar al-Assad, helping it in Syria's bloody conflict.

Iran is "proud of defending Syria, a member of the (anti-Israeli) resistance," Jafari said, "by providing them with experience while other countries are not shy of supporting terrorist groups," he added using Iran's official term for the Syrian opposition.

Iran accuses Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar of arming the opposition in Syria, in collusion with the United States and Israel, to overthrow Assad.

The Quds Force is a special unit responsible for all extra territorial operations, official or clandestine, of the Guards.

Western analysts say the unit, with thousands of members, is particularly active in the Middle East.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54384>

- **Syria violence: Fresh clashes rage in two main cities**

Latest violence comes as new school term starts in Syria, where UN says over 2,000 schools have been damaged or destroyed.

DAMASCUS - Syrian troops on Sunday fought rebel fighters in the country's two main cities Damascus and Aleppo, as Iran acknowledged for the first time it has elite forces present in Syria and Lebanon as "counsellors."

The latest violence comes as the new school term started on Sunday in Syria, where the UN says over 2,000 schools have been damaged or destroyed and hundreds more are being used as shelters.

And Pope Benedict XVI called in Lebanon on Sunday for peace in Syria and urged Arab countries to propose workable solutions to the conflict, which has killed more than 27,000 people.

Violence overnight and early Sunday killed another 15 people, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The victims included four men killed as the army pounded the rebel southern Damascus suburb of Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, and at least four people were killed when a blast targeted a bus in the southern province of Daraa, the Observatory said.

Fighting erupted at dawn in the northeast suburb of Harasta, which was rocked by loud explosions, as blasts also rattled the northern suburb of Douma, said the Britain-based watchdog, which added that smoke billowed across both districts.

A child and a media activist meanwhile killed overnight in Aleppo, where the army and rebels have fought fierce battles since July to control Syria's second city and commercial hub.

The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards told a news conference in Tehran on Sunday that members of his elite special operations unit, the Quds Force, are present in Syria and Lebanon but insisted they were only there to provide "counsel."

"A number of Quds Force members are present in Syria and Lebanon... we provide (these countries) with counsel and advice, and transfer experience to them," Guards commander Brigadier General Mohammad Ali Jafari said.

"But it does not mean that we have a military presence there," he added.

Several Western and Arab countries accuse Iran of giving military aid to President Bashar al-Assad's regime as the Syria conflict becomes increasingly bloody.

The latest violence comes after Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN-Arab League envoy to Syria, warned after meeting President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus on Saturday that the conflict threatens both the region and the world at large.

"The crisis is dangerous and getting worse, and it is a threat to the Syrian people, the region and the world," said the newly appointed Brahimi, who took over as envoy earlier this month from former UN chief Kofi Annan.

The 78-year-old veteran Algerian troubleshooter, on his first Damascus visit since replacing Annan who quit after a hard-sought peace deal he brokered became a dead letter, stressed that "the solution can only come from the Syrian people."

He said he currently had "no plan" to tackle the crisis, but a strategy will be "set... after listening to all internal, regional and international parties."

Assad, quoted by state television, said dialogue between Syrians held the key to a solution and called on foreign countries to stop supplying arms to his foes.

"The success of political action is dependent on putting pressure on the countries that finance and train the terrorists, and which bring weapons into Syria, until they stop doing so," Assad said.

As fighting raged in Damascus and Aleppo, Pope Benedict XVI on Sunday celebrated mass in neighbouring Lebanon, praying that leaders in the Middle East work toward peace and reconciliation.

"In a world where violence constantly leaves behind its grim trail of death and destruction, to serve justice and peace is urgently necessary," Benedict said to an estimated 350,000 faithful at open-air mass in Beirut.

"May God grant to your country, to Syria and to the Middle East the gift of peaceful hearts, the silencing of weapons and the cessation of all violence," the pope said.

He also appealed to Arab countries that, "as brothers, they might propose workable solutions respecting the dignity, the rights and the religion of every human person."

Syrian's violence has spilled over into Lebanon where supporters and opponents of the Damascus regime have squared off in often deadly clashes over the past months.

On Saturday the 85-year-old pontiff had words of praise for young Syrians, saying: "I want to tell you how much I admire your courage."

Pupils headed back to schools on Sunday across Damascus, where most

establishments reopened for a new term, which a UNICEF spokeswoman has described as one of "immense challenge."

"For children, being back at school is one of the most effective ways of giving them a sense of stability, hope and normality," said UNICEF's Marixie Mercado.

"It really is a hugely important way of enabling children who have gone through a nightmare to see that they do have a future."

At least 115 people, most of the civilians, were killed across Syrian on Saturday, according to the Observatory, which gathers its information from a network of activists, medical workers and other sources on the ground.

The death toll from 18 months into the Syrian conflict has risen to more than 27,000 people, according to the Observatory, which relies on activist accounts from the ground. The United Nations puts the toll at 20,000.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54387>

- **Peace envoy Brahimi to brief Arab League chief on Syria trip**

The international peace envoy for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, was to hold talks in Cairo on Monday with Arab League chief Nabil al-Arabi following his trip to Damascus, the organization said on Monday.

"Brahimi will brief Arabi on his visit to Syria and his meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and members of the opposition there," an Arab League official said.

The UN-Arab League envoy and Arabi will discuss "the Arab and international moves required to resolve the current crisis in Syria," the official said.

The veteran Algerian diplomat, who left Damascus on Sunday, warned after a meeting with Assad that the worsening conflict in Syria threatens both the region and the world at large.

"The crisis is dangerous and getting worse, and it is a threat to the Syrian people, the region and the world," said Brahimi, who replaced Kofi Annan following the failure of the former UN chief's six-point peace plan.

According to the Iranian Fars news agency, Brahimi is also expected to attend part of a meeting of foreign ministers of a Syria "contact group" in Cairo. The group includes Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey.

The meetings comes as the head of a UN commission tasked with probing abuses in Syria said that serious human rights violations have soared in recent weeks.

"Gross violations of human rights have grown in number, in pace and in scale," Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, a Brazilian who heads the United Nations' Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria, told diplomats gathered in Geneva.

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

- **Iran: Syria 'contact group' to meet in Cairo**

The foreign ministers of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey are to hold their first high-level meeting on the Syria conflict on Monday in Cairo, Iran's official news agency IRNA reported.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi was also to speak with Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi in a separate bilateral meeting during his visit to Cairo, it added.

The Fars news agency in an unsourced and unconfirmed report said the UN-Arab League peace envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, would attend part of the foreign ministers' meeting, whose ultimate goal is to end the violence in Syria.

The gathering of the "contact group" on Syria – an initiative by Morsi – follows preparatory talks a week ago in the Egyptian capital by lower-ranking officials from the four countries' foreign ministries.

Salehi told the ISNA news agency before leaving Tehran on Monday that Iran would be setting out its "clear" position on its ally Syria.

"We are very hopeful given that four important countries of the region are gathered to discuss one of the sensitive issues of the region," he was quoted as saying.

The very fact the meeting was being held was "a positive step," he said, "and we

hope that its results will correspond to the interests of all the people of the region, and to peace and stability."

Salehi reaffirmed that Iran was looking to expand the group to include allies Iraq and Venezuela.

As it stands, Iran is the odd member out in the regional quartet.

It staunchly supports Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, in contrast with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey which are all calling for his ouster.

On Sunday, its Revolutionary Guards admitted that members of its elite Quds Force were present in Syria, but the Guards chief affirmed they were there purely as advisors, and did not constitute a military presence.

The Guards commander, General Mohammed Ali Jafari, also said that it was undecided whether Iran would jump in militarily to help out Syria should it be attacked. He repeated Tehran's allegations that "other countries" – taken to be Western and Gulf Arab states – were

providing material backing to Syria's rebels.

Brahimi on Sunday wrapped up a four-day visit to Syria during which he met with Assad and spoke by telephone with Free Syrian Army rebel commanders.

One of those commanders, Colonel Abdel Jabbar al-Okaidi, told AFP: "We are sure that Brahimi will fail like the other envoys before him."

Brahimi this month took over as peace envoy from former UN chief Kofi Annan, who stepped down amid discord and acrimony in the UN Security Council over how to tackle Syria.

The death toll from the conflict in Syria has risen to more than 27,000 people, according to a tally of activists' counts. The United Nations puts the toll at 20,000.

More than 250,000 Syrians have fled the violence to neighboring countries.

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

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Yemenis ignore call to protest deployment of US Marines

Organizers cancel Sunday's planned demonstration in front of Yemeni President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi's residence after people failed to show up.

SANAA - Yemenis on Sunday ignored calls to protest the deployment of US Marines at the US embassy in Sanaa just days after demonstrators stormed the compound to protest an anti-Islam film produced in the United States.

Sunday's planned demonstration in front of Yemeni President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi's residence in the capital was cancelled by organisers, the Huthi rebel movement from the north, after people failed to show up, a correspondent at the scene reported.

The Huthis are believed to have participated in the violent protests outside the US embassy last Thursday which left four people dead.



On Friday, the US deployed a Marines anti-terrorism unit to Yemen to help protect the American embassy, a move that was condemned by the Yemeni parliament, saying it was up to the government to provide security for foreign embassies.

Security around the embassy remained tight on Sunday with all access roads to and from the heavily fortified compound blocked by security forces.

US Consular services also remained closed for the second day Sunday.

Protests over a trailer for the anti-Islam film on YouTube first broke out Tuesday in Egypt and Libya, where the US consulate in Benghazi came under attack by an armed mob killing the US ambassador and three other Americans.

The protests have since spread across other Arab and Muslim countries.

The low-budget movie "Innocence of Muslims," in which actors have strong American accents, portrays Muslims as immoral and gratuitously violent.

It pokes fun at the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and touches on themes of paedophilia and homosexuality, while showing him sleeping with women, talking about killing children and referring to a donkey as "the first Muslim animal."

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54391>

- **Saudi cracks down on male-staffed lingerie shops**

Authorities close around 100 lingerie shops in Riyadh for violating decree on "feminisation and nationalisation of jobs".

RIYADH - The labour ministry has ordered the closure of around 100 lingerie shops in the Saudi capital for having men on their sales staff, a newspaper said on Sunday.

Al-Eqtisadiyah quoted a ministry official as saying all shops which violate a decree on

the "feminisation and nationalisation of jobs" would be shut down. The measure aims to "provide a safe environment for working women," he said.

The ministry at the start of the year banned male assistants from working at lingerie shops, as a first step to be followed by women-only sales assistants at cosmetics outlets.

King Abdullah issued a decree in June 2011 limiting work for females at lingerie shops to Saudi women only in a bid to reduce high female unemployment in the conservative kingdom.

Unemployment among women in the oil-rich state is estimated at 30 percent.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54400>

- **Iran inventory of mines grows to more than 5,000**

US bolstering its capabilities in the region this year

Manama: The US has been bolstering its capabilities in the region this year, doubling to eight the number of naval

minesweepers and MH-53 helicopters, made by the Sikorsky Aircraft unit of Hartford, Connecticut-based United Technologies Corp for the mission, and introducing a new underwater drone for mine detection and neutralisation.

The drone, called the Seafox, is being developed for Lockheed Martin Corp, based in Bethesda, Maryland, by a unit of Bremen, Germany-based Atlas Elektronik GmbH.

The Pentagon in June requested congressional approval to spend \$9.6 million (Dh35.2 million) extra to buy missile launchers for five ships from Raytheon Co. That would allow installation of Griffin missiles on US patrol boats "to protect vessels and personnel from the increased threat of hostile fast-attack craft" used by Iran.

The "reprogramming" request also included \$6.4 million to buy 40 additional Griffin missiles for installation on the patrol craft. The Pentagon plans to spend \$30.2 million on the Raytheon system through 2017 because it was urgently requested by the US Central Command.

Iran's inventory of mines has grown to more than 5,000, military historian David Crist wrote in *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*.

That compares with 1,000 mines in the 1980s during its conflict with Iraq and its "tanker war" with the West. In 1987 and 1988, Iran battled the US Navy after its mines damaged American vessels.

Given the threat from Iran, "more such exercises are needed to improve our ability to operate with our international partners," Mark Gunzinger, an analyst with the Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in Washington, said in an email. "It's also a very clear signal that we have the capabilities and the will to maintain freedom of navigation."

Still, "the United States recognises the importance of not overreacting to Iranian threats regarding the Strait, which would give them more credit and influence than they deserve," said Caitlin Talmadge, an Iran specialist and associate professor at George Washington University in Washington.

The US "wants to clearly and publicly remind Iran that implementing these threats won't have a good outcome for anyone, especially Iran," she said in an email. For all its occasional bluster, "Iran has generally avoided picking fights with the US Navy since the Iran-Iraq War," Talmadge said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/iran-inventory-of-mines-grows-to-more-than-5-000-1.1077327>

- **GCC condemns anti-Islam film, violence**

Bahrain ordered websites carrying the movie be blocked

Dubai: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Friday condemned an anti-Islam film as well as the violence it has triggered, as Bahrain ordered that websites carrying the movie be blocked.

"This film cannot be accepted or excused as it abuses the feelings of Muslims and non-Muslims who reject insulting prophets (PBUH), religions and beliefs," GCC Secretary-General Abdul Latif Al Zayani said in a statement.

Al Zayani also “condemned acts of violence against US embassies in some countries,” adding that “our anger... is no excuse to such carry out such attacks that only serve the low and suspicious aims of those who produced it.”

The GCC chief called for the issue to be dealt with “wisely” and for those who carry out or support such attacks to be punished.

Article continues below

Meanwhile, Bahrain’s Interior Minister Shaikh Rashed Bin Abdullah Al Khalifa ordered “the blocking and stopping of websites carrying the film mocking” Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), according to state news agency BNA.

Citizens were urged “not to participate in broadcasting the film by sharing it on social media networks,” and advised against allowing their children to watch it.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/gcc-condemns-anti-islam-film-violence-1.1075228>

- **Women take questions from Saudi Shura members**

Make history as they take floor to answer queries on health issues

Manama: History was made in the men-only Saudi Shura when two women answered questions from the members in a face-to-face debate.

The breakthrough occurred on Sunday when Dr Muneera Bint Hamdan Al Aseemi, the health ministry assistant undersecretary for supporting medical services, and Dr Afaf Al Tuwaijari, the head of training and scholarships at the ministry, used the podium to answer queries from the Shura members.

The two women were sitting at the parliament gallery following the three-hour debate on the floor between Dr Abdullah Al Rabeeah, the health minister, and the members. However, when the minister was asked a question related to Al Aseemi’s work, he referred it to her and she came down to take up the podium to answer the query. Al Tuwaijari followed some time later when the minister again referred a question to her, local Arabic news site Sabq reported on Monday.

Responses from both women triggered warm appreciation from some Shura members, Sabq said.

“Their participation in the debate has made Shura members talk about a rehearsal for the involvement of women in face-to-face Shura debates in the near future,” a member was quoted as saying.

Al Aseemi, a 1984 nursing graduate who has authored books and given lectures in several countries, became in April the first Saudi woman to be appointed assistant undersecretary in the health ministry.

Al Tuwajiri was appointed head of training and scholarships in November 2010.

Although the Shura Council’s bylaws do not oppose the membership of women and do not specify the gender of the appointed members, it has had since it was founded in 1993 only male members.

The first council (1993–1997) had a speaker and 60 members and the second (1997–2001) had a speaker and 90 members. The third council (2001–2005) had a speaker and 120 members and the

fourth (2005–2009) had a speaker plus 150 members.

Last year, King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz whose stances on reforms, particularly on women’s rights, have been obvious since he became ruler in August 2005, said that women would become members of the Consultative Council in the next term.

“We made this decision because we refuse to marginalise women in the Saudi society in their roles that comply with the Islamic Sharia and following consultations with many of our scholars who supported it,” King Abdullah said. “Muslim women in our history have had stances that cannot be sidelined, be it through views or advice, since the time of Prophet Mohammad [PBUH].”

According to the Saudi monarch, “balanced modernisation compatible with Islamic vales was a significant necessity.”

“It is our right to receive your opinion and advice according to the fundamentals of our religion. Whoever trespasses them is arrogant and must take responsibility for those actions,” he said.

King Abdullah in the same speech also announced that women would have the right to run and vote in the 2015 municipal elections.

Earlier this month, Al Sharq daily reported that 30 women are expected to be appointed to the Shura in 2013 in a historic breakthrough.

“The expectations are that up to 30 women will be appointed to the council in its next term,” sources close to the consultative assembly told local Arabic daily.

The sources said that talks have already started with several institutions to provide the names of women they saw as “properly qualified” to become Shura members.

A special commission, headed by the king, will look into the nominees and select the final list.

Criteria include Saudi citizenship, a minimum of 30 years of age, impeccable personal record, high level of competency and practical experience.

The Shura has 12 women advisers whose work is related mainly to issues of women, families and children.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/women-take-questions-from-saudi-shura-members-1.1077350>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• NATO Accused of Killing 8 Afghan Women in Airstrike

VOA News

September 16, 2012

Afghan officials say NATO coalition forces have killed eight women and girls in an airstrike in a remote district of the country. The deaths come after three "insider" attacks in as many days by Afghan forces against international soldiers killed eight troops, including four Americans.

Sunday's airstrike came shortly before dawn, in Laghman province's Alingar district, east of Kabul. Villagers drove the bodies to the provincial capital, claiming they were killed by NATO aircraft while they were out gathering firewood before dawn.

A Laghman provincial government spokesman said the villagers were condemning the attack and shouting "Death to America!"

The U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force initially said an air strike targeted around 45 insurgents, but later expressed condolences over "possible ISAF-caused civilian casualties" numbering five to eight.

Meanwhile, ISAF said four U.S. service members were killed Sunday in an "insider" attack in the southern part of the country.

Local authorities in Zabul province say the four Americans, were killed by an Afghan police officer. Coalition officials have not identified the service personnel.

Sunday's attack comes one day after two British soldiers were gunned down by an Afghan policeman in southern Helmand province.

The deadly attacks are the latest in a series of so-called green-on-blue "insider" attacks by Afghan forces against their

international counterparts, threatening the military partnership between NATO and Kabul.

In another development, coalition officials say the insurgents who attacked a British military base in Afghanistan Friday, killing two U.S. Marines, were dressed in U.S. Army uniforms and were armed with automatic rifles, rocket propelled grenade launchers and suicide vests.

The coalition says the 15 militants were organized into three teams and "executed a well-coordinated attack" against the airfield on Camp Bastion in Helmand province.

The alliance say the attackers destroyed six Harrier jets and "significantly damaged" two more. The militants also destroyed three coalition refueling stations and damaged six aircraft hangars.

International troops say they killed 14 of the insurgents and wounded one, who is in custody.

The Taliban has claimed responsibility for the attack.

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

- **Karzai condemns killing of civilians by US-led forces**

Press TV

September 16, 2012

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has strongly condemned the killing of civilians in two airstrikes carried out by US-led forces in the country's eastern provinces of Laghman and Kunar.

The condemnation comes after at least 24 people, including eight women, were killed in two US-led airstrikes on the two provinces on Sunday.

Local witnesses said on Sunday that at least eight women have lost their lives and several others were wounded in an overnight attack in Laghman.

The US-led military coalition has confirmed the airstrike.

Sixteen other Afghans were also killed in another airstrike carried out in Kunar on Sunday.

Many civilians have lost their lives in the US-led operations in various parts of Afghanistan over the past months, with Afghans becoming increasingly outraged at the seemingly endless number of the deadly assaults.

The United Nations announced on February 4 that 2011 was the deadliest year on record for Afghan civilians. The death toll for the civilians rose eight percent compared to the year before and was roughly double the figure for 2007.

The US claims that its airstrikes target militants, but local sources say civilians have been the main victims of the attacks.

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

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

- **Karzai Criticizes U.S. Over Delayed Bagram Transfers**

September 16, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has criticized the United States for not handing over hundreds of Afghan prisoners at the Bagram detention facility to the Afghan government.

The United States officially handed over control of the Bagram prison to Kabul on September 10, ending a six-month transfer that began after a March agreement between the two countries.

But while some 3,000 detainees have been transferred to Afghan control, about 50 foreign prisoners and several hundred Afghans detained after the March agreement remain in U.S. custody.

Karzai said in a statement that Washington's decision to delay the handover of the remaining inmates was a "serious violation" of their March agreement and contradicts the "spirit of mutual friendship and the provisions of the bilateral strategic partnership agreement."

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

- **Afghan students rally in Kabul against US-made anti-Islam movie**

Press TV

September 16, 2012

Hundreds of Afghan students in the capital, Kabul, have held a demonstration against a blasphemous anti-Islam movie produced in the United States.

The students, mostly from Kabul University, canceled classes and poured into the streets on Sunday, chanting slogans against Washington and the film.

"The demonstration is peaceful. There are about 1,500 students who have gathered here and are protesting the film," said a local district police chief.

Also on Sunday, protesters in the western city of Herat set fire to pictures of US President Barack Obama and American flags.

Over the past two days, thousands of protesters have held similar demonstrations in Afghanistan to voice their anger over the release of the insulting film.

Afghan lawmakers have also called for the cancelation of a security pact with the US over the video.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney has said that the Obama administration will not apologize for the US-made video.

“We have denounced it. We have said we find it offensive and reprehensible, but we will not -- you know, we cannot and will not squelch freedom of expression in this country,” Carney told reporters at the daily White House news briefing on September 14.

The White House has not asked YouTube to take down the video.

Outrage is growing across the Muslim world over the \$5-million movie, named Innocence of Muslims, which was financed by more than 100 Zionist Jews.

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

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

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