



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

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1. IRAQ

- **Maliki supports Talabani's endeavors for "constructive dialogue" (Aswat al-Iraq)**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Premier Nouri al-Maliki re-iterated his support to the efforts made by President Jalal Talabani for "constructive dialogue" as means for reaching common understanding among Iraqi politicians, instead of political division and conflict.

In his meeting with President Talabani in Sulaimaniya, 364 km north of the capital, Baghdad, both sides exchanged views on the general situation in the country and unifying efforts to solve pending questions, as reported by a statement, late yesterday, a copy received by Aswat al-Iraq.

It is expected that President Talabani will continue his contacts from Sulaimaniya till his arrival in Baghdad next week.

The statement added that the conferees stressed "the importance of the coming talks and contacts of President Talabani".

Continued contacts between Maliki and Talabani continued during the last three months, as reported by the statement.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28jnr3at45aymdts550obj5i2c%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150577&l=1

- **Parliament rapporteur confirms absence of most MPs from parliament sessions (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad , Sep 19(AIN) –The parliament rapporteur, Mohamed al-Khalidi, assured absence of most of the MPs from the sessions of the parliament and the discussion of the law drafts.

Speaking to All Iraq News Agency (AIN), he said "A large number of the MPs do not attend the parliament sessions to discuss the law drafts and they do not care about the issues discussed in the parliament."

"Those MPs just want to finish the current term of parliament where a few MPs attend the sessions," he added.

Some observers and politicians criticize the performance of the parliament and the delay in endorsing the law drafts such as the Oil and Gas, Federal Court, the

Supreme Judicial Council and the General Amnesty law drafts in addition to the security ministries that are run by acting ministers, pointing out "The parliament vacations and the lack of quorum in addition to the political disputes resulted in the delay in the observatory and legislative performance of the parliament."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18896

- **Iraqi minister calls on int'l community to investigate crimes of former regime (KUNA)**

GENEVA, Sept 19 (KUNA) -- The Iraqi Minister of Human Rights Mohammad Al-Sudani fiercely condemned the former Saddam Hussein regime and urged the international community to cooperate with the new Iraqi government to reveal the extent of human rights crimes committed.

"Iraq had witnessed during this period the worst-ever human rights violations in the post-World War II era," Iraqi minister Al-Sudani said in his opening speech of an international conference on the crimes of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Themed, "Special Conference of the Crimes of the Former Dictatorial Regime, the event is being held in Geneva from September 19 to 21, with the participation of human rights personalities from the across the world.

He added that these human rights violations have hurt the Iraqi people and left irremovable impacts on their lives.

In statements to KUNA, Al-Sudani said the conference will highlight the efforts exerted to discover these crimes and offer support and treatment for their victims.

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2263520&Language=en>

- **Bolani urges to open fortified IZ (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Sep 19 (AIN) –The former Minister of Interior, Jawad al-Bolani, urged to open the fortified International Zone like other areas to avoid the terrorist attacks.

He assured in a press statement received by AIN "If the government abandoned the excessive concerns and opened the IZ like

other areas, the terrorists will not have the chance to conduct exceptional attacks against it."

"The government promised to open the IZ previously to create equality between the Government and the people; yet, this area is still fortified in an exaggerated way," he added.

"This issue gives the impression that the government protects the officials rather than the people," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18913

- **Nijaifi, EU Ambassador discuss bilateral relations, IHEC formation (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Sep 19 (AIN) –The Speaker, Osama al-Nijaifi, and the European Union Ambassador to Iraq, Jana Haibshkova, discussed bilateral relations and the formation of the Independent High Electoral Commission.

A statement by Nijaifi's office received by AIN quoted him as saying "We are sure that the associated strategic pact and the

future plans that will be performed by the European Union in Iraq in all fields will have the positive results for both sides."

"We will activate this pact due to its importance in achieving the developmental plans," he added.

The statement pointed out "The two sides discussed the cooperation and association between the European Union and Iraq."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18910

- **Tehran ships weapons to Assad via Iraq: report (gulf times)**

Reuters/United Nations

19 Sep 2012

Iran has been using civilian aircraft to fly military personnel and large quantities of weapons across Iraqi airspace to Syria to aid President Bashar al-Assad in his attempt to crush an 18-month uprising against his government, according to a Western intelligence report seen by Reuters.

Earlier this month, US officials said they were questioning Iraq about Iranian flights in Iraqi airspace suspected of ferrying

arms to Assad, a staunch Iranian ally. Yesterday, US Senator John Kerry threatened to review US aid to Baghdad if it does not halt such overflights.

Iraq says it does not allow the passage of any weapons through its airspace. But an intelligence report obtained by Reuters says Iranian weapons have been flowing into Syria via Iraq in large quantities. Such transfers, the report says, are organised by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

“This is part of a revised Iranian modus operandi that US officials have only recently addressed publicly, following previous statements to the contrary,” said the report, a copy of which was provided by a UN diplomatic source.

“It also flies in the face of declarations by Iraqi officials,” it said. “Planes are flying from Iran to Syria via Iraq on an almost daily basis, carrying IRGC personnel and tens of tons of weapons to arm the Syrian security forces and militias fighting against the rebels.”

Although the specific charges about Iraq allowing Iran to transfer arms to Damascus are not new, the intelligence report alleges that the extent of such

shipments is far greater than has been publicly acknowledged, and much more systematic, thanks an agreement between senior Iraqi and Iranian officials.

http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=532363&version=1&template_id=37&parent_id=17

- **Beecroft says U.S. is engaging with an evolving Iraq (KUNA)**

WASHINGTON, Sept 19 (KUNA) -- Nominated US Ambassador to Iraq Robert Beecroft said on Wednesday that the United States is "engaging with an evolving Iraq" and talked about "reason for optimism" in the country despite of internal and regional tensions.

"The United States is engaging with an evolving Iraq. The country is only now emerging from over 50 years of isolation, fragmentation and war. We have a strong relationship with the democratically elected government", said Beecroft during his nomination hearing at the Senate foreign relations.

"This relationship is codified in the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement which lays out a shared vision and a

concrete, common roadmap for our bilateral commitments across the fields of defense, economics, justice, diplomacy, education and energy", he added.

Beecroft noted that "through this agreement, we support and assist the Iraqis in building a united, federal and democratic country that can play a constructive role in the region. Of course, challenges abound, and our work is not easy".

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2263562&Language=en>

- **Nujaifi, Demerer discuss bilateral relations (Aswat al-Iraq)**

BAGHDAD, Sep 19 / Aswat al-Iraq: Parliament Speaker Usama Nujaifi discussed with the Turkish Ambassador Younis Demerer the development of bilateral relations and the regional political situation, especially Syria.

In a statement by his office, obtained by Aswat al-Iraq, both sides tackled developing common relations in all fields according to historical relations between the two countries.

The Syrian question and refugees were among the topic tackled between the two sides.

For the last 18 months, Syria has witnessed a bloody and tumultuous situation when the opposition began their protests, then to be turned into armed confrontation against the Syrian regime headed by Bashar al-Assad.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28qfu4mn45dps15o55guj2x1mi%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150573&l=1

- **Iraq kills senior leader in al-Qaeda on the Iraqi-Syrian border (Shafaq News)**

Shafaq News, Sep 19 / A source in the Iraqi army said on Wednesday that a senior leader in al-Qaeda from a Syrian nationality was killed and two others were arrested, including a Saudi and an Iraqi belongs to al-Qaeda who were with him in Rabia area western of Mosul.

The source, who asked not to be named said in an interview with "Shafaq News", that "a military force has killed this afternoon a senior leader in al-Qaeda from a Syrian nationality in Rabia area west of Mosul, near the Syrian border and

has arrested two others belonged to the same organization itself”.

"The military forces have transferred the body to the forensic medicine department in Mosul and the other two detainees to the army headquarters to conduct preliminary investigations with them and transmit them to the competent authorities to supplement the necessary measures against them," the source added.

An informed source revealed yesterday for "Shafaq News", "al -Qaeda willingness to carry out its "biggest" operation since 2003 in Iraq, pointing out that the process will depend on a new tactic of the organization in which it trains its elements intensively, using "for the first time" it's all funding sources both inside and outside Iraq.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3585-iraq-kills-senior-leader-in-al-qaeda-on-the-iraqi-syrian-border.html>

- **Iraq allocates \$275 bln for projects over five years (Reuters)**

BAGHDAD, Sept 19 (Reuters) - Iraq has earmarked \$250-275 billion for spending

on infrastructure projects and other investments over the next five years, the planning ministry said on Wednesday.

Iraq needs development in almost every sector, as rubble and incomplete buildings are still commonplace more than nine years after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

"Allocating these huge sums will have a positive effect on pushing the development pace forward," Planning Minister Ali al-Shukri, who was attending a financial and investment conference in London, said.

The investment plan will run from 2013 to 2017, his office said in a statement about his visit, without giving further details about possible projects or investors.

Shukri called on foreign companies to invest in Iraq's housing, tourism, agriculture, industry and higher education sectors.

Other than oil, economic development in Iraq has lagged despite an easing of violence since the height of sectarian strife in 2006-2007.

Al-Qaeda militants and other insurgent groups are still active however, and manage to hit Iraq with daily attacks, bombings and assassinations which make security costs a large burden for foreign investors.

Investors also complain about bureaucracy and red tape. Government infighting has delayed projects in areas such as electricity and telecommunications.

However, the market is potentially lucrative for foreign investors.

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/09/19/iraq-economy-investment-idINL5E8KJCQ320120919>

- **Iraq approves \$358.8 mln Zubair oilfield contract (Reuters)**

BAGHDAD, Sept 19 (Reuters) - Iraq's cabinet approved a \$358.8 million contract with Italy's SICIM and Dubai-based Drake and Scull to lay pipelines in the southern Zubair oilfield, a government spokesman said on Wednesday.

The deal is part of a series of contracts aimed at developing Zubair which officials say should have an output of 1.2 million barrels per day by 2017.

Under the two-year extendable deal, the consortium will lay pipelines to transport crude from oil wells to production facilities, will lay water injection pipelines and will replace old lines in the field, Ali al-Dabbagh said.

The group will also build an 18 km (12 mile) pipeline to carry oil exports from Zubair to a crude storage depot, an Iraqi oil ministry document showed.

OPEC member Iraq aims to double its output over the next three years after decades of neglect of infrastructure due to war and economic sanctions.

Italy's ENI, U.S.-based Occidental Petroleum Corp and South Korea's KOGAS signed a 20-year deal with Iraq in 2010 to develop Zubair, whose production is currently at 270,000 barrels per day (bpd).

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/09/19/iraq-oil-zubair-idINL5E8KJDKW20120919>

- **Kurdistan may increase its oil exports to more than 250,000 bpd (AKnews)**

ERBİL, Sep 19 (AKnews) - The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) may increase its oil exports to more than 250,000 bpd by next year after agreeing with Baghdad about the payments of foreign companies operating in the region, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)'s Minister of Natural Resources has said.

Baghdad and Erbil agreed last Thursday to end the disputes over Kurdistan's oil exports and financial dues of oil producing companies in the region.

The agreement states on the commitment of the Kurdistan region to increase its oil export from 120,000 bpd to 200,000 to the Iraqi government pipelines that connect Kirkuk to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea.

While Baghdad in turn will be committed to paying the dues of foreign oil companies in the region that reach \$1.5 billion.

According to the KRG Minister, the Region will export 140,000 bpd this month

and then increase it to 200,000 bpd at the end of this year.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/2/327064/>

- **Um Qasr seaport receives commercial ships (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Sep 19 (AIN) -UM Qasr seaport associated to the General Company for Iraqi Ports, within the Ministry of Transportation, received a commercial ship loaded with more than (5000) tons of wheat for the favor of the Ministry of Trade.

The MoT assured in a statement on Wednesday "Um Qasr port, of southern Basra province, received a commercial ship from Panama loaded with (5619) tons of wheat for the favor of the MoT to serve the Ration Card's items."

"The port also received a ship loaded with (221) containers from Hong Kong and an Iranian tug with different cargos," the statement concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18874

2. IRAN

• IRGC Blasts Fabrication of Commander's Remarks on Syria

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps on Wednesday deplored western media outlets for fabricating the recent remarks of the IRGC Commander, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, on Syria.



"General Jafari said in that meeting that the IRGC's Quds Force has had a number of forces in Lebanon and Syria with the aim of supporting (the two) Muslim nations and given the special conditions that these countries are facing, but this presence does not mean a military presence in these countries," Head of the IRGC Public Relations Department General Ramezan Sharif said, referring to the remarks made by the IRGC commander during a Sunday press conference in Tehran.

General Sharif reiterated that Iran is proud of its "thinking assistance and transfer of experience to Syria as a member of the resistance front against the Zionist regime".

He reminded that transfer of experience is what military attaches do in the world, and added, "The Islamic Republic's Armed Forces have military attaches in other countries within the framework of international norms and criteria."

"At present, the IRGC has military attaches in around 15 world countries, including Syria and Lebanon, while the Islamic Republic Army has sent military attaches to a number of other countries."

Ramezan Sharif's remarks came after the western media misrepresented General Jafari's remarks about Iran's military activities in Syria, alleging that he has admitted to Iran's military deployment in the crisis-hit country.

During the press conference on Sunday, the IRGC Commander strongly rejected the western media reports alleging that Iran has deployed troops in Syria and

increased their numbers after the start of insurgency in there, and said that Tehran is only giving advice and spiritual assistance to Bashar al-Assad's government.

"We just give them our experience, advice and intellectual assistance," Jafari told reporters in a press conference here in Tehran on Sunday.

"Compared with certain Arab countries' military presence and support for opposition groups in Syria, we have actually done nothing," he said.

He said the very few IRGC Quds force members who had some time in the past been in Lebanon or Syria did not serve as military or combat troops, alluding that their presence was aimed at a transfer of knowledge and experience.

"That doesn't mean our military presence in there," Jafari said.

The Syrian terrorists and their supporters have on many occasions claimed that Iran, specially its IRGC's Quds force, are helping Bashar al-Assad's government through a strong military presence, and even alleged

that Iranian forces help the Syrian squads in the fight against the rebels.

To that end, the terrorists have also attempted to take forced confession from abducted Iranian nationals in Syria.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106241164>

- **Iranian Army Warns Enemy of All-Inclusive, Crushing Response to Aggression**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian Army in a statement on Wednesday warned enemies to avoid threatening Iran, reiterating that any aggression against the country will be reciprocated with a crushing response.

"The Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran ... declares that, in obedience to Muslims' Leader and Commander-in-Chief Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the Army, along with other armed forces, is monitoring all the internal and external moves of the enemies with maximum strength and power and will give an all-around and crushing response to any hard and soft threat of the enemies," the Army said in a

statement on the occasion of the Sacred Defense Week.

September 21 is the start of the Sacred Defense Week in Iran which marks the anniversary of the beginning of Iraq's imposed war against the country in 1980.

Israel and its close ally the United States accuse Iran of seeking a nuclear weapon, while they have never presented any corroborative document to substantiate their allegations. Both Washington and Tel Aviv possess advanced weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear warheads.

Iran vehemently denies the charges, insisting 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.

Both Israel and the US have recently intensified rhetoric against Iran, saying an attack on the Islamic Republic's nuclear site is impending.

Iran has, in return, warned that it would target Israel and its worldwide interests in case it comes under attack by the Tel Aviv.

Iran has also warned that it could close the strategic Strait of Hormuz if it became the target of a military attack over its nuclear program.

Strait of Hormuz, the entrance to the strategic Persian Gulf waterway, is a major oil shipping route.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106241160>

- **Iran Urges Asian Nations to Adopt Single Standard for Nanotechnology**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian delegates attending the 9th Asia Nano Forum Summit (ANFoS 2012) proposed establishment of a single code of operation for various fields of nanotechnology among Asian nations, describing it as the most important and effective contributor to market promotion.

Professor Ali Beitollahi, the director of INIC's international collaboration committee, briefed the audience on Iran's

activities regarding standardization policymaking and codification of nanotechnology. He also elaborated on Iran's Nano Scale Certificate, and invited the other member countries to help expand the nanotechnology market by adoption and promotion of this certificate.

Iran is the second country - after Taiwan - to introduce a nano scale certificate for organizing the market for nanotechnology-based products within Asia. In this summit, it was decided that Iran will host joint meeting under the title of Nano Mark in collaboration with Thailand and Taiwan in 2013.

The ANFoS 2012 was held with 11 member economies including Iran, Thailand, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand, Vietnam and Sri Lanka in attendance at the conference hall of Thailand Science Park Convention Center, Bangkok city, from August 22 to 23.

At the end of the summit, a statement focusing on sustainable development of nanotechnology in Asia was issued in the presence of the representatives from the 11 member economies.

In addition to highlighting the social, economic, environmental and safety impacts of sustainable development of nanotechnology, measures which can improve cooperation and standardization in various fields of the technology within Asia were specifically emphasized.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106241158>

- **Ahmadinejad to Meet with NAM Leaders in New York**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Wednesday that he plans to hold meetings with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) heads of state on the sidelines of the upcoming UN General Assembly meeting in New York next week.



President Ahmadinejad said he has planned to hold meetings with other NAM

leaders on the sidelines of the General Assembly meeting to review the issues of the NAM member states.

He further hoped that he could take up the agenda of the Iranian nation and the NAM member states during his presence at the United Nations.

About his plan for New York visit, President Ahmadinejad said he is to present Iran's stand on the important global problems and offer proposals for removing them.

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will leave Tehran for New York at the head of a delegation in the next few days in a bid to attend a UN General Assembly meeting and hold talks with senior heads of state who will participate in the meeting.

Tehran hosted the 16th NAM summit from August 26 to 31, including two days of talks among deputy foreign ministers followed by a two-day meeting of the NAM foreign ministers and eventually two days of talks among NAM leaders.

During the heads-of-state summit meeting on August 30-31, Iran inherited the three-year leadership of the Non-Aligned bloc, a platform for anti-Western sentiments and grievances over big-power domination.

NAM is a group of states considering themselves not aligned formally with or against any major power bloc. The movement had 120 members and 17 observer countries.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106241154>

- **'Iran's exploitation of South Pars gas field could equal Qatar's by March 2014'**

TEHRAN, Sept. 19 (MNA) -- Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi has announced that Iran's exploitation of the South Pars gas field will equal Qatar's exploitation of the gas field by the end of Iranian calendar year 1392 (ends March 20, 2014) if \$54 billion is invested in gas projects.

"For the development of this gas field, an investment of 650 billion rials (over \$54 billion) has been put on the agenda," Qasemi told MPs in the Majlis on Wednesday.

Iran's oil exports have increased in the current month, and this will provide more revenue for the country, and oil exports are also projected to increase in the next few months, he added.

He went on to say that Iran has successfully skirted the sanctions meant to prevent companies from providing insurance for tankers carrying Iranian oil.

"At the current time, there is no problem in insuring tankers that carry crude oil for export," he explained.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1700454>

- **Ashton had 'constructive' meeting with Jalili in Istanbul: spokesman**

TEHRAN, Sept. 19 (MNA) - European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili held "constructive" talks in Istanbul on Tuesday, Ashton spokesman Michael Mann has said.

The meeting was the first after the two officials' talks in Moscow back in June.

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

Ashton represents the 5+1 group - Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States plus Germany – in nuclear talks with Iran.

Ashton will meet with the foreign ministers of the 5+1 group on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York next week "in order to assess the situation and to discuss the way forward," her office reported after the Tuesday talks.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1700002>

- **IAEA responsible for possible Israel, US attack on Iran: AEOI**

If Mr. Amano ignores our request for not disclosing our data he will be held accountable for possible damage inflicted on Iran's facilities be it by a terrorist act or military operation."

Director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Fereydoun Abbasi

The head of Iran's nuclear body says Tehran will hold the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) responsible for a possible attack by Israel and the US on the country's nuclear facilities.

In an exclusive interview with Press TV on Wednesday, Director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Fereydoun Abbasi noted how some institutions gain access to the information that Iran provides to the IAEA before UN Nuclear Chief Yukiya Amano presents them at the IAEA General Conference.

"Normally the reports are never circulated; especially, those which are provided to the Board of Governors and General Conference. But we have realized that even prior to the reports of IAEA chief Mr. Amano to the General Conference, some institutes gain access to the information," Abbasi stated.

"If Mr. Amano ignores our request for not disclosing our data, he will be held accountable for possible damage inflicted on Iran's facilities, be it by a terrorist act or a military operation," he warned.

The Iranian official further pointed out that most institutions work for Zionists and that Iran has seriously called on Amano to stop offering such reports to the General Conference.

"He [Amano] should be more responsible in this regard, particularly in a situation where some countries are hostile to Iran," the AEOI chief stated.

Abbasi noted that in response to Iran's good-will gesture in cooperating with IAEA inspectors, the agency should urge countries hostile to Iran to stop resorting to terrorist acts that jeopardize the nuclear security of the Islamic Republic.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/09/19/262521/iaea-responsible-for-possible-attack/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

• **Medics: 2 killed in Israeli airstrike**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Two Palestinian men were killed Wednesday when Israeli military forces shelled the al-Janeneh neighborhood in eastern Gaza, officials said Thursday.

Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman of Gaza health ministry, told Ma'an that ambulances transferred the dead and injured to Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital in Rafah.



Israeli military aircraft forces shelled a car and killed Ashraf Salah, 38, and Anees Abu al-Aynaen, 22, who worked in the security forces of the Hamas government, locals told Ma'an.

The two Palestinians were on official business to secure the southern border between Gaza and Egypt, the Gaza interior ministry said. The attack betrayed Israel's intentions toward Gaza and confirmed its plans to implement wide-scale operations, the ministry said.

The Israeli military said the attack targeted two "terror operatives" affiliated with a

group called "Defenders of al-Aqsa" in the southern Gaza Strip.

It said one of the operatives, Anis Abu Mahmoud el-Anin, was in the final stages of preparing to carry out an attack against Israeli civilians.

It said Ashraf Mahmoud Salah was a member of the Popular Resistance Committees who had admitted in the past to transferring two people into Egypt to attack Israel.

"The IDF will not tolerate any attempt by terrorist groups to harm Israeli civilians and IDF soldiers, and will continue to operate with strength and determination against those who use terror against the State of Israel," the statement added.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=521763>

- **Hamas angered as PA arrests supporters**

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA CITY (Reuters) -- Hamas sharply criticized the arrest of dozens of its members by Palestinian Authority police

in the West Bank on Wednesday, underscoring dire relations between the Islamist group and its Fatah-dominated rival after a failed bid for reconciliation.

President Mahmoud Abbas' Western-backed Palestinian Authority denied any political motives behind the round-up, which saw as many as 71 people detained, and said it had targeted criminals and that many were freed after questioning.

The detentions came at a time of renewed friction between Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, and Abbas, who holds sway in the occupied West Bank.

West Bank officials say Abbas is particularly upset at the developing ties between the Hamas leadership and the new authorities in Egypt. A delegation from Gaza met Egyptian Prime Minister Hisham Kandil in Cairo on Monday.

Hamas seized control of Gaza in a brief civil war in 2007. Abbas still claims to represent all Palestinians, but has not set foot in Gaza since his faction was ousted and the two sides regularly accuse each other of judicial harassment.

"Everyday, Abbas surprises us, confirming that he is harming our people and our parties," said senior Hamas lawmaker Ismail al-Ashqar, after news of the West Bank arrests.

He urged fellow Palestinians to "reject" Abbas and to "bring him before justice for his anti-national deeds."

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights said 71 Hamas supporters had been detained in the past 24 hours.

Adnan Dmeiri, spokesman for the security services loyal to Abbas, told Reuters the number was exaggerated, but did not offer any alternative figures.

"Arrests were made all over the West Bank in a legal fashion, involving cases of possession of weapons, incitement, money-laundering and attempts to transfer the Gaza takeover into the West Bank," he said.

Abbas and Hamas announced they were ready to lay aside their differences in 2011 and overcome the divisions that have led to a near total schism between the West Bank and Gaza.

The split is widely denounced by ordinary Palestinians, but all efforts to make good on last year's accord have foundered, including an attempt by the new Islamist leaders in Cairo to broker a deal between the two sides.



Abbas's allies fear Cairo is ready to side with Hamas, which could ultimately damage their own standing elsewhere in the Arab world. They looked on with concern as the Egypt's prime minister held talks on Monday with Hamas's leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh.

"Holding economic, political and security talks with Ismail Haniyeh sends a wrong message to the Hamas leadership in Gaza, encouraging it to continue neglecting Palestinian reconciliation," said Palestine Liberation Organization senior member Saleh Raafat. The Fatah-dominated PLO has been recognized by the UN as the

Palestinians' sole representative abroad for almost four decades.

In an effort to regain the political initiative, Abbas is due to address the United Nations next week and seek recognition of a Palestinian state as a non-member of the UN -- the sort of status already granted to the Vatican City.

Hamas has dismissed such diplomatic moves as a waste of time.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=521727>

- **PA Economy Facing Serious Risks, says International Monetary Fund**

RAMALLAH, September 20, 2012 (WAFA) - The Palestinian economy is facing serious risks, with a slowdown in growth and rise in unemployment in both Gaza and the West Bank, said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Thursday in its latest report on the West Bank and Gaza.

The report, which will be presented at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in New York on September 23, said that the Palestinian Authority's severe financing difficulties in 2011 and so far in

2012 have led to a substantial rise in domestic payment arrears and debt to commercial banks.

Given the high risk of continued aid shortfalls, it is important for PA to promptly implement a contingency plan to cover the financing gap, which as of mid-September is projected at \$0.4 billion for 2012, said the report.

It said a Joint PA-Government of Israel measures to raise clearance revenue should be implemented promptly to support the fiscal adjustment efforts.

Along with its efforts to address the immediate financing difficulties, it is important for PA to employ its enhanced institutional capacity to press ahead with measures to further raise public sector efficiency and phase out reliance on recurrent aid, added the report.

It said that an additional aid is essential to sustain orderly reforms and fiscal adjustment.

Urgent and concerted actions are needed by PA, the Government of Israel, and the international community to stem the risks

of a continued economic slowdown, a rise in unemployment, and a deepening fiscal crisis which are bound to fuel social upheaval, said the report.

The latest report of IMF on West Bank and Gaza covers fiscal performance PA in 2012, recent economic developments, an updated economic and fiscal outlook for the remainder of 2012, and reforms and institution building in the fiscal and financial areas (Palestinian Monetary Authority).

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20712>

- **Rights Group Holds Israel Responsible for Striking Prisoners' Lives**

GAZA, September 20, 2012 (WAFA) - The Gaza-based al-Mezan Center for Human Rights expressed its concern for the detainees' health and lives, particularly the two striking Palestinian prisoners held in administrative detention, Samer al-Barq and Hassan Safadi, and held the Israeli authorities responsible for their well-being, according to a press release on Thursday.

Samer al-Barq has been on hunger strike for 119 days and Hassan Safadi for 89 days, protesting their administrative detention without charge or trial.

Al Mezan strongly condemned Israel's gross abuses of Palestinian detainees, starting with the Unlawful Combatant Law, the policy of administrative detention, and other procedures that violate detainees' rights, including solitary confinement, medical negligence, barring of family visitation, and other practices.

It demanded the international community, especially the signatory parties to the Geneva Conventions, to put pressure on the occupation state and force it to respect its obligations under international law, and to treat detainees humanely in keeping with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners issued in 1955, and other relevant international standards.

There must also be steps taken towards guarantee of the release of all Palestinian prisoners, especially those thrown in prison without charge or fair trial, including appeal to all means of defense, said the release.

Al Mezan called on civil society groups, national and international human rights organizations to express their solidarity with Palestinian detainees, to expose Israel's violations of international humanitarian law, and to oblige Israel to uphold its legal responsibilities.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20711>

- **Israel's nuclear chief: Jerusalem can defend itself**

By HERB KEINON

Speaking at IAEA meeting, Shaul Chorev says Israel is not indifferent to "direct and blunt" Iranian threats to its existence."

IAEA in Vienna Photo: Elana Kirsh

Israel is not indifferent to "direct and blunt" Iranian threats to its existence and is "competent to deter its enemies and to defend itself," Shaul Chorev, head of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, said Wednesday.

Chorev's comments came at the annual meeting of the 155-nation International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, where he said that Iran's sizable enrichment of

uranium and construction of a heavy water research reactor for the military production of plutonium, as well as its design and testing of components of nuclear weapons and its activities to integrate a payload onto the Shahab 3 missile, left no doubt as to the goal of Tehran's efforts.

Related:

Syria accuses West of double standards over Israel

'Iran shipping arms and personnel to Syria via Iraq'

"Iran's nuclear activities are conducted in violation of all relevant UN Security Council and IAEA Board of Governors resolutions, and are carried out with impunity, as measures of the international community have no effect on Iran's nuclear program," he said.

Chorev added that Iranian fingerprints were all over Syria, where "the Syrian regime fights for its survival at a cost of tens of thousands of lives of innocent Syrian civilians."

He also argued against Arab calls for a nuclear-free Middle East, saying the

region had long been characterized by the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction by despotic regimes in violation of every legally binding international commitment and obligation.

"The concept of a region free of WMD that has never been put to test even in the most peaceful regions of the world is certainly much less applicable to the current volatile and hostile Middle East region," he said. "Any attempt to reach this goal requires a significant transformation of regional trends and the creation of some elementary pre-conditions."

Chorev listed three preconditions: First, that such a process be launched only when peaceful relations exist for a reasonable period of time; second, that the call for this zone come from within the region; and third, that it not be imposed from the outside.

Obviously, he said, these conditions do not presently exist.

He alluded to charges leveled against Israel earlier this month by Jordan's King Abdullah II to the effect that it was

blocking Jordanian efforts to build a nuclear reactor for peaceful purposes.

“With regards to Jordan’s civilian nuclear program I wish to emphasize that Israel supports the use of nuclear power by its neighbors, to meet their energy and water needs,” Chorev said. “Israel believes in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in the Middle East, as long as states fully honor their international nonproliferation obligations.”

Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, meanwhile said in a speech quoted by the AFP news agency from his official website that his country does not “accept the demands of any superpower.”

According to AFP, Khamenei gave the speech to an audience of military personnel Tuesday in the northern part of the country.

Iran, he said, “makes its decisions solely based on the interests of its people and the country, even if all of the world’s powers get angry at its decisions.” Khamenei added that Western media were playing up the degree to which sanctions were impacting on Iran, and

urged his listeners not to pay any attention to their reports.

“Drawing a black and dark picture of the country’s situation is the known method of Western and Zionist media aimed at halting the Iranian nation’s path,” he said.

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

One Israeli official responded by saying that the “unfortunate reality” is that despite the sanctions and strong talk from Israel and the international community, the Iranians have not been convinced that “if they continue they will face an unacceptable price.”

In a related development, Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, said on Wednesday that he and European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton had agreed to defer further nuclear talks until she consulted the six world powers she represents next week.

Jalili said his talks with Ashton late Tuesday night in Istanbul had been constructive.

“We evaluated the common points and what we could do for further cooperation and future meetings,” he told a news conference.

Jalili added that they had agreed to renew contact after Ashton meets the members of the P5+1 next week in New York.

This group, which is negotiating with Iran, is made up of the US, Russia, China, France, Germany and Britain. Three rounds of P5+1 talks with Iran since April have made little progress.

<http://www.ipost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=285579>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Morsy appoints new intelligence chief**



President Mohamed Morsy on Wednesday appointed Major General Mohamed Raafat Shehata as chief of intelligence.

Shehata was acting chief after his predecessor, Mourad Mowafy, was fired last month following the Rafah attack, when gunmen killed 16 Egyptian soldiers in an army checkpoint on the border with Israel. Mowafy was blamed for not providing Morsy with information about the attack.

The Armed Forces have been cracking down on what they call Islamic militants in Sinai since the attack.

Shehata has kept a low profile and has not appeared in the media or made any press statements.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-appoints-new-intelligence-chief>

- **Papal politics: candidates line up in politicized elections**

Leyla Doss

Lately, Bishop Beshoy has raised a huge controversy over authenticity of Quran

during a public lecture in Fayoum, September 22, 2010. Sunday, September 26, Bishop Beshoy issued a statement, emphasizing respect for all faiths, including Islam, but refused to apologize for his earlier statements.



Elections for the Coptic Orthodox Church's 118th pope are under way at a time in which the role of the papacy is in turmoil.

Some Copts have balked against the church as their political representative and for what many see as passive support for the former regime. Others contest the church's control of their personal life, in matters of divorce and remarriage.

With a government led by Islamists, a new constitution in the cards and Christian-Muslim relations a matter of international debate, Copts are asked to choose a new

leader in matters spiritual and, perhaps, temporal.

The process for electing a new pope is also highly politicized. Candidates — who must eventually secure the support of senior members of the church — are now able to position themselves through forms of mass media not available at the time of the previous pope's election.

The process

A list of 17 nominees, 10 bishops and seven monks was released last Thursday. An appeal period in which nominations may be challenged ends on 30 September. Thereafter, the Nominations Committee, chaired by the acting pope, will whittle the number down to between five and seven, based on criteria that are unclear.

The Nominations Committee includes nine bishops appointed by the Holy Synod, the highest authority in the church, and nine laypersons elected by the Millet Council, the 24-member secular body in charge of the church's administrative affairs.

On 24 November, an electoral college of 2,410 will vote on the candidates. Finally,

on 2 December, at St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Abbasseya, the top three nominees will have their names placed at the altar, where a blindfolded child will select the name of the next pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church from a ballot.

In an unprecedented move — despite its arguable violation of Canon law — the church decided to allow diocesan bishops to be eligible for the papal seat. This allowed diocesan bishops such as Bishop Bishoy, Bishop Baphnotious and Bishop Kiroillos to nominate themselves.

According to Father Antonio Kaldas of St. Bishoy's in Sydney, Australia, writing in an online statement, the exclusion of diocesan bishops in the past had functioned to protect the church from “the ravages of personal ambition.”

Bylaws passed in 1957 stipulate that candidates must be above 40 years old and have had a monastic life of at least 15 years. They must be endorsed by a minimum of six members of the Holy Synod or 12 members of the Millet Council.

Members of the electoral college must be members of the church's General Congregation, formed of the Holy Synod and the Millet Council.

Voters must be older than 35 years old and have a university degree. This year, the 2,410 members of the committee range from bishops and clerics to judges, lawyers and MPs. They live both within Egypt and abroad.

But not everyone believes the process is fair.

“The process is not democratic since not all members of the church can vote,” says activist Vivian Fouad.

Members of the group Copts Without Borders objected in a meeting with Bishop Morcos to limiting eligible voters to Copts with a certain financial status — namely, a salary of above LE400 per month.

“These laws are elitist and discriminate against the poor,” adds Fouad.

Activists such as Maged Mikhail have filed cases claiming that voter list is not a fair representation of the Coptic populace.

Some are concerned about bias toward candidates with greater media visibility.

Earlier this month, Bishop Pachomius, the acting patriarch, warned Coptic TV channels against being dragged into campaigning.

The five leading candidates

Bishop Bishoy

Bishop Bishoy, 70, is the secretary of the Holy Synod and the Metropolitan Bishop of Damietta, Kafr al-Sheikh, Barary and St. Damiana Monastery in the Nile Delta.

Bishoy is head of the Clerical Council for Church Trials and therefore has the power to supervise different dioceses that are vacant, and to punish bishops, as he has in Mahallah and Luxor.

Despite his unpopularity outside the church establishment, Bishoy is known as former Pope Shenouda III's "right-hand" and has great support within the church.

He has repeatedly issued controversial statements. In 2011, he said that "Egypt is

the land of Copts and Muslims are just visitors," and criticized aspects of the Quran, later apologizing.

Moreover, in a statement issued earlier this year, he claimed that Christian women should learn from their veiled Muslim counterparts and dress conservatively. This caused some women to openly protest in response.

He has also famously cited rifts between different Christian denominations. He called the Evangelical Church "conquerers" who attract orthodox youth through evangelism and deemed marriage with evangelicals "adultery."

Hany Labib, managing director of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue & Translation, claimed in a report in March that Bishoy is "confrontational and strict."

Fouad agrees with Labib.

"He is more conservative in his views, especially when it comes to women, other faiths and even other Christian denominations," Fouad says.

Bishoy's support for the succession of Gamal Mubarak, former President Hosni Mubarak's son, to the presidency alienated him from progressive liberals.

A source from within the Coptic Orthodox Church who requested anonymity described Bishop Bishoy as undiplomatic and extreme in his ideas.

"He is not open-minded at all and even stirred problems with intellectuals such as writer Youssef Zidane," the source says.

Bishop Youanis

Bishop Youanis, 42, was the former secretary to Shenouda and was ordained in St. Paul Monastery in the Red Sea Governorate. Youanis is very active in administering church affairs.

He has written a book named "On the Shores of the Spiritual Sea" and many short articles. He has also hosted TV shows on CTV, a satellite channel owned by businessman Tharwat Basil.

Many have claimed Youanis is humble and spiritual in his endeavors.

Activist Fouad says Youanis is a doctor and has often worked in social services.

"He has a background in development, especially in working with the poor in charity programs," Fouad says. "His programs encompass charity work with the poor, whether Muslim or Christian, and youth in NGO training programs. He is a very spiritual person and his ideas are moderate. He is also very active for women's rights and has campaigned against female genital mutilation."

Labib claims Youanis has a "vibrant role in the Holy Synod. He is humble, has a clear vision and has solid relations with state bodies, which helped him overcome and solve many sectarian conflicts."

On the media front, Labib claims CTV favors Bishop Youanis.

Others have claimed Youanis has close links with prominent businessmen and politicians and has worked to position himself for years to gain the papal throne.

The anonymous church source described Youanis as having been "maneuvering to take the role of pope for too long."

Since the revolution, many revolutionary youth have protested his pro-regime political leanings.

In early May 2011, Youanis negotiated privately with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces Major General Adel Emara in St. Mark's Cathedral in an attempt to end a sit-in by the Maspero Youth Union, a Coptic group, outside the state TV building in downtown Cairo. The church called on the activists to return home and allow the bishops to negotiate a settlement with the SCAF behind closed doors.

Bishop Raphael

Dubbed the voice of the Coptic youth, Bishop Raphael, 54, is the general bishop of central Cairo. He assists Bishop Moussa, another youth favorite, in the administration of the Bishopric of Youth.

“He is very popular with youth as he has worked on several youth campaigns. He also organized several awareness conferences in Alexandria. He manages summer classes for children in music, sports, Bible studies and Christian rituals,”

says Fady Youssef, co-founder of the Copts of Egypt Coalition.

“He mostly focuses on church liturgy and ecclesiastical teaching. He is low-profile in the media and public matters,” says Fouad. Youssef concurs.

Labib also agrees, describing Raphael as “dignified” and “quiet.”

“Bishop Raphael has very moderate and progressive views. He always focuses on Egyptians as a unified entity first and then on Coptic Christians,” the anonymous source says.

In 2007, Raphael argued in an interview with state-owned weekly newspaper Rose al-Youssef that the Coptic Orthodox Church is a religious rather than a political institution.

However, he is openly critical of Israel and stated in April that Copts are banned from doing pilgrimage to Jerusalem and that they should not visit the Holy Land “as long as it is named Israel.”

Bishop Baphnotious

Bishop Baphnotious, the 64-year-old bishop of Samalut and Taha al-Aameda, has been very active in the civil society sector by managing several development projects in hospitals and schools, as well as awareness campaigns.

Labib describes Baphnotious as having great managerial skills but a minimal media profile.

He adds that Baphnotious is reformist in his thinking, which is reflected in some of his published books.

“He created the idea of forming a high consulting council as an alternative for the current Millet Council in administrative affairs,” Labib says.

However, Bishop Baphnotious has had power struggles with other members of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

In 2007, tensions arose between him and Bishop Bishoy when Baphnotious nominated himself as secretary general of the Holy See of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Bishoy, the secretary general of the time, asked Pope Shenouda III to intervene.

Fouad sees this as an example of the church’s undemocratic, internal power plays.

Bishop Botrous

Bishop Botrous, 63, was Shenouda’s personal secretary. He managed schools such as Al-Karmah School, a bakery and a marble factory. He also founded Aghape, a popular TV satellite channel that has retained a mostly apolitical character.

His media presence is minimal, but he has occasionally been criticized for controversial statements, including one from 2004: “Spirits are full of hatred. Muslims and Christians are not good to each other — and it’s hard to correct.”

Botrous has stated that events in Palestine and Iraq, the headscarf ban in France and US hegemony of the region have sparked sectarian tensions.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/papal-politics-candidates-line-politicized-elections>

- **Libya security official resigns after US embassy attack**

A Libyan official quit his job on Wednesday highlighting tensions in the security establishment after a deadly attack killed four Americans, including the ambassador, in Benghazi.

"There are problems at the ministry of interior and disputes between the security services," Fawzi Wanis al-Qaddafi, head of the supreme security committee in Benghazi, told AFP.

"Working conditions are not the same as before, so I decided to resign," he added.

The supreme security committee, which falls under the interior ministry, was established by ex-rebels after the overthrow of Moammar Qaddafi last year in a bid to restore order.

Libya's interior minister on Monday announced the sacking of deputy interior minister for the eastern region, Wanis al-Sharif, and the head of national security for Benghazi, Hussein Bou Hmid.

The resignation comes a week after Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other

Americans were killed as the Benghazi consulate came under fire from rocket-propelled grenades.

The attack was originally blamed on protesters angered by an anti-Islam film made in America but neither US or Libyan officials have excluded the possibility that it was a pre-planned attack supported by Al-Qaeda.

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

- **US: Benghazi attack 'terrorist' but likely opportunistic**

Last week's deadly assault on a US diplomatic mission in the Libyan city of Benghazi was a "terrorist attack" but probably not a pre-planned operation, a senior US official said Wednesday.

The attack, which left four Americans including US Ambassador Chris Stevens dead, was carried out on the 11th anniversary of the September 11 attacks and amid protests in the Muslim world against an anti-Islamic film.

In Washington, where President Barack Obama's election rival Mitt Romney has

criticized the handling of the attack, there has been keen interest in whether the attackers were simply an angry mob or an organized gang.

On Wednesday, the director of the US government's National Counterterrorism Center told lawmakers that, while many questions remain to be answered, he was prepared to describe the killings as "a terrorist attack."

But the director, Matthew Olsen, immediately qualified that statement.

"The best information we have now, the facts that we have now indicate that this was an opportunistic attack on our embassy," he told the Senate Homeland Security Committee, under questioning from Senator Joe Lieberman.

"The attack began and evolved and escalated over several hours at our embassy—our diplomatic post in Benghazi. It evolved and escalated over several hours," he said, emphasizing that a US investigation was continuing.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was due to address lawmakers on Thursday at

a closed door secret intelligence briefing, but in the meantime Olsen confirmed that the Islamist militant group Al-Qaeda was among the suspects.

"At this point, what I would say is that a number of different elements appear to have been involved in the attack, including individuals connected to militant groups that are prevalent in eastern Libya," he said.

"We are looking at indications that individuals involved in the attack may have had connections to Al-Qaeda or Al-Qaeda's affiliates, in particular, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," he said.

Benghazi was the cradle of last year's Libyan revolt that ousted strongman Moammar Qaddafi, and the region is still prey to several loosely-organized militia groups with varying degrees of ties to the interim government.

Initial reports into Thursday's attack on the US consulate suggested that it had been attacked by protesters angered by an amateur movie produced by private US Christian groups deemed insulting to the Prophet Mohammed.

But the gang that stormed the compound and torched the consulate was heavily-armed, and Libyan officials have said that a militant group took advantage of the protest to launch a pre-planned attack.

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

- **Tunisian ruling party green-lights protests against French cartoons**

Tunisia's ruling party said on Wednesday that Muslims have "the right to protest" against the publication in France of cartoons mocking the Prophet Mohammed as long as they do so peacefully.

"Ennahda backs the right of Muslims to protest and calls on the use of peaceful and civilized means," the Islamist party that leads the governing coalition in Tunis said in a statement.

It branded French weekly Charlie Hebdo's publication of cartoons of Mohammed, one portraying him naked, as "a new attack against the Prophet."

It said the caricatures, which came hot on the heels of a US-produced low-budget movie that mocks Islam, were an attempt to "derail the Arab Spring and push it into conflict with the West."

It said that was a "trap" that the Arab world should "not fall into."

France's interior ministry has banned all protests over the controversial film following a violent demonstration last weekend near the US embassy.

Tunisia was the cradle of the Arab Spring uprisings that ousted a string of veteran dictators across the region last year.

But in recent weeks, the country has seen a spate of disturbances by Islamist hardliners of the Salafist movement that have escalated in the face of the US-produced movie "Innocence of Muslims."

Last Friday, the US embassy and adjacent American School in Tunis came under attack sparking clashes in which four people were killed and dozens injured.

Earlier Wednesday, the French embassy in Tunis announced that French schools in

the North African nation will be closed from Wednesday until Monday, adding that it had requested extra security following the publication of the cartoons.

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

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Jumblatt: ‘Jungle law’ could prevail if Lebanon situation not contained**

Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumblatt said that the series of abduction incidents in Lebanon should be brought to an end to prevent “the law of the jungle” from prevailing.

“[I call for] swiftly putting an end to this series [of kidnappings]... before the law of the jungle prevails and before we reach the same situation as the one in Mexico or Colombia,” Jumblatt told As-Safir newspaper in remarks published on Thursday.

He also warned that kidnapping for ransom was “a new phenomenon” that could indiscriminately target any citizen in Lebanon “since it was not motivated by politics.”

In recent weeks, a string of abductions targeted a number of people in Lebanon—including Syrians, two Turks as well as Lebanese nationals. Several Lebanese nationals were also abducted for ransom.

On Wednesday, an abducted Lebanese man, identified as Fouad Daoud, was released following clashes between the Lebanese army and the abductors, the National News Agency reported.

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

- **Lebanon PM announces breakthrough in kidnapping incidents**

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Miqati said in remarks published on Thursday that Lebanon’s security chiefs possessed information and indications that would provide a solution to the issue of recurrent kidnappings in the country.

“Security chiefs obtained indications and information that promise breakthrough results on the ground,” Miqati told As-Safir newspaper.

“The security forces will adopt the necessary measures to put an end to the kidnapping incidents,” he also said.

The prime minister added that there could be “no lenience in this issue which directly [affects] people’s security and the prestige of the state.”

In recent weeks a number of people in Lebanon—including a series of Syrians, two Turks as well as Lebanese nationals—had been kidnapped. Several Lebanese nationals had been also abducted for ransom.

On Wednesday, a kidnapped Lebanese man, identified as Fouad Daoud, was released following clashes between the Lebanese army and the abductors, the National News Agency reported.

Regarding the cabinet-approved defense agreement between France and Lebanon, Miqati said that it respected Lebanon’s interests, adding: “The amendments requested by Hezbollah are only related to the administrative aspect [of the agreement].”

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

- **Gemayel links kidnapping incidents to Hezbollah’s security approach**

Kataeb Party leader Amin Gemayel said on Wednesday evening that Hezbollah was responsible for the latest spat of kidnappings in Lebanon due to its lack of cooperation with the security forces.

“This phenomenon is a natural result of the lack of security and the spread of security havens... and I consider Hezbollah responsible [for the kidnapping incidents] due to [the lack of cooperation] with the security forces,” Gemayel said in an interview with Future News television.

“The existing clientelism and political cover-up are not acceptable and, since it is responsible for the security havens [in place], Hezbollah should help by providing a solution that would bring the abduction incidents to an end,” he added.

In recent weeks a number of people in Lebanon—including a series of Syrians, two Turks as well as Lebanese nationals—had been kidnapped. A number of the Lebanese had been abducted for ransom,

and the release of some of them has been achieved.

Regarding the issue of the electoral law for the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2013, Gemayel said that the Free Patriotic Movement led by MP Michel Aoun allowed the Shiite electorate in Lebanon to weigh in on the votes by supporting the cabinet draft law based on proportionality.

“The FPM did not respect what had been agreed on [between the Christian parties in the Bkirki follow-up committee], and what the cabinet has proposed is tailor made to suit the interests of the March 8 coalition and to politically sideline all their rivals.”

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

The Bkirki follow-up committee, which gathers representatives of Christian parties, agreed to work on passing an

electoral law based on small constituencies.

Gemayel also commented on Lebanon’s stance regarding the crisis in neighboring Syria, saying that the policy of dissociation adopted by the Lebanese government “is an elastic term.”

“We prefer the term ‘positive neutrality’... Security concerns [over the repercussions of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon] are still there and the signs are still negative,” he added.

Syria’s armed revolt has since March 2011 led to more than 27,000 deaths, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The UN puts the toll at more than 20,000.

Shelling from strife-stricken Syria into Lebanon and cross-border shootings have become near-daily occurrences in recent months.

Regarding the issue of the ranks and salaries system, the Kataeb Party leader voiced concern over the tax increases that had been proposed in order to provide the

necessary funds covering the wage increases for public employees.

“With the tax increases we will be obstructing the economic cycle in the country and we will be heading toward more unemployment and bankruptcy.”

Earlier in September, the cabinet approved a new ranks and salaries system for public employees. On Tuesday, the cabinet tasked Finance Minister Mohammad Safadi to prepare draft laws for financing the wage increases.

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

- **Jordan media up in arms over new online controls**

Jordanian journalists voiced alarm on Wednesday over newly approved amendments to the press and publication law, warning that they threatened freedom of expression particularly in the online media.

Political analysts said the new legislation was a retrograde step that undermined promises of reform made in the midst of last year's Arab Spring revolts and

threatened to tarnish Jordan's international image.

King Abdullah II issued a decree on Monday night approving the law in its new form, after parliament passed the amendments that require the country's 220 news websites to obtain licenses from the government, which can censor content and hold journalists liable for posted comments.

The amendments also stipulate that website chief editors must be members of the Jordan Press Association.

"We reject this restrictive law that threatens press freedom and online expression," said Mohammad Ghneim of the Centre for Defending Freedom of Journalists.

"The law will also affect social networks, blogs and access to information, especially now that Jordan is witnessing pro-reform protests and people have the right to know what is going now."

Nearly half the country's 6.8 million people are Internet users.

Journalists demonstrated on Saturday against the new changes after many news websites joined a "blackout," switching their homepages to black in protest at the legislation.

"We refuse to be terrorized," read a banner carried by journalists during a sit-in.

"You could be deprived of this content under this law and government censorship," said a message posted on the homepage of a local news site.

"The government seeks to control independent media and news websites, which are widely read by Jordanians," Basel Akur, editor of Jo24 website, told AFP.

"Online media played a key role in the Arab Spring, publishing people's views and positions. The government does not like this."

Jordan has been largely spared the kind of protests that have swept eastwards from Tunisia across the Arab world since early 2011, but it still sees regular demonstrations demanding political and

economic reform and an end to corruption.

"A siege mentality controls the way the government thinks," said Mohammad Fdeilat, who runs Ammanet news site.

"The government has been trying for years to control news websites as people demand more freedoms."

But Information Minister Samih Maayatah defended the law.

"The law protects people's rights by ensuring that freedom of expression is practiced in a responsible manner," he told AFP.

"It encourages news website to be more professional and helps enhance the media."

Some journalists agreed.

"We did not take part in the 'blackout' campaign because we think the situation of news websites needs to be organized," said Mohammad Hawamdeh, managing editor of the popular Khaberni news website.

"I do not think the law limits our freedom. These measures are important to stop unprofessional practices."

Wael Jaraisheh, managing editor of Ammon news, another popular website, echoed that view.

"We reject attempts to suppress freedoms, but at the same time a modern law to organize the work of news websites is a must," Jaraisheh told AFP.

Political analysts saw the hand of conservatives within the kingdom's establishment as behind the new legislation.

"It is illogical to come up with such a law while the authorities talk of reforms," said Mohammad Masri, a researcher at the University of Jordan's Centre for Strategic studies.

"It is obvious that conservatives are behind this law, which is a disturbing sign of backwardness.

Political analyst Oraib Rintawi said the law was "a step in the wrong direction."

"Almost everybody was against this law but the government did not listen," Rintawi, who heads the Al-Quds Centre for Political Studies, told AFP.

"We realize that some online excesses need to be curbed. But at the same time the government should not punish all media because of that.

"This will affect the image of Jordan and violate international treaties," he warned. "The media need support not censorship."

The amendments drew renewed criticism of Jordan from international human rights watchdogs.

"The government has long imposed restrictions on how Jordanians may express their thoughts and opinions," said Human Rights Watch senior Middle East researcher Christophe Wilcke.

"The state should be rolling back those laws, not extending them to online expression."

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

6. SYRIA

- **Libyan fighters “return favor” in Syria battles**

Firas, a youth who helped topple Libyan dictator Moammar Qaddafi last year, says Syrians aided in that struggle and he has now come to Syria to return the favor.

"In the Libyan revolution, many Syrians fought on our side, so it is now time to return the favor," explained Firas, who left his studies in Britain to join the uprising to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Firas said he had been watching the events in Syria unfold on television and knew he had to do something.

"I am tired of peace conferences, of useless sanctions imposed on the Assad government; I am fed up as people look the other way while Russia and China supply weapons to the regime."

"While the world sits down to talk, women and children here in Syria die under the regime's artillery fire and nobody does anything about it."

Firas sees a big difference in the two conflicts.

"In Libya, we had a no-fly zone to which civilians could flee without fear of being systematically bombed, but here the cities have become death traps in which the Assad government punishes the people without a thought," he said.

Abu Omar, another Libyan fighter, also feels it was his duty to fight in Syria.

"I had to do something for them. At the moment it is important to be here with my brothers," he said.

The Libyans are fighting Syrian government forces in Aleppo's Saif al-Dawla district, which has witnessed fierce clashes between the rebels and regime troops for several days now.

"After 30,000 dead you think the Syrians expect Westerners to come and help? Nobody will do anything for them because the life of a Syrian child is not worth that of a Western child," said Abu Abdo, another Libyan.

"How many more children must die for the West to act," he asked, adding that he is "fighting against a tyrant who uses weapons bought from the West to massacre his own people."

He said the Libyans are not fighting a holy war.

"It is not jihad, it is a revolution," Abu Abdo insisted, adding that "in Syria there are many foreign fighters as we no longer believe in promises coming from the West."

Firas has his own explanation for why the West is not interfering in the Syrian conflict as it did in Libya.

"In Libya there is oil and gas and the West is still looking for wars from which it can derive economic benefits even if it is at the cost of thousands of lives, as was the case in Iraq," he said.

"The second reason is that Libya is far from Israel, a war out there does not affect Israel as here a large-scale conflict would be devastating."

He also pointed to talk about the presence of radical Islamists among the rebels as a concern in the West.

"Does our wearing a beard or praying to a god different than yours make us terrorists or members of Al-Qaeda?" he asked angrily. "If that's the case, then we are all Al-Qaeda," he added sarcastically.

" Qaddafi used the same technique. He said we were backed by Al-Qaeda so that Europe would not intervene and he could annihilate us. Here too you are fighting against a dictator who is violating human rights every day and killing his own people."

Firas warned that the West's passive approach towards the Syrian conflict is contributing to the rise of pro-Qaeda sentiment among the people and rebels.

"It is undeniable that in Syria, as elsewhere, there are people who support Al-Qaeda," Firas says.

"I have met a number of fighters from a small group very close [to Al-Qaeda] and it would definitely scare you to talk to them.

They are very radical and they hate everything that comes from the West."

Abu Omar echoes similar fears.

"These people are beginning to smear the Syrian revolution," he laments.

"But what we must understand is that this is not a religious war; this is a war for a people's freedom. We have not come from Libya to fight against Shiites or Alawites, but the troops who support the regime, regardless of their faith."

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

- **UN chief: Syrian army, rebels set to fight to bitter end**

UN chief Ban Ki-moon warned that the Syrian government and rebels seem intent on fighting to the bitter end, as opposition fighters seized a crossing on the Turkish border.

Ban said the conflict will top the agenda at next week's UN General Assembly summit of world leaders, even though there is no formal meeting on Syria, and that the

international body may offer a new strategy for peace.

"Unfortunately both sides, government and opposition forces, seem to be determined to see the end by military means," said Ban, speaking 18 months into the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's rule.

"I think military means will not bring an answer," he told reporters. He went on to call for "political dialogue reflecting the genuine aspirations and will of the Syrian people."

The new UN envoy on children in conflict, Leila Zerrougui, said the world body was investigating Syrian rebel groups as well as government forces for attacks that have killed children.

"We have received information concerning indiscriminate bomb attacks which have killed children in Damascus and other areas, and continue to document incidents committed by armed actors, such as the Syrian Free Army, who may have children associated with their forces," Zerrougui told the UN Security Council.

Assad meanwhile told the visiting foreign minister of key ally Iran that the uprising targeted both their governments and their allies across the region.

He said the war engulfing Syria was targeting the "axis of resistance," a term Syria, Iran and Lebanon's Shiite movement Hezbollah use to refer to their common opposition to Israel.

On the ground, Syrian rebels seized a crossing on the Turkish border Wednesday, the fourth they have captured in recent months.

Turkish media footage showed rebel fighters pulling down the regime flag at a crossing on the main highway between the city of Raqa in northeastern Syria and the Turkish city of Sanliurfa.

Turkey's Anatolia news agency reported that the rebels tore down Assad's pictures to celebrate the capture, but an opposition activist in Raqa said that fighting was still raging as government troops tried to recapture the crossing.

Meanwhile, rebels withdrew from three southern districts of Damascus after weeks of heavy combat and shelling, while the army bombarded parts of the capital, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The bodies of 11 people were found in the Jobar district of Damascus, some of them belonging to people who had been detained by security forces, the Britain-based Observatory said, adding that nationwide at least 68 people were killed in violence on Wednesday, 50 of them civilians.

A network of activists, the Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC), described the Al-Hajar al-Aswad, Qadam and Assali districts, as well as the Yarmuk Palestinian refugee camp, as "disaster areas."

Ban said that UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, who just wrapped up his first visit to Syria and its neighbors since taking up his post earlier this month, may put a plan to Assad's government after next week's UN talks.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi called for a Syrian solution to the conflict as he visited Damascus for talks with Assad.

Salehi said the country was "facing a problem, and we hope that this problem can be solved as soon as possible."

But he added that "Syria has very strong, solid ties with Iran, especially at the political level."

The former head of Syria's chemical arsenal, Major General Adnan Sillu, was quoted by British newspaper The Times as saying he believed the regime would eventually use those weapons against civilians.

The Times quoted Sillu as saying that before his defection three months ago he had been involved in "serious discussion about the use of chemical weapons, including how we would use them and in what areas."

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- **Syria opposition says wary of Iran in contact group**

The head of Syria's main opposition coalition expressed reservations on Wednesday about the presence of staunch Damascus ally Iran in the regional contact group on the strife-torn country.

"We have informed the Qatari leadership of our reservations over the matter of having Iran join the quartet," Abdel Basset Sayda, chairman of the Syrian National Council, told AFP in Doha after meeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem.

"We appreciate the return of Egypt to its regional role, but I think Iran is involved in what is happening in Syria."

Several Western and Arab countries accuse Iran of providing military aid to the embattled regime of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad.

Iran denies such accusations, and earlier this week called for a simultaneous halt to the fighting by both regime and rebel forces.

Tehran has proposed that the four countries in the so-called "contact

group”—Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey—send observers to Syria in an effort to quell the violence there.

Last month, the United Nations withdrew its own observers after both sides failed to respect an April ceasefire to which they had committed themselves.

On Wednesday, Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, who met Assad, said on arrival at Damascus airport that a solution to the 18-month conflict lies "only in Syria and within the Syrian family."

The uprising, which has steadily militarized in the face of government repression, has left more than 27,000 people dead since it erupted in March 2011, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Civilians have borne the vast brunt of the violence.

The United Nations puts the toll at 20,000.

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

- **Turkey finds jet downed by Syria in international airspace**

A Turkish jet that crashed in June was downed after a Syrian missile exploded nearby in international airspace, the army said Wednesday, three months after an incident that heightened tensions between the two neighbors.

The probe by the army prosecutor into the downing of the two-seater F4 Phantom found that it crashed into the eastern Mediterranean after a Syrian missile exploded near its rear side, the army said in a statement.

The final report says the Turkish plane fell "due to the blast effect that incapacitated the pilots and the plane," causing a dramatic loss of altitude. The two pilots aboard were killed.

The report reiterates Turkey's official position that the plane was shot down in international airspace, a claim rejected by Damascus.

In July, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told a Turkish newspaper that he regretted that his country's defense forces shot down the jet, but insisted the plane was in Syrian airspace at the time.

The army prosecutors said there was no trace of anti-aircraft ammunition on the wreckage retrieved from the water after the incident, rejecting Damascus's claim.

The June 22 incident exacerbated tensions between the one-time allies, with Ankara vowing a harsh response to any border violations by Syria, and both sides have sent military reinforcements to the frontier.

Some media reports, including in the international press, say the plane was in Syrian airspace and was shot down by shore-based anti-aircraft guns after the Turkish jet provoked Syrian air defenses.

But Turkish officials have repeatedly disputed the reports, insisting the plane was brought down by surface-to-air missiles, which have longer ranges and can strike down the aircraft in international airspace.

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

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Bahrain accepts "90 percent" of critical UN rights report

Bahrain said Wednesday it accepted "90 percent" of reforms urged by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in the wake of a popular uprising, amid US criticism that the kingdom was dragging its feet.

"The government of Bahrain is pleased to fully accept 145 out of 176 recommendations and partially accept 13 more," Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa told the Council, adding that "significant challenges remain."

"We have undertaken unprecedented reforms," he said, responding to numerous recommendations by the Council first made in May and covering notably Bahrain's criminal justice system, the prevention of torture and the rights of women, children and minorities.

The Bahraini representative also pointed to the creation of a special unit tasked with investigating mistreatment by security services.

But he added: "Some, unfortunately believe that continued unrest on the streets affords them a political advantage. To keep up the momentum and media coverage, they fuel the flames of extremism and violence."

Since February 2011, thousands of anti-government protesters have staged regular demonstrations and called for reforms in the Gulf kingdom, which is ruled by the minority Sunni Khalifa family.

The Shiite-led opposition's demands for an elected government involve constitutional changes that would reduce the power of the dynasty.

While the 21st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva saw several countries including China, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Yemen applaud Bahrain for its moves so far, the United States was less forthcoming.

"The government needs to be attendant to accountability," Michael Posner, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, told reporters outside the chamber, adding that progress was "slowing down."

"We have yet to see a successful prosecution of anyone in connection with some of the torture cases and deaths in custody last year. It's now a long period," he said, adding that he planned to meet the Bahraini representative later in the day.

Cases involving doctors and prominent human rights activists still in detention or pending after the demonstrations "need to be resolved," he added.

While acknowledging continued violence on the streets involving "Molotov cocktails and young kids throwing things at the police," Posner criticized the "excessive force, large amounts of tear gas" used by police in response.

"Those are things that are not helping to lead to an environment where a negotiation dialogue is going to be fruitful," he said, adding that Washington would continue to hold discussions with Bahrain on police and labor reform, trade union membership and the freedom of expression.

"Human rights issues in Bahrain are critically important and they actually help reinforce our security interests. A stable, healthy democratic Bahrain where human rights issues are dealt with appropriately is one that is going to be a strong ally and we need that," said the US representative.

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) said on Tuesday that 80 people have died in Bahrain since the start of the violence on February 14 last year, including 34 since the release of a report by an independent commission of inquiry on November 23.

Earlier this month UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon sharply criticized tough jail terms imposed on 13 leading Bahraini opposition figures, calling on the kingdom to ensure the right to a fair trial.

The jail terms, which included seven life sentences, were imposed on charges of plotting to overthrow the monarchy during last year's protests.

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- **Saudi court orders jail and lashes to three Shiites, activists say**

A Saudi court in the eastern Qatif district sentenced Wednesday three men to up to eight months in jail and 100 lashes each for participating in violence during Shiite protests, activists said.

One man was sentenced for eight months, while two others received seven months jail term "for taking part in riots last year," an activist said on condition of anonymity.

The court began this summer the trials of several Shiites arrested over protests in Qatif, in the Eastern Province, and has already sentenced some to jail, the activist said.

The lists of charges include "taking part in mob rallies and vandalizing public and private properties, as well as possessing illegal guns," the activist added.

Confrontations had intensified over the past months between police and protesters from the Sunni-dominated kingdom's marginalized Shiites—estimated at about two million and mostly concentrated in the Eastern Province.

A policeman and an armed protester were killed in clashes in early August, as a security patrol came under heavy gunfire from four armed rioters on motorbike in Qatif, the Interior Ministry said.

Two Shiite protesters were killed in July, triggering attacks on government buildings in Qatif.

In May, Amnesty International said seven people had been killed and a number of others injured in clashes between the authorities and protesters in the region since November.

Qatif witnessed a spate of demonstrations after an outbreak of violence between Shiite pilgrims and religious police in the Muslim holy city of Medina in February 2011.

The protests escalated when the kingdom led a force of Gulf troops into neighboring Bahrain the following month to help crush a Shiite-led uprising against the Sunni monarchy there.

Rights groups say more than 600 people from Qatif have been arrested since spring 2011, but most of them were released.

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- **Saudi Arabian aid to Arab Spring countries \$3.7 billion, IMF says**

Oil-rich Saudi Arabia has distributed \$3.7 billion in aid to countries touched by the Arab Spring, most of it to Egypt and Jordan, a report by the International Monetary Fund showed Wednesday.

Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's wealthiest country, has pledged nearly \$17.9 billion in support for fellow Arabs since the pro-democracy revolt erupted in Tunisia in January 2010 and spread throughout the region, toppling and shaking authoritarian governments.

Themselves unnerved by the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and neighboring Bahrain and Yemen, Riyadh promised key allies Cairo \$4 billion, Bahrain and Oman \$5.0 billion, Yemen \$3.6 billion and Jordan \$2.65 billion.

It also pledged \$750 million to Tunisia, \$1.25 billion to Morocco and \$340 million to the West Bank and Gaza.

But most of the aid remains to be distributed, the IMF said in an annual report on the Saudi economy.

The IMF praised Riyadh for having provided "important support to the global economy during a period of high uncertainty, including through its actions in stabilizing the global oil market."

"Spillovers from higher growth and fiscal spending, together with increased financial assistance, have positively impacted the region," the IMF said.

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

- **Yemen boosts security for French mission**

Yemeni authorities Wednesday beefed up security around the French embassy in Sanaa after a French weekly published cartoons of a naked Prophet Mohammed, a security official told AFP.

"Security reinforcements were deployed today [Wednesday] around the French embassy in Sanaa," the official said on condition of anonymity. "These measures

were taken based on the embassy's request."

Wednesday's publication of the controversial images by the satirical French magazine Charlie Hebdo comes against a background of violent protests across the Muslim world, which first erupted early last week, over an anti-Islam film made in California and posted on the Internet.

The film sparked violent protests also in Yemen.

On September 13, an angry mob of protesters tried to storm the US embassy grounds and clashed with Yemeni security forces, leaving four dead. The embassy has since suspended all consular services for two weeks.

The United States also deployed a 50-strong Marine counter-terrorism unit to Yemen to help protect the embassy in the face of the protests.

Earlier the French foreign ministry in Paris said France would close its embassies and schools in around 20 countries on Friday because of fears of being targeted by

angry Muslim protesters after the publication of the cartoons.

Meanwhile, Yemeni cleric Abdul Majid al-Zendani, who is suspected by Washington of financing terrorism, called for legal action against the producers of the anti-Islam film, "Innocence of Muslims."

Zendani, at a news conference, insisted that the Yemeni government "demand Washington's embassy file a complaint against the producers of the film."

He also called on Washington "to officially apologize to Muslims" for the film and for withdrawing "foreign forces" from Yemen.

The US ambassador in Sanaa Gerald Feierstein insisted Tuesday that the Marine reinforcements deployed to Yemen were on a temporary mission with limited duties.

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

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Bomb attack kills two in Afghanistan

Press TV

September 19, 2012

At least two security personnel have been killed and five others injured in a bomb attack near a police station in the western Afghan province of Herat, Press TV reports.

The bombing on Wednesday was carried out at 6:30 a.m. local time in a police parking lot in the Adraskan district of the province, located about 640 kilometers (396 miles) west of the capital, Kabul, said Abdolraouf Ahmadi, a local police spokesman.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but similar incidents are usually blamed on the Taliban militants.

On Tuesday, 12 people, including South Africans, were killed in a car bomb attack targeting a vehicle carrying foreigners to Kabul International Airport.

Violence in Afghanistan has been on the rise in recent months despite the presence of thousands of US-led foreign forces in the war-weary country.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror.

The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but years into the invasion, insecurity continues to rise across the country.

- **Clash leaves an Afghan police, 9 Taliban dead**

PARUN, Afghanistan, Sept. 19 (Xinhua) -- One police and nine Taliban militants were killed as clash erupted in Kamdish district of Nuristan province 180 km east of capital Kabul on Wednesday, police said. "A group of armed Taliban fighters raided Kamdish district headquarters at 04:30 a.m. local time today and police with the support of the national army and air power returned fire, killing nine insurgents on the spot," Ghulam Allah, police inspector general of Nuristan province told Xinhua.

In the gun battle one police was killed and three others sustained injuries, he added.

Meantime, a Taliban purported spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid in talks

with media via telephone from an unknown location confirmed the clash, claiming several police were killed and injured in the conflict.

Since warring sides in Afghan conflicts exaggerate the casualties of rival side, it is difficult to get verification from independent sources.

- **Taliban destroy 13 NATO fuel tankers in southern Afghanistan**

Press TV

September 19, 2012

Taliban militants have destroyed at least 13 NATO supply fuel tankers in Afghanistan's southern Zabul Province, leaving one person injured, Press TV reports.

The incident took place late Tuesday, in the town of Shahr-e Safa.

Shahr-e Safa official, Shadi Khan says such attacks are usually seen when the tankers travel without Afghan approval.

The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack.

Trucks carrying supplies from Pakistan to the US-led forces deployed in Afghanistan come under frequent attacks in the country.

On Monday, an Afghan soldier opened fire on a NATO vehicle in the southern province of Helmand.

Earlier this week, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) restricted joint operations with Afghan forces following a rise in the number of "green on blue" attacks.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. However, more than a decade into the invasion, insecurity continues to rise across the war-torn country.

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

- **More Protests In Afghanistan Over Anti-Islam Film**

September 19, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Hundreds of students in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad have vented their anger at a film made in the United States that Muslims worldwide say insults the Prophet Muhammad.

Some 400 students blocked the main road leading to Kabul, shouting anti-U.S. slogans.

Local official Ahmad Zia Abdulzai said the road was only blocked for about an hour and added that some protesters burned pictures of "a Western country's leader."

Protests also took place in Kabul and the northern city of Konduz earlier this week expressing outrage at the low-budget film "Innocence of Muslims."

Based on reporting by AFP and dpa

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

- **10 Taliban militants give up fighting in N. Afghanistan**

PUL-E-KHUMRI, Afghanistan, Sept. 19 (Xinhua) -- Ten Taliban fighters under Mawlawi Abdul Fatah handed over their weapons and joined the government-backed peace process in Afghanistan's

Baghlan province, 160 km north of capital Kabul on Wednesday.

"With joining these dissident brothers, the peace and security will be further stabilized in Baghlan," provincial governor Munshi Abdul Majid said during a ceremony welcoming the former fighters.

Fatah and his men who were active against government in Julga district over the past couple of years asked government to provide job opportunities for them and accelerate reconstruction process in Julga district.

The governor in his speech vowed to spare no efforts in providing jobs to the former militants.

According to officials, more than 3,000 Taliban fighters have joined the government-backed peace process over the past year, a claim rejected by Taliban as groundless.

<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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