



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

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Batı'yla İlişkiler



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1. IRAQ

- **Peshmerga Budget Next on Agenda in Baghdad-Erbil Talks**

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region, Sep 26 — After Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) renewed exportation of oil as a goodwill gesture toward the central government, tensions between Baghdad and Erbil seem to have eased.

Now, there are new attempts to resolve the Peshmerga budget issue, one of the three main issues between Baghdad and the KRG.

In the Iraqi constitution, the Peshmerga is described as the “Kurdistan Region’s guardian.” The constitution also regards the Peshmerga as part of the Iraqi defense system, and therefore its budget must be provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.

However, the spokesperson for the KRG Ministry of Peshmerga says that his ministry has not received its budget from Iraq’s Ministry of Defense for the past five years.

Every year, during the budget debate in Iraqi Parliament, the majority approves

that the central government must provide a budget for the Peshmerga forces.

Jabbar Yawar, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Peshmerga, told Rudaw that they have not received their budget from the central government due to the “suspension of agreements.”

Yawar estimates that the total budget Baghdad has withheld from the Peshmerga is around USD\$7 million.

“Since 2007, a total budget of \$50 million has been allocated to Iraq’s Ministry of Defense,” he said. “The KRG’s Ministry of Peshmerga was entitled to 17 percent of the budget, which makes for a total of \$7 million.”

Hamid Mutlaq, a member of the security and defense committee in Iraqi Parliament, told Rudaw, “The Peshmerga budget issue has not been discussed by the committee.”

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/5246.html>

- **Shabak deputy accuses Nujaifi of hindering his sect's regiment formation**

Shafaq News, Sep 26 / The member of Nineveh provincial council of Shabak , Qusay Abbas accused on Wednesday, political parties of working to obstruct the formation of a special regiment of Shabak in their areas within the province, while Nineveh governor , Ethel al-Nujaifi insisted on his rejection to form a regiment as well as these accusations.

Abbas said during the meeting of Nineveh provincial council that was held today and attended by "Shafaq News" that "the security issue of forming the regiment in Hamdaniya district was magnified by some specific parties for political purposes."

Abbas added that "the formation of the regiment is not an attempt to stir up sectarian strife as claimed by some officials, including the governor of Nineveh, Ethel al-Nujaifi, as he called the federal government to speed up the formation of the regiment.

"Paying attention to the security of Shabak territory by their people is a

natural matter because they are worthwhile to protect their lands where they have lived and know for thousands of years."

Abbas added that " Shabak land and their areas of Hamdaniya district has been exposed specifically this year for several bombings that effected mosques , Shiite mosques, schools and houses, which claimed the lives of more than 700 Shabak people as a result of the unwillingness of most of the political parties of their presence in the province."

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/3641-shabak-deputy-accuses-nujaifi-of-hindering-his-sects-regiment-formation-.html>

- **Khuzai denies to Clinton using Iraqi skies to arm Syrian Regime**

Baghdad, Sep 26 (AIN) –The Iraqi Vice-President Khudhair al-Khuzai denied in a meeting with the US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, the reports of using the Iraqi skies to arm the Syrian Regime.

A statement by Khuzai's office cited Wednesday "Khuzai met Clinton in New York on Wednesday and discussed with

her the regional and international issues as well as the means of mutual cooperation between Iraq and the US.”

The statement added “Khuzai stressed the importance of the US adherence to the Strategic Framework Agreement concluded between Iraq and the US.”

“Khuzai also emphasized the necessity of preventing the display of the Anti-Islam movie which defames the Great Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) which insulted all religions and gives a free chance for the terrorist organizations to attract angry young people,” the statement mentioned.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19416

- **Kuwaiti PM highlights "remarkable developments" in relations with Iraq in GA speech**

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 26 (KUNA) -- After nearly 22 years since Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the aftermath of the deterioration of relations between the two neighboring Arab nations, Kuwait highlighted "remarkable positive

developments" in relations with Iraq after HH the Amir of Kuwait's milestone visit to Iraq earlier this year.

"Kuwait-Iraqi relations have witnessed remarkable positive developments, as the State of Kuwait has let bygones be bygones to open up a new chapter in ties between the two neighboring countries," said Representative of HH the Amir at the 67th session of the United National General Assembly, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Wednesday.

"HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's milestone visit to Baghdad to attend the Arab Summit late last March has given great impetus to the relations with Iraq." He added that the Iraqi Premier Nuri Al-Maliki's visit to Kuwait on March 14 has also helped restore confidence and create a congenial atmosphere for a new chapter for relations.

"Moreover, the Joint Kuwaiti-Iraqi Committee convened in April, and the two sides have reached several important points of understanding on some of the pending issues as well as agreeing on a plan of action to accelerate Iraq's

fulfillment of its UN obligations, in order to end the sanctions imposed on it under the UNSC Chapter VI after the occupation of Kuwait," he said.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Jaber lauded the UN's role in resolving international disputes, but underlined the need for restructuring the UN's organizations and upgrading its mechanisms to help meet growing challenges on the international arena.

In this regard, he called for fair and evenhanded representations for world countries in its organizations, particularly the Security Council.

"The State of Kuwait underscores the importance of reforming the UNSC to better reflect the new international reality and ensure a proper representation of Arab and Muslim countries in line with their size, contributions and roles in defending the goals and principles of the UN and its charters," Sheikh Jaber said.

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2264923&language=en>

- **Iraq calls for stopping building Turkish dams**

BRUXELLES, Sep 26 / Aswat I-Iraq: Iraq called for the assistance of the European Union to press Turkey stopping building dams that will "kill the Iraqi people" and signing an agreement for water division.

Prime Minister's Political Advisor Sadiq al-Rikabi said, before the EU Foreign Relation Committee, here, that "these dams will kill the Iraqi people by thirst".

He was speaking before the committee that discussed the situation in Iraq, relations with EU, joint cooperation agreement, energy and investment dossiers, as well as the human rights issues.

"Though our trade relations with Turkey reached to 12 billion dollars annually, Turkey is still refusing to discuss water issues with us", he added.

Commenting on freedom of expression and killing of journalists, he pointed out that "freedom of opinion in Iraq is unique, in comparison to the region that might reach to a state of chaos".

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28is3raa55k0g2fpvwy2tmjgmr%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150681&l=1

- **Turkey delivers military equipment to border with Iraq**

Turkey has begun delivering military equipment to the border with Iraq today, the newspaper Yeni Safak reported with reference to the Turkish General Staff.

According to the General Staff, Turkey will conduct the operation against militants of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party, which will be called "Fall cleaning".

Earlier, head of the Iraqi parliamentary security committee Iskander Witwit said that any Turkish military aircraft that will penetrate into Iraq with the aim of the operation will be shot down.

Previously, it was also reported that the Turkish government has appealed to the parliament to extend the mandate for cross-border operations against the groups of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

The period of the previous mandate expires on October 17. The new mandate

is expected to be granted for one year. The mandate for cross-border operations covers the territory of northern Iraq.

The Turkish parliament for the first time entitled the army to strike at PKK terrorist bases in the neighboring country in 2007. The tension connected with frequent attacks of PKK militants strengthened in Turkey.

The conflict between Turkey and the PKK has lasted for over 25 years. The PKK is recognised as a terrorist organisation by both the UN and the EU.

<http://en.trend.az/regions/met/turkey/2069880.html>

- **Turkish military chief says could strike heavily at PKK in Iraq**

ISTANBUL, Sept 26 (Reuters) - Turkey's military has the capability to launch a sustained operation against a Kurdish militant base in Iraq and believes that the group's members are also receiving training in Syria and Iran, the head of the armed forces said in a rare interview.

General Necdet Ozel told the Turkiye newspaper that a sustained assault on the

main base of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the Qandil mountain region of northern Iraq was "technically possible" but gave no details on whether such an operation was planned.

Clashes in recent months between Turkey's armed forces and militants from the PKK - considered a terrorist organisation by Ankara, the United States and European Union - have been among the heaviest since the group took up arms 28 years ago.

Turkey has stepped up air operations on suspected PKK rebels in northern Iraq over the past year after an increase in PKK attacks, fuelling tensions between Ankara and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

"They are very well protected and frequently change location. We are working to render them ineffective," Ozel said of the PKK's leaders, using a phrase frequently employed by Turkish military officials to describe the killing of militants.

Asked whether the PKK had camps in Syria and Iran, Ozel said: "The terror organisation has terrorist groups in the

countries you mention. Terrorists are educated in these camps."

Ankara has linked the surge in PKK violence to the unrest in neighbouring Syria and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has accused Syria's President Bashar al-Assad of arming the PKK militants.

<http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/turkish-military-chief-says-could-strike-heavily-at-pkk-in-iraq/>

- **Iraq against nuclear weapons, PM advisor**

BRUXELLES, Sep 26 / Aswat al-Iraq: Iraq confirmed it is against the presence of nuclear weapons in the region, stressing that any escalation with Iran will affect Iraqi security and economic affairs.

Prime Minister's Political Advisor Sadiq al-Rikabi said, before the EU Foreign Relation Committee, here, that "Iraq aims at turning aside previous stands and build new positive and fruitful relations with the neighboring countries, as well as other countries of the world".

He was speaking before the committee that discussed the situation in Iraq,

relations with EU, joint cooperation agreement, energy and investment dossiers, as well as the human rights issues.

Rikabi pointed Iraqi concern for the tension between Iran and the European community, because "any escalation will affect Iraqi oil exports through Hormuz straits".

Commenting on Iranian support to the Syrian regime, he pointed out that "Iran expressed its total support to Syria, but our problem is that the fall of the Syrian regime will create a state of vacuum in the region, as well as the presence of Qaeda organization there".

[http://www.en.aswataliraq.info/\(S\(is3raa55k0g2fpvwy2tmjgmr\)\)/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150682&l](http://www.en.aswataliraq.info/(S(is3raa55k0g2fpvwy2tmjgmr))/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=150682&l)

- **Iraq says Shell denies oil talks with Kurdistan**

BAGHDAD, Sept 26 (Reuters) - Iraq said on Wednesday that Royal Dutch Shell has denied starting talks with Iraqi Kurdistan to sign energy deals with the semi-autonomous region.

Sources told Reuters last week that Shell was exploring possibilities in Iraqi Kurdistan, encouraged by the example of rivals who were risking Baghdad's anger by moving into the northern region while developing oilfields in the south.

"We don't have any discussions with the Kurdish regional government about working in the region," Shell's vice-president Hans Nijkamp told Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Hussain al-Shahristani, according to a statement from Shahristani's office.

Shell, contacted by Reuters on Wednesday, said it had no comment on the Iraqi government statement.

"Over time, we want to work in all of Iraq, but for the time being we've got three mega-projects on the go (in southern Iraq)," a spokesman said, repeating a statement made last week.

Competitors Exxon Mobil and Total have gone largely unpunished by Baghdad for their northern forays.

<http://af.reuters.com/article/commodities/News/idAFL5E8KQCBB20120926>

- **Iraq prepares to distribute oil revenue surplus to citizens**

The Iraqi Ministry of Planning on Wednesday (September 26th) announced it prepared a new plan to distribute a percentage of the surplus from Iraqi oil revenues to citizens.

"The ministry prepared a plan to distribute 25% of the surplus of Iraqi oil export revenues to citizens, based on statistical records from the Iraqi Ministry of Trade and the social welfare directorate," Planning Minister Ali Shukri said at a press conference.

"The ministry will soon present the plan to the Iraqi parliament for approval as per the constitution, and will start distributing that surplus money to citizens as of next month through food ration cards," he said.

http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/newsbriefs/2012/09/26/newsbrief-07

- **Bolani calls government to give priority to Mutanabi Street**

Baghdad, Sep 26 (AIN) –The former Interior Minister and the MP of the Iraqiya

Slate, Jawad al-Bolani, stated "Celebrating the poet, Mutanabi, is not only by holding a festival for him as being a poet, but also by giving a priority to the street of culture that holds his name."

In a press statement received by AIN on Wednesday, Bolani said "Mutanabi Street suffers from many problems and lack of organization in addition to neglecting it by the government which became the reason behind the reduction of the number of its visitors."

He called "The government to have a responsible stance over developing this street to bring its glory back because it is one of the important Streets of Baghdad."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19428

2. IRAN

- **Iran sanctions having effect, says Israel deputy minister**

International sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program are having an effect, but have not yet convinced Tehran to step

back, Israel's deputy foreign minister said on Thursday.

"Iran is on the verge of bankruptcy because of the sanctions, and there are growing protests against the ayatollahs, but these sanctions have not dissuaded the regime in power in Tehran from pursuing its nuclear ambitions," Danny Ayalon told Israeli public radio.

Israel has warned it could launch pre-emptive strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities, arguing they mask a drive for a weapons capability that poses an existential threat to the Jewish state.

Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful civilian energy and medical purposes only, but it has been slapped with progressively tougher sanctions by the international community.

Israeli officials have repeatedly voiced skepticism about the effectiveness of sanctions on Iran, with a rare public divide opening between the Jewish state and Washington about what should trigger military action against Tehran.

But Ayalon said "our position and that of the United States are getting closer," on the issue.

Later Thursday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was expected to devote most of his address to the United Nations General Assembly to Iran's nuclear program.

In a statement before his departure for New York, Netanyahu said he was "working in every way so that Iran will not have nuclear weapons."

"Israel is a modern and strong state thanks to the strength and talents of its citizens and to our faith in the justice of our cause," he said.

Israel has the Middle East's sole, if undeclared, nuclear arsenal.

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

- **Ahmadinejad blasts absent US, Israel in final UN speech**

Ahmadinejad accuses West of nuclear 'intimidation' in his speech to UN General

Assembly which was boycotted by US, Israel.

UNITED NATIONS - Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Wednesday accused the West of nuclear "intimidation" in his final speech to the UN General Assembly which was boycotted by the United States and Israel.

But the Iranian president steered clear of the toxic remarks about Israel which have sparked mass walkouts at his previous seven appearances before the UN summit.

"Arms race and intimidation by nuclear weapons and weapons of mass-destruction by the hegemonic powers have become prevalent," Ahmadinejad said in a rare outburst in the rambling 35 minute speech.

"Continued threat by the uncivilized Zionists to resort to military action against our great nation is a clear example of this bitter reality," he added in his only reference to Israel.

The Iranian government faces mounting international pressure over its nuclear

drive, which western powers say hides a bid to develop a nuclear bomb.

Iran denies the charge but there has been mounting speculation that Israel could launch a military strike against Iran's bunkered nuclear facilities.

President Barack Obama told the UN assembly on Tuesday that the United States will "do what we must" to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.

Foreign ministers from the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany will meet in New York on Thursday to discuss the increasingly tense nuclear showdown.

Ahmadinejad's last stay in New York as president has been marked by new condemnation of Israel which he refused to mention by name, calling them the "Zionists" or "fake regime".

The United States boycotted the UN speech because of his attacks.

"Over the past couple of days, we've seen Mr. Ahmadinejad once again use his trip to the UN not to address the legitimate

aspirations of the Iranian people but to instead spout paranoid theories and repulsive slurs against Israel," said Erin Pelton, spokeswoman of the US mission to the United Nations.

Israeli diplomats also stayed away, partly because their country is marking Yom Kippur, the holiest Jewish day of the year.

Outside the UN headquarters, demonstrators protesting at Ahmadinejad's presence set up a hangman's gallows to symbolize Iran's widespread use of executions.

Diplomats from Britain, France and Germany sat through Ahmadinejad's address, but found nothing in his lecture-like theological comments to justify a repeat of the walkouts of previous years.



In past speeches, Ahmadinejad has said the US government may have had a role in the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and called for the eradication of Israel.

This time he lashed out at the Western nations for the global economic crisis.

"Creation of worthless paper assets by using influence and control over the world's economic centers constitutes the greatest abuse of history, and is considered a major contributor to global economic crisis," he said.

But much of the speech was devoted to religion.

Ahadinejad hailed the imminent arrival of an "Ultimate Savior."

"God Almighty has promised us a man of kindness," the Iranian leader told world leaders.

Ahadinejad said the savior is "a man who loves people and loves absolute justice, a man who is a perfect human being and is named Imam Al-Mahdi, a

man who will come in the company of Jesus Christ and the righteous."

As a Shiite Muslim, Ahmadinejad reveres Islam's twelfth imam, Muhammad Al-Mahdi, who disappeared from the earth in the tenth century and is said to be due to return, accompanied by Jesus, to save mankind.

The date of his return is not known, but Ahmadinejad indicated that he felt the arrival would come quickly, telling delegates: "Now we can sense the sweet scent and the soulful breeze of the spring, a spring that has just begun."

Ahmadinejad's speech was applauded and he acknowledged the acclaim with a wave before leaving the UN stage for the last time.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54590>

- **Ahmadinejad Stresses Iran's N. Rights, Continued Talks with World Powers**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Tehran is insistent on a full attainment of its nuclear rights, but meantime, reiterated the country's

willingness to continue negotiations with the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) on equal footings and on the basis of international laws.

The Iranian president told the Japanese NHK television channel that all countries have the right to benefit from Peaceful civilian nuclear energy, including the Islamic republic of Iran, and that no one (no country) can deprive the nations of this world from this lawful right.

He stressed that Iran's nuclear issue should be resolved through diplomacy and negotiations, stressing that Iran sees no reasons why the negotiations with the 5+1 Group should not continue , on the basis of fairness, impartiality, and adherence to international laws.

Commenting on relations between Iran and the United States, President Ahmadinejad stressed that for the past 33 years Washington has pursued a hostile policy towards the Islamic Republic, and that bitter memories have been etched into the collective memory of the Iranian nation, regarding America's past meddling and intervention in Iran's internal affairs.

On the situation in Syria, President Ahmadinejad said violence and fighting will not solve the crisis in Syria - in fact the only way to solve the crisis in Syria is for all sides to sit round the negotiating table and to engage in talks and negotiations.

Turning to the production of a blasphemous anti-Islam movie in the United States, President Ahmadinejad said this is another Zionist conspiracy which is meant to divide Muslims, and cause rifts between Muslims, with the aim of salvaging the Zionist regime of Israel which faces imminent collapse.

Regarding Iran's presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Ahmadinejad said as the rotating president of NAM, Iran will present solutions to current world problems, identify their root causes, and will suggest ways of achieving lasting peace.



Ahmadinejad attached special importance to the role of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on the international scene, and called on the UN to boost cooperation with NAM.

In relevant remarks during a meeting with the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the sidelines of the 67th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Sunday, Ahmadinejad called for closer cooperation between the NAM and the United Nations, and said that effective measures should be taken to establish sustainable peace throughout the world.

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=9106242490>

- **Iran Rejects Rumors about Withdrawing Support for Assad**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior Iranian foreign ministry official strongly rejected rumors about Tehran's agreement with an overthrow or resignation of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as "sheer lies".



Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian said on Wednesday that Iran's stance on Syria is "clear and transparent", and stressed the recent claims that Iran has consented to the fall of the Syrian president are "untrue".

"Supporting the Syrian people and Bashar Assad's reforms has always been at the center of Iran's attention," Abdollahian underscored.

He pointed to the meeting of the so-called Contact Group on Syria in Cairo, and reminded that the group has agreed on "political solution to Syria, cessation of hostilities and stop of arms shipments to rebel groups, negotiations between the Syrian government and opposition groups, and democratic decision-making about the future of Syrian by the country's people and through election".

In similar remarks earlier this week, Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi underlined the Iranian legislative body's full support for the Syrian government against the plots hatched by the enemies.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is serious about defending Syria's national sovereignty as (part of) an axis of resistance against the Zionist regime and will stay on the side of that nation," Boroujerdi said in a meeting with head of the Syrian parliament's Foreign Affairs

Commission Fadiya Daib and head of the National Security Commission Mohammad Sobhi Abu al-Shamat here in Tehran.

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

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

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106242484>

- **NAM ready to help reform UN structure: Ahmadinejad**

TEHRAN, Sept. 26 (MNA) - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said that the Non-Aligned Movement is ready to help reform the inefficient structure of the United Nations.

The president of Iran, which assumed the rotating presidency of NAM for a three-year term on August 30, made the remarks in a speech during the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly at the UN Headquarters in New York on Wednesday.

In his speech, Ahmadinejad said, "The United Nations does not currently have the necessary efficiency, and the persistence of this situation, I mean losing hopes in the global structure in regard to defending nations' rights, could seriously undermine international cooperation and the spirit of global cooperation while diminishing the status of the United Nations."

“The United Nations, which has been established with the aim of promoting justice and restoring universal rights, has gotten caught in the trap of discrimination and has paved the way for the... oppression of the entire world by a handful of countries and has fanned the flames of its inefficiency in practice. The existence of the right of veto and the monopoly of power of the Security Council has led to the restriction of the exercise of rights by and the protection of the rights of nations,” he added.

“We should pool our collective efforts to help reform the structure of the United Nations according to the interests of all and the interests of the world. Given this, it is important to take this point into consideration that the United Nations belongs to nations, and therefore, the existence of discrimination among members is a great insult to nations. The existence of discrimination and a monopoly at this organization, to whatever extent, will not be acceptable,” Ahmadinejad stated.

He also said, “I insistently ask respected members of the General Assembly and Mr. Secretary General to seriously put the

issue of reforms on their agenda and to develop a proper mechanism to implement (reforms).

“The Non-Aligned Movement is ready to provide assistance to the United Nations in this important task.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1706229>

- **Iran can target any military bases in the world: general**

QOM, Sept. 26 (MNA) – Brigadier General Hossein Salami, the deputy chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, said on Wednesday that Iran’s armed forces are able to target any military base around the world.

“Our military might has reached such a point that today, we are able to target any point or base in the world at any moment and with any intensity,” the Tehran Times quoted Salami as telling a gathering of armed forces in Qom.

Brigadier General Ali Ostad Hosseini, the IRGC commander in Semnan Province, also said on Tuesday that thirty-five U.S.

military bases are within the range of Iran's missiles.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1706231>

- **Iran insists on its right to use of nuclear energy: official**

TEHRAN, Sept. 26 (MNA) – The deputy secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), Ali Baqeri, said on Wednesday that the Islamic Republic insists on its right to have a civilian nuclear energy program.

Baqeri, who is also the country's deputy chief nuclear negotiator, commented on the meeting between SNSC Secretary Saeed Jalili and European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton on September 18 in Istanbul, saying that after the meeting, Ashton described the talks as positive and constructive.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1706175>

China against unilateral sanctions on Iran

- **Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei**

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei has reaffirmed Beijing's opposition to unilateral sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear energy program.

"The Chinese side has long been opposed to any unilateral sanctions on Iran," Xinhua quoted Hong as saying on Wednesday.

He said that sanctions will fail to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue and will only further complicate the matter, which he said will not be to the interest of regional peace and stability.



He called on all parties involved to boost dialog and cooperation to seek an appropriate solution to the issue through negotiations.

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

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

The United States and the European Union have imposed unilateral sanctions on the Islamic Republic over its nuclear energy program.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/09/27/263784/china-against-unilateral-bans-on-iran/>

- **Iran has sea, land, air defense plans: Cmdr.**

Commander of the Iranian Army

The Islamic Republic of Iran monitors all these maneuvers and will implement plans in proportion to them."

Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces Brigadier General Ahmad-Reza Pourdastan

A senior Iranian commander has downplayed the war games of the United States and some of its allies in the Persian

Gulf, stressing that Iran has sea, ground and air plans to defend its borders.



"The Islamic Republic of Iran monitors all these maneuvers and will implement plans in proportion to them," Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces Brigadier General Ahmad-Reza Pourdastan told reporters.

He added that the "passive condition" of the US-led war games in the region was indicative of Iran's might.

The US-led anti-mine exercises began on September 16 and are scheduled to wrap up on September 27.

The US Navy has claimed that the maneuvers are purely defensive and not directed at any country.

On September 25, Navy Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Rear-Admiral Ali Fadavi pointed to the US-led mine-sweeping drill and said, “We keep a moment-by-moment watch on every move of the Americans.”

“Over the past years, we have not neglected to enhance our naval capabilities, particularly in the field of mines, and these capabilities are unimaginable to the Americans,” the Iranian commander added.

Tehran has repeatedly clarified that its military might is merely based on the nation's defense doctrine of deterrence and poses no threat to other countries.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/09/27/263773/iran-has-sea-land-air-defense-plans/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israeli forces detain teen in Balata camp**

NABLUS (Ma'an) -- Israeli forces raided a refugee camp east of Nablus and arrested a Palestinian teenager early Thursday.

Locals identified the detainee from Balata camp as Abdullah Salameh, 16.



An Israeli military spokeswoman confirmed the arrest.

She said another Palestinian was detained in a raid in the Ramallah area.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=523919>

- **Abbas meets Clinton, Ashton ahead of UN speech**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- President Mahmoud Abbas met US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Wednesday on the sidelines of a UN summit, the PA's official Wafa news agency reported.

The report said the meeting in New York was attended by PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat, senior Abbas aides Nabil Abu

Rudeina and Akram Haniyeh, and PLO ambassador Maen Areikat.

Abbas was in New York for the 67th General Assembly of the United Nations, where he plans to seek an upgrade to Palestine's status at the world body.

Also Wednesday Abbas met with European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.



Ashton's representative said that during the discussion she reaffirmed the EU's commitment to the creation of a "sovereign, independent, democratic and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security with Israel."

A statement said the EU was "determined to bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and believes that substantive negotiations aiming at a comprehensive

solution are the best way forward. Ending the conflict is a fundamental interest of the EU as well as of the parties themselves and the wider region."

Abbas and Ashton also discussed Palestinian institution-building and the economic situation of the Palestinian Authority, the statement said. Ashton repeated her call to all the donors to step in and help the PA to overcome the financial and economic crisis and to continue with the building of state institutions.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=523922>

- **Israeli Military Vehicles Cross Borders in Gaza**

GAZA, September 27, 2012 (Wafa) – Israeli military vehicles Thursday crossed the borders in Gaza into the eastern part of the town of Jabalya, north of Gaza, according to witnesses.

They said Israeli forces accompanied by three bulldozers crossed the borders into the town amid heavy gunfire towards Palestinian residents' houses, conducted

combing operations, as well as razed residents' land.

No injuries were reported.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20751>

- **Israeli Forces Work on Palestinian Land for Settlers' Use**

JERICHO, September 26, 2012 (Wafa) – Israeli forces have been working on large areas of land in the Jordan Valley near the villages of Jiftlik and Aqraba as a prelude to take over the land and hand it over to Jewish settlers to plant it, local sources said Wednesday.

They told Wafa that Israeli bulldozers protected by soldiers began awhile ago razing and preparing around 2000 dunums of private Palestinian land to be later planted by settlers with palm trees and vegetables.

Sources said that residents have not been able to plant their land due to the Israeli measures against them, the difficult economic conditions, and the ongoing harassments by Jewish settlers.

Residents said the Israeli measures are proof that the intentions behind taking over the land is for their own economic and personal benefits and not for security reasons as they claim.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=20746>

- **Ayalon: US, Israel working together to set Iran red lines**

Deputy foreign minister says Washington and Israel are coordinating over Tehran's nuclear program, even if not in public; praises Obama's UN speech saying Iran must not be allowed to obtain weapons as very important.

Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon
Photo: Courtesy

Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon said on Thursday that Israel and the US are engaged in a dialogue over setting a red line for Iran's nuclear program, even if it is not set publicly.

In an interview with Israel Radio, Ayalon added that the gaps between Israel and the US over the Iranian nuclear threat are constantly narrowing.

"The dialogue between Israel and the United States about the Iranian issue is going great right now," Ayalon said.

Ayalon added that even though US President Barack Obama did not lay down specific red lines in his Wednesday speech to the UN General Assembly, the fact that he warned against allowing Iran to obtain nuclear weapons is very important.

Click here for full Jpost coverage of the Iranian threat

The deputy foreign minister also commented about the effectiveness of the economics sanctions on Iran.

"There are credible reports that the Iranian economy is on the verge of collapsing, but nothing has been achieved yet," Ayalon said.

"It is in everyone's best interests that [stopping Iran's nuclear program] is achieved using economic, diplomatic and political actions. If these actions don't work, then all other options are on the table," Ayalon added.

Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee chairman Ronnie Bar-On also stressed the importance of covert talks with the United States aimed at setting red lines that could form a pretext for war with Iran, Israel Radio reported.

Netanyahu is expected to lay out his red lines on Iran's nuclear program at his speech at the UN Thursday evening.

<http://www.jpost.com/IranianThreat/News/Article.aspx?id=286284>

- **Barak: Israel can rely only on itself for defense**

At Yom Kippur War memorial service, defense minister says the IDF is ready to confront any challenge, near or far.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak at memorial service Photo: Communications Minister of Defense



Defense Minister Ehud Barak on Thursday reiterated that Israel is ready for any challenge, but cautioned it cannot rely on anyone but itself.

Speaking at a memorial service for the 1973 Yom Kippur War's victims, Barak stated: "The region around us is alight." The IDF and security forces, however, "are ready for any challenge, be it near or far."

Related:

Declassified Yom Kippur war papers reveal failures

He continued: "It is our duty to maintain absolute security at all times, not foster false hopes, ambitions and dreams. When faced with the ultimate test, we can rely on no one but ourselves."

Directing his comments at the bereaved families present at the ceremony, Barak added: "If necessary, we will fight and win every battle, even at painful costs."

The Yom Kippur War, he said, was a turning point in Israeli history.

The annual memorial ceremony for the 2,691 fallen soldiers of the Yom Kippur

War was held in Jerusalem's Mount Herzl and attended by bereaved families, former Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz and Supreme Court Justice Yoram Danziger.

Last week, newly declassified documents released by the IDF archives revealed serious shortcomings leading up to the surprise attack by Egypt and Syria on Israel at the start of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

The shortcomings include a failure to pass on a warning of imminent war from the Mossad handler of Ashraf Marwan – the son-in-law of then- Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser – who allegedly spied on behalf of Israel.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=286301>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Sudan and its South: Partial deal after four days of marathon negotiations**

Juba, Khartoum reach agreements on demilitarised border zone, oil production

but make limited progress on contested areas.

Smiles in front of cameras are not enough

Sudan and South Sudan reached agreements on a demilitarised border zone and oil production but made limited progress on contested areas, their officials said late Wednesday.

"There is agreement on some areas," said South Sudan delegation spokesman Atif Kiir, while his Sudanese counterpart Badr el-din Abdullah Badr spoke of "progress on many issues," with both saying a deal would be inked Thursday.



The partial agreement was reached after four days of marathon negotiations between the former civil war foes, President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan and his

Southern counterpart Salva Kiir, in Ethiopia's capital.

While few details were released, both said a demilitarised border buffer zone -- where troops must withdraw 10 kilometres (six miles) from the de facto line of control along the undemarcated frontier -- had been agreed.

The buffer zone would also potentially cut support for rebel forces in Sudan's Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile regions that Khartoum accuses Juba of backing, just as the South accuses Sudan of arming rebels in its territory.

Economic agreements were also reportedly reached, building on an oil deal last month to ensure South Sudan's stalled production would restart, after a stoppage that has damaged the economies of both nations.

The talks -- originally billed as a one-day summit -- had been hoped to provide a comprehensive solution to the festering disputes that took the rivals to the brink of war earlier this year.

But they did not reach agreement on the contested flashpoint Abyei region or on a series of border zones claimed by both sides.

"The two countries failed to reach an agreement on two issues -- that of Abyei... (and) the second issue is that of the border," Kiir told reporters after the talks ended late Wednesday.

"The two countries have agreed to have another round of talks... mainly on the issue of the border, on the disputed and unclaimed areas," he added.

His counterpart Abdullah said optimistically that the issues would be addressed in the future.

"We have overcome many differences... but here are some differences on Abyei," he said, adding also that resolving border areas claimed by both sides "is going take time".

No dates were given for a potential further round of talks.

It was also not clear if all negotiations had been entirely settled, or whether talks could still continue Thursday.

"Only the final touches remain," Abdullah added.

Amid international pressure on both sides to reach a deal -- after missing a UN Security Council deadline to settle by Saturday -- their teams spent days trying to narrow positions as mediators shuttled between them.

The UN set a deadline for a deal after border fighting broke out in March, when Southern troops briefly wrested the valuable Heglig oil field from Khartoum's control, and Sudan launched bombing raids in response.

The protracted talks under African Union mediation began in Addis Ababa several months before South Sudan split in July 2011 from what was Africa's biggest nation, following an independence vote after decades of war.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54594>

- **Clinton suggests Qaeda link in attack on US mission in Libya**

Confusion reigns as Clinton appears to suggest for first time that militants close to Qaeda are linked to attack on US mission in Libya.

NEW YORK - Confusion reigned Wednesday as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appeared to suggest for the first time that militants close to Al-Qaeda were linked to an attack on a US mission in Libya.

During a speech to a high-level meeting on the crisis in the West African Sahel region, Clinton warned the vast desert area was becoming a powder keg with militants moving into the lawless area and creating instability.

"For some time, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other groups have launched attacks and kidnappings from northern Mali into neighboring countries," Clinton told the meeting, convened by UN chief Ban Ki-moon.

"Now with a larger safe haven, and increased freedom for maneuver,

terrorists are seeking to extend their reach and their networks in multiple directions.

"And they are working with other violent extremists to undermine the democratic transitions underway in North Africa, as we tragically saw in Benghazi," she said.



Some reports maintained Clinton was explicitly saying that Al-Qaeda militants were behind the September 11 assault on the US mission in Benghazi, in which four Americans, including ambassador Chris Stevens, were killed.

Clinton has already acknowledged that it was a "terrorist attack," but the State Department swiftly denied she was affirming that Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was definitely linked to the assault.

"Don't read more into what the secretary said than she actually said," a senior State Department official said.

"What she actually said is that AQ in the Maghreb is working with other violent extremists to try to undermine democratic transitions under way in Africa.

"This something that we've known. This is something that we have been watching."

Questions have swirled about who was behind the Benghazi attack, with the Obama administration and the State Department initially maintaining it arose out of a spontaneous protest against an anti-Islam Internet video.

The explanations about the events surrounding the attack have changed over the past several days, with the White House eventually acknowledging it was an act of terrorism.

The FBI is conducting its own investigation into the attack, and Clinton has also opened an official review into whether proper security measures were taken.

"With regard to the specific issue of who was responsible for the Benghazi attack, as everybody in the administration has said, we can't go beyond our preliminary statements until we have the results of the FBI investigation," the State Department official said.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54597>

- **Ex-Ben Ali mouthpieces detained at military barracks**



Romdhani, Bsaies remanded in custody amid inquiry into improper payments before Tunisian revolution.

TUNIS - A former Tunisian communications minister and a journalist considered mouthpieces of ousted dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali have been

detained at a military barracks pending trial, judicial sources said on Wednesday.

The arrest of Oussama Romdhani and Borhane Bsaies comes during an inquiry into improper payments before the revolution that toppled the Ben Ali regime in January last year.

Bsaies, whose detention was confirmed to AFP by his wife, is accused of receiving an income both from the education ministry and Tunisian telecoms firm Sotetel, something illegal under Tunisian law.

He was a key figure in the country's Atce public relations agency, which under Ben Ali wielded huge power over journalists and foreign correspondents in particular, threatening some of them because of their coverage of the revolution.

Romdhani, who was chief executive of Atce for years, before his appointment as communications minister in 2009, is accused of commanding those who intimidated journalists during the popular uprisings.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54582>

- **Trial begins for Egyptian Christian accused of blasphemy**

Saber case sparks condemnation from human rights groups, raises concerns over freedom of expression under Islamist President Morsi.

CAIRO - The trial opened on Wednesday of an Egyptian Copt accused of blasphemy after posting on the Internet an anti-Islam video that sparked violent protests worldwide, a reporter said.

Albert Saber, 27, was arrested at his home in Cairo on September 13 after neighbours alerted authorities that he had posted clips from "Innocence of Muslims" on social networking sites.

The low-budget film made in the United States caused outrage for mocking Islam and portraying the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) as violent and immoral.

Saber faces up to five years behind bars in a case that has sparked condemnation from human rights groups and raised concerns over freedom of expression under Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, the first president after an uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak.

"Albert has nothing to do with the offensive film but the case was a way to calm down popular anger," Saber's lawyer Ahmed Ezzat, a Muslim, said outside the court.

The trial "comes in a general atmosphere of discrimination and bad management of justice especially when it comes to minorities," Ezzat said.

Authorities had broken into Saber's home while he was in detention.

His mother, Kariman Masih said she was "shocked, terrified" by what is happening.

"I can't believe all that is happening to us and to my son," she said.

"I'm defending my son and his right to expression. Didn't the revolution call for freedom?," she said.

Ezzat said Saber had launched discussions about religion online and "criticised fundamentalist men of religion."

"The problem is with the articles in the law and not what Albert did. The law

relating to blasphemy can be interpreted in 100 different ways," Ezzat added.

Copts have repeatedly criticised authorities for what they say are double standards when it comes to cases of blasphemy and offence to religion.

Egypt's Christians, who make up six to 10 percent of the 82 million population, have regularly complained of discrimination and marginalisation. They have also been the target of numerous sectarian attacks.

Ahmed Seif al-Islam, a lawyer and member of the National Council for Human Rights who attended the hearing, said the case "is linked to the charged atmosphere caused by the film."

"We are here to support a fair trial, fairness has nothing to do with religion," said Seif al-Islam.

Saber's case is likely to fuel the fears of Egypt's Copts who fear that the anti-Islam film will lead to further persecution at home, particularly as "Innocence of Muslims" was apparently produced by a Coptic Christian film-maker in the United States.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54581>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Electoral law dispute heats up ahead of parliamentary committees meeting

Lebanon's Joint Parliamentary Committees are scheduled on Thursday to discuss an approved electoral draft law based on proportional representation to be adopted for the upcoming parliamentary elections, according to An-Nahar newspaper.

However, the Beirut daily highlighted the "complication and schism" engulfing this matter and downplayed the possibility of reaching political consensus any time soon.

Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) leader MP Walid Jumblatt has reiterated his rejection of an electoral law based on proportionality, saying that he favored the adoption of the 1960 electoral law based on simple majority.

During an interview with As-Safir newspaper published on Thursday,

Jumblatt also voiced his reservation on an electoral law that would divide Lebanon into small constituencies.

"I understand the concerns of some Christian [factions], but embracing small constituencies would come at the expense of [the sectarian] blend [in some Lebanese areas]."

"Shrinking the electoral districts [implies that that we are] approaching the unacceptable orthodox proposal, [which is] impossible [to implement]," Jumblatt added.

The PSP leader also said that no political party consulted his National Struggle Front bloc regarding "small and larger constituencies."

Meanwhile, Speaker Nabih Berri told As-Safir that he had informed Future bloc leader MP Fouad Siniora during their latest meeting that the Taif Accord needed to serve as a starting point to discuss the way electoral districts should be distributed.

The speaker added that he was against an electoral law based on small

constituencies, saying that it was likely to “disintegrate what’s already fragmented.”

Christian parties, like the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb party, affiliated with the March 14 alliance have agreed with the Future Movement on an electoral law based on 50 small constituencies, according to An-Nahar newspaper.

The daily added that the aforementioned electoral proposal will be presented by Lebanese Forces bloc MP George Adwan, Kataeb bloc MP Sami Gemayel and March 14 MP Boutros Harb to the parliament’s General Secretariat on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Change and Reform bloc MP Alain Aoun voiced surprise over claims made by some March 14 Christian groups that he had agreed on the electoral law based on small constituencies during a meeting that took place at the seat of the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkirki.

“I did not examine the proposal and we did not make a decision on it. [All statements issued by the March 14 Christian groups] are inaccurate. The agreement [that took place during the Bkirki meeting] was on the orthodox

proposal and then on proportionality based on 15 electoral constituencies and the [March 14 Christian parties] agreed on it.”

In turn, Change and Reform bloc MP Ibrahim Kanaan said that his group will not reject any attempt to revive the Bkirki meeting in order to bridge gaps between rival Christian parties that are locking horns on the electoral law issue.

The Change and Reform bloc is afflicted with the March 8 alliance—the main political rival to the March 14 coalition.

Furthermore, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea, during an interview with Al-Akhbar newspaper, downplayed the possibility of serious talks kicking off over the upcoming parliamentary elections “before the [March 14 forces] present the electoral proposal that is based on small constituencies.”

He also said that the 1960 electoral law “does not guarantee [fair] representation,” adding that talks were ongoing between his party and the PSP on the controversial electoral law.

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.

However, many March 14 figures spoke out against the approved draft law saying they would support it if it was based on smaller districts, while others said they backed the Orthodox gathering's proposal which states that citizens should vote for candidates affiliated with their own religious sect.

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

- **Jordan charges Syrians with “unlawful assembly”**

Military prosecutors have charged eight Syrians with "unlawful assembly" after riots erupted this week at their refugee camp in northern Jordan, a judicial official said on Thursday.

"State security court prosecutors on Wednesday accused eight Syrian refugees of unlawful assembly and carrying out riots" at the UN-run Zaatari refugee camp

near the border with Syria, the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The men, who face up to three years in jail if convicted, have been remanded in custody for 14 days, he said.

On Monday night, Jordanian anti-riot police fired tear gas to quell a demonstration by angry Syrians protesting their living conditions after they torched a tent and destroyed property in Zaatari.

The next day, the government said it would isolate unmarried men at the camp, which houses more than 30,000 Syrians, to avoid more problems, insisting that Amman "will not tolerate such acts."

In August, similar disturbances took place at the camp, where Jordan said stone-throwing refugees wounded more than 20 police in a protest.

The refugees have repeatedly complained of bad living conditions at the camp, but Jordan, which says it is hosting more than 200,000 Syrian, complains of limited resources to cope with the growing influx.

The UN refugee agency warned Thursday that there could be as many as 700,000 Syrian refugees in neighboring countries by the end of the year, up from 300,000 now.

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

- **Miqati discusses bilateral ties with foreign officials**

Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Miqati met with officials from several countries on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York, the National News Agency reported Thursday.

The premier discussed bilateral ties with the Cypriot President Dimitris Christofias, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Sabah, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem al-Thani, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and Libyan President of the General National Congress, Mohamed al-Megaryef.

With Megaryef, Miqati discussed the importance of reinforcing commercial and economic ties between Lebanon and Libya.

Miqati also called for facilitating the export of Lebanon's apple harvest to Libya, and said that he would ask the Lebanese economic committees to visit Libya and discuss means to reinforce ties.

The Lebanese Forces have repeatedly called on the cabinet to help Lebanese farmers in Mount Lebanon and North Lebanon export their apples.

Miqati also stressed the importance of following up on the issue of the disappearance of Shiite cleric Imam Moussa Sadr.

The Amal Movement claims that Libya is complicit to the 1978 disappearance of its founder, Sadr. Ousted Libya's Moammar Qaddafi had repeatedly denied involvement.

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

- **Future Movement to back electoral law reassuring Christians, says Siniora**

Future bloc leader MP Fouad Siniora said on Wednesday evening that his party

would support any electoral law that “reassures the Christians” in Lebanon.

“We [pledged] to adopt an electoral law based on small constituencies, and we [will] commit to what we [have promised] Patriarch [Bechara Boutros al-Rai],” Siniora said during an interview with the Future television.

Siniora also expected the March 14 alliance to win the upcoming elections.

“The performance of the current cabinet [is marred] by many mistakes; there are also numerous changes taking place in Lebanon and in the region, this is why March 14 is more likely to succeed in the elections,” Siniora said.

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.

However, the Lebanese Forces and the Kataeb Party have called for an electoral law based on small constituencies,

considering that it would provide the best representation for Christians.

The Future bloc leader also commented on gunfire that targeted the convoy of Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun.

“It has been confirmed that there was a shooting, but where, when and how it took place? We still do not know,” Siniora said, calling on the security and judicial forces to follow up on the issue and punish the assailants.

On Saturday evening, Aoun said he was targeted by an assassination attempt after local media reported his convoy came under fire in the southern city of Sidon while returning from a tour in Jezzine.

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

6. SYRIA

- **UNHCR: Up to 700,000 Syrian refugees by year-end**

The UN refugee agency warned Thursday there could be as many as 700,000 Syrian refugees in countries neighboring the war-

torn nation by the end of the year, up from 300,000 now.

"There may be up to 700,000 Syrian refugees in neighboring countries by the end of the year," Panos Moutzsis, the UNHCR's chief coordinator for Syrian refugees, told reporters in Geneva.

"We are running out of time," he added.

Faced with the soaring need for aid, humanitarian agencies upped their call for funds Thursday to \$487.9 million (379.2 million euros) to sustain their operations until the end of the year.

At present, only \$141.5 million in funding is available, just 29 percent of the overall request, Moutzsis said, stressing the urgency of the appeal in the face of an "overwhelming increase" in the number of refugees fleeing the 18-month conflict.

In March, the UNHCR had registered 41,500 Syrian refugees and said it expected the number to rise to 100,000 by the end of this year, but that figure was surpassed in July.

The approach of winter made Thursday's appeal even more important, Moutzsis said, adding that winterized tents, clothing, blankets and heaters were needed to prepare for the "very harsh" winter months.

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

- **Syrian troops cross into Lebanese town, destroy house**

Syrian troops entered the Beqaa town of Masharee al-Qaa on Thursday and destroyed the house of Lebanese citizen Mohammad Aqeel al-Radi, the National News Agency reported.

The report added that heavy Syrian gunfire was heard in the Lebanese area.

Shelling from Syria into Lebanon and cross-border shootings have become regular occurrences.

Lebanon's political scene is deeply divided over the Syrian revolt, with the Western-backed opposition supporting the uprising and the powerful Shiite militant group Hezbollah a staunch backer of President Bashar al-Assad's Baath regime.

[http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?
ID=125478](http://www.nowlebanon.com/Sub.aspx?ID=125478)

- **Syria's 'bloodiest day' leaves scores dead as world leaders clamor for peace**

Over 300 die in bloodiest day of Syria revolt as US Secretary of State Clinton appeals for 'paralyzed' UN Security Council to find way to end violence.

DAMASCUS - More than 305 people were killed across Syria on Wednesday, making it the bloodiest single day of the 18-month revolt, as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appealed for the "paralyzed" UN Security Council to find a way to end the conflict.

"This is the highest toll in a single day since March 2011. And this is only counting those whose names have been documented. If we count the unidentified bodies, the figure will be much higher," director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights Rami Abdel Rahman said by telephone.

A total of 199 of Wednesday's dead were civilians, the Britain-based watchdog said.

In the eastern city of Deir Ezzor, 23 people, including a child and a woman were killed by army gunfire when troops stormed the Jura district.

In Damascus, 17 people, including eight women and three children, were shot dead in the northern Barzeh neighbourhood, the watchdog said.

Another 14 people were killed when two bombs struck the Syrian army headquarters in the heart of Damascus, according to the Observatory.

A rebel officer and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it was an inside job, while an Islamist rebel group said its men carried out the attack, and five of its fighters including a suicide bomber died during the assault. The claims were impossible to verify.

Outside the capital, 40 bodies, including those of women and children, were found in the village of Diabeya.

The previous highest death toll of the uprising was on July 19, when 302 people were killed, according to the Observatory.

More than 30,000 people have been killed in violence since the outbreak of the revolt against the rule of President Bashar al-Assad in March last year.

"The atrocities mount while the Security Council remains paralyzed and I would urge that we try once again to find a path forward" so that the council can try to end the violence, Clinton said.

Her appeal came amid mounting attempts by Western nations to press Russia and China to ease their opposition to UN action against the Assad regime.

Russia, Syria's key ally, and China have used their permanent member Security Council veto to thwart resolutions that could have led to economic sanctions on Syria.

British Prime Minister David Cameron said the blood of children killed in the conflict had become "a terrible stain on the reputation of this United Nations," and blasted "those who have failed to stand up to these atrocities and in some cases aided and abetted Assad's reign of terror."

Arab ministers also weighed calls for an Arab intervention in Syria, and met with UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi on the General Assembly sidelines.

Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki said that his country could support an Arab peacekeeping force, and called Assad "a bloodthirsty dictator."

"We have really pushed for a peaceful solution, but if it is necessary, it must be an Arab peacekeeping force, yes," he said.

The emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, called at the UN General Assembly for an Arab intervention in Syria on Tuesday. However Arab League secretary general Nabil al-Arabi told reporters he did not believe the emir intended it to be a "fighting force."

Western diplomats say they do not expect Russia to weaken its defense of Assad. But China, which does not have the same strategic interests, may be feeling pressure from Arab and other nations over its position.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov showed no sign of changing position

Wednesday, and said violence by the government and opposition had to be condemned.

Separately, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told reporters that Tehran was working to set up a contact group on the conflict in Syria, in a move unlikely to be welcomed by many nations.

He refused to say which states had been approached to join, saying he was hopeful his foreign ministry would soon be making an announcement.

Ahmadinejad also accused "outside forces" of meddling in Syria, without directly naming any countries.

Aid groups in Syria need better access to people ravaged by the war, said European Union humanitarian aid commissioner Kristalina Georgieva.



"With winter approaching, more populations are at risk," Georgieva said after meeting with officials from NGOs and the main countries providing aid to Syria on the sidelines of the General Assembly.

The UN humanitarian affairs chief, Valerie Amos, said that 2.5 million people affected directly or indirectly by the war need aid.

Some 1.2 million people have been displaced inside Syria and another 300,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries, such as Turkey and Lebanon, exerting tremendous pressure on them.

In Beirut, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that more than 30,000 people, most of them civilians, have been killed in violence since the outbreak of a revolt against Assad in March 2011.

The toll does not include thousands of people arbitrarily detained and held in Syrian jails, he added, nor does it include hundreds of unidentified corpses, most of

which were found across the war-torn country in the past three months.

On Wednesday alone, the death toll rose to 343, the highest daily toll since the unrest began, a spokeswoman for the Local Coordination Committees of Syria told CNN.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54591>

- **Two explosions rock heavily fortified Damascus neighborhood**

Two massive explosions targeting the army command headquarters rocked a highly fortified neighborhood in the Syrian capital Wednesday, setting off clashes and a huge fire inside the building, state-run media and residents said.

The Umayyad square is considered to be the most heavily guarded in the country, with the presidential palace standing just meters away from the explosion site. Roads leading to the square have been partially closed by military checkpoints, who are known to conduct extensive searches of people passing through.

All roads in the capital were closed down for nearly one hour, while entrances to the city remain sealed off to those wishing to enter.

Information Minister Omran Zoubi said there were no casualties from the blasts, the latest to hit the city as the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's regime intensifies. But the explosions appear to show the deep reach of the rebels determined to topple the regime.

Witnesses said the explosions were followed by heavy gunfire, suggesting security forces clashed with gunmen in the area.

The army command building was in flames, sending huge columns of thick black smoke that hung over Damascus for several hours following the blasts.

Zoubi, the information minister, said the blasts were caused by two "large, highly explosive" improvised devices, one of which may have been placed "on the inner side of the fence" around the grounds of the army command building. He said the damage inflicted was material and there were no casualties.

"I can confirm that all our comrades in the military command and defense ministry are fine," he told Syrian TV, which is located near the site of the explosion, in a telephone call.

On July 18, rebels penetrated the heart of Syria's power elite, detonating a bomb inside a high-level crisis meeting in Damascus that killed three top regime officials, including Assad's brother-in-law and the defense minister. Other large blasts have targeted the headquarters of security agencies in the capital, killing scores of people this year.

On Tuesday, several bombs went off inside a Damascus school that activists said was being used by regime forces as a security headquarters. Several people were wounded.

<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/two-explosions-rock-army-command-hq-damascus>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Two Saudi activists shot dead

Two men were shot dead on Wednesday when Saudi security forces stormed a house to arrest a wanted man in the Qatif region, the focal point of unrest by an anti-regime movement.

Activists have demonstrated against what they perceive as systematic discrimination against minorities in the kingdom. But Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil producer, has avoided the sort of broad uprising that has ousted Arab autocrats elsewhere.

Saudi authorities were trying to arrest one of 23 men who the government said were wanted for stirring unrest in Qatif, where 15 people have been killed since November in clashes and protests.

"He and his companions opened fire on the security forces and, in dealing with the situation as it required, it resulted in the death of the wanted man ... and one of his companions, and the wounding of two others and the arrest of a third," Saudi Press Agency reported, citing the government security spokesman.

The wanted man was identified as Khaled Abdulkarim Hassan al-Labad. Activists in the village of Awamiya in Qatif, the center of Saudi unrest, said a third man was killed in a car. They distributed photos showing wounds in his neck.

A Saudi Interior Ministry spokesman described that as an unrelated incident in which one man died and another was injured after their vehicle was fired at by unknown assailants.

"It was a separate incident and an investigation is ongoing," the spokesman said. Preliminary information suggests a person wanted by the security forces for criminal activity in Qatif may have been involved in the attack, he added.

Activists say protest rallies have been fueled by the 15 deaths in Qatif, arrests of protesters and a heavy security presence. Activists say some of those killed were shot during peaceful protests.

Qatif is in Eastern Province, the hub of Saudi oil output.

Saudi authorities say that the deaths have all been the result of exchanges of fire after security forces were shot at. One of those killed was a security official.

"The security forces will not hesitate to pursue wanted people and troublemakers on the ground and to arrest them," the security spokesman was quoted as saying by the press agency.

<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/two-saudi-activists-shot-dead>

- **Bahrain activist jailed for ripping picture of king**

The daughter of an imprisoned Bahraini activist was jailed for two months on Wednesday for tearing up a picture of the Gulf Arab state's king, her lawyer said.

Zainab al-Khawaja is better known by her Twitter handle @angryarabiya, where she wrote about human rights abuses in the Gulf monarchy on a nearly daily basis.

"For the past 5 hours, I've had security following me closely wherever I go. They wait for me outside every store I go into," she wrote two weeks before her arrest in

an early morning police crackdown that left 45 people injured.

Bahrain, headquarters of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, has been in turmoil since pro-democracy protests erupted last year and were put down by the ruling government.

Al-Khawaja, daughter of leading activist Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, was arrested at a protest in August that was dispersed by security forces using tear gas and birdshot.

Her defense lawyer called the sentence harsh.

"Usually sentences for such crimes are just fines," Mohammed al-Jishi told Reuters by telephone from Manama.

Jishi said she faced eight more charges related to participating in protests. The next court hearing is on Oct. 4.

Her father went on a hunger strike for more than three months earlier this year to protest against his imprisonment.

The ruling Al Khalifa family used martial law and help from Gulf neighbors to put

down last year's uprising, but unrest has resumed.

Protesters and police clash almost daily and Washington has called on its ally to talk to the opposition.

Bahraini authorities accuse regional power Iran of encouraging the unrest and has vowed a tough response to violent protests as talks with the opposition have stalled.

Earlier this month, a Bahraini court upheld jail sentences of up to 25 years against leaders of last year's uprising. Last Saturday, 29 people were arrested for participating in weekend protests in the capital.

Last week, the kingdom pledged before the UN Human Rights Council to improve its treatment of political activists, crack down on torture, and prevent violence against ethnic and religious communities. Bahrain's foreign minister, Sheikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, told council representatives in Geneva that Bahrain would accept the majority of the body's recommendations but stopped

short of agreeing to abolish the death penalty.

<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/bahrain-activist-jailed-ripping-picture-king>

- **Rights groups call on Kuwait to end abusing stateless residents**

Three global human rights organisations urge ruler of Kuwait to end alleged abusing of more than 100,000 stateless people.

Subjected to repeated abuse and discrimination



KUWAIT CITY - Three global human rights organisations on Thursday urged the ruler of the Gulf state of Kuwait to end alleged abusing of more than 100,000 stateless people, locally known as bidoon.

In an unprecedented move, Refugees International, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International jointly wrote a letter to Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, highlighting the plight of bidoons and urging a solution.

"The bidoons are not treated equally before the courts and continue to be denied protection conveyed through nationality and residency, and have been subjected to repeated abuse and discrimination," the letter said.

Since the start of protests in early 2011, the government's treatment of bidoons has "deteriorated to such an extent that it has eroded Kuwait's ability to fulfill its international human rights commitments," said the letter.

The letter said that police has used excessive force against peaceful bidoon protesters who were demanding rights and citizenship, and detained dozens who have claimed abuse during detention.

Close to 200 stateless men are facing trial for illegal assembly, resisting and assaulting police.

The 11 benefits for bidoons that were promised by the government in April 2011 have not been implemented, leaving many of them without access to employment, health care, education, and other vital public services, as well as documents such as birth certificates, the letter said.

"Particularly egregious is the government's exclusion of bidoons' children from primary and secondary education, a problem that is exacerbated by a recent government ban on charitable contributions, including tuition, to bidoon individuals and organisations," it added.

The three groups urged the emir of Kuwait to immediately grant citizenship to 34,000 of them already acknowledged by the government.

They also called for allowing bidoons to challenge decisions in court, guarantee their right to peaceful assembly, eliminate discriminatory regulations and revoke rules that bar donations to bidoons.

"All bidoons born in Kuwait should be recognised as citizens, and those who have resided in the country for a

reasonable amount of time should be eligible to apply for citizenship and acquire citizenship," they said.

Kuwait says only 34,000 out of the 105,000 bidoon present in the oil-rich Gulf state are eligible for citizenship, accusing the remaining 71,000 of concealing their true nationalities.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=54595>

- **Qatar to give Jordan \$1.25 billion to back economy reform**

Qatar has inked a deal with Jordan to give it a total of \$1.25 billion as part of a Gulf Cooperation Council plan to back economic reforms, the state-run Petra news agency reported on Thursday.

Under the agreement signed on Wednesday, Qatar will provide Jordan with \$250 million a year for the coming five years.

"The grant will help support Jordan's infrastructure and investment climate," Qatari Finance, Economy and Trade Minister Yusef Hussein Kamal told Petra.

"It will encourage the private sector, at the local, Arab and international levels, to launch projects in Jordan."

During a GCC summit last year, "Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar agreed to extend \$5 billion over a five-year period to support development projects in Jordan," Petra said.

At the time, the GCC said it had "decided to create a Gulf development fund which begins by providing support to development projects in the Kingdom of Jordan and the Kingdom of Morocco worth \$2.5 billion for each."

Amman is trying hard to offset a \$3 billion deficit in this year's \$9.6 billion budget.

The oil-rich Arab states of the Gulf, which have seen entrenched regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya fall, are seeking reliable allies in the region, singling out fellow monarchies.

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 sweeping

political and economic reform, and an end to corruption.

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

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• 2 US-led soldiers killed in east Afghanistan

Press TV

September 26, 2012

Two US-led soldiers have been killed in an attack in Afghanistan, says the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

"Two International Security Assistance Force service members died following an insurgent attack in eastern Afghanistan today," the NATO-led military alliance said in a statement on Wednesday.

The alliance has not released further details about the nationalities of the soldiers and the exact location of the attack.

The high number of military casualties in Afghanistan has intensified opposition in

the United States and other NATO member states against the protracted war in the country.

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

According to independent website icasualties.org, as of September 25 at least 343 US-led forces, most of them Americans, have died in Afghanistan in 2012.

A total of 566 foreign forces were also killed in 2011.

However, 2010 remains the deadliest year for foreign military casualties with a death toll of 711.

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

- **Pentagon says partnered operation with Afghan forces continuing**

WASHINGTON, Sept. 25 (Xinhua) -- Partnered operations between NATO and Afghan forces are continuing despite a decision by the U. S. commander to scale them back after a string of deadly insider

attacks, Pentagon spokesman George Little said here on Tuesday.

Speaking at a Pentagon news conference, Little described such scaling back as "a temporary measure," adding that some patrols below the battalion level still continue.

"Let me be clear as well that operations with our Afghan partners continue," said Little.

John Allen, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, ordered on Sept. 16 that all combined International Security Assistance Force and Afghan operations below the battalion level must be approved at the regional command level, following insider attacks that have killed 51 members of the coalition forces so far this year.

The insider attacks refer to those perpetrated by people wearing Afghan soldier and police uniforms.

Little said it would be up to the command in Afghanistan to determine how long partnered operations are scaled back, but

U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta strongly supports Allen's decision.

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

- **5.1-magnitude quake hits Hindu Kush region, Afghanistan -- USGS**

HONG KONG, Sept. 25 (Xinhua) -- An earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale jolted Hindu Kush region, Afghanistan at 08:33: 01 GMT on Tuesday, the U.S. Geological Survey said.

The epicenter, with a depth of 33.50 km, was initially determined to be at 36.3831 degrees north latitude and 69.1857 degrees east longitude.

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

- **Drones 'terrorising' Pakistani civilians**

By Sajjad Shaukat

ISLAMABAD: The US campaign of drone strikes in Pakistan's northwestern tribal belt is terrorising civilians 24 hours a day and breeding bitter anti-American sentiment, researchers said on Tuesday.

The attacks have killed thousands of people since they began in June 2004, according to the report by experts from Stanford Law School and the New York University School of Law.

Aside from casualties, the "Living Under Drones" report said, the missile strikes are affecting daily life in the tribal areas, making people unwilling to gather in groups and even stopping their children going to school for fear of being targeted.

After attacks, rescuers are unwilling to help the wounded for fear of being hit by follow-up missiles, said the report commissioned by UK-based charity Reprieve, which campaigns against drone strikes.

"Drones hover twenty-four hours a day over communities in northwest Pakistan, striking homes, vehicles, and public spaces without warning," the report said.

"Their presence terrorises men, women, and children, giving rise to anxiety and psychological trauma among civilian communities. Those living under drones have to face the constant worry that a deadly strike may be fired at any moment,

and the knowledge that they are powerless to protect themselves."

The report urged Washington to rethink its drone strategy, arguing it was counterproductive and undermined international law.

Based on media reports and interviews with residents of North Waziristan, one of the areas most heavily targeted by drones, the research said the US conception of the campaign as a "surgically precise and effective tool that makes the US safer" was false.

Drone strikes allow the United States to carry out "targeted killings" of people it believes are militants from afar, without endangering American lives, but the campaign has become a festering sore in US-Pakistan relations. Islamabad says the strikes are counterproductive and a violation of its sovereignty.

<http://paktribune.com/news/Drones-terrorising-Pakistani-civilians-253626.html>

- **Jihadi leader killed in attack**

KABUL: Jihadi leader Azim Khan and two of his bodyguards were killed in an insurgent attack in Afghanistan's eastern Laghman province overnight, local officials said.

The incident took place in Mehtarlam, the capital of the province, when Azim Khan was on the way home, provincial spokesman Sarhadi Zowak.

"The insurgents attacked their vehicle and started clashing with his bodyguards. Four insurgents including their commander were also killed in the attack," he said.

Four other insurgents were injured during the attack, he added. Mr Zowak said that the Jihadi leader had no link with the government. No group including the Taliban has claimed responsibility.

Local officials said that Azim Khan was aligned with the Northern Alliance which has been fighting against Taliban fighters.

<http://paktribune.com/news/Jihadi-leader-killed-in-attack-253620.html>

- **Four civilians injured Officials, Taliban claim casualties to each other**

KABUL: At least four Afghan civilians were injured in a bomb blast Tuesday morning in the west of Kabul city, local officials said.

A bomb exploded near a market in the Mahtab Qala area of Kabul at around 10:50AM local time, injuring at least four people, officials said.

Chief of the Kabul Police Criminal Investigation Unit Mohammad Zahir also confirmed the blast and said that more security forces have been deployed in the area. Witnesses said that all the casualties are civilians.

No group has claimed responsibility for the blast.

Meanwhile, the officials and Taliban Tuesday raised conflicting claims about casualties to each other in various parts of the country.

The Farah police chief Aqa Noor Kaintoos told the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) 17 Taliban fighters were killed while a cop sustained injuries during hours-long clash in Chishma Mashik area, Lash-wa-Jwaind district of the province today.

In a separate incident, he said Taliban fighters attacked a security checkpoint in Khak-i-Safaid district last night. Two Taliban fighters were killed and two more injured in the gunfight, he added. The police did not suffer casualties in the clash, he said.

However, the area resident told the AIP the police also suffered casualties. They, however, were unaware about exact information about casualties.

Meanwhile, a Wardag media office statement available with the AIP stated a Taliban commander Mullah Malang alias Mullah Mansoor was killed in an ISAF airstrike in the limits of Syedabad district today.

Separately, an interior ministry press release said 15 Taliban fighters were killed, three injured and nine more held alive during operations in Laghman, Baghlan, Kunduz, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Wardag and Khost provinces over the past 24 hours.

A defence ministry statement said five ANA soldiers were injured in separate

violence-related incidents in Wardag, Kunar and Kandahar provinces over the past 24 hours.

Meanwhile, the Taliban Spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told the AIP their fighters conducted operations on Afghan and foreign forces in Laghman, Kunar, Wardag, Paktiya, Nimroz, Kandahar, Helmand, Baghlan, Ghazni, Zabul, Farah, Herat, Ghor, Sar-i-Pul, Nangarhar, Paktika and Uruzgan provinces over the past 24 hours, causing casualties and losses to them. He, however, did not say anything about casualties to Taliban fighters.

<http://paktribune.com/news/Four-civilians-injured-Officials-Taliban-claim-casualties-to-each-other-253621.html>

- **ISAF reports 7% decline in Taliban attacks**

By Khalid Iqbal

KABUL: NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has said attacks by anti-government armed groups against foreign forces declined by 17 percent in the first seven months of the current year, as compared to the same period in 2011.

Brigadier General Günter Katz, spokesman for the international force, told journalists here on Monday (Sept. 24) that attacks on their troops by armed rivals decreased by 9% percent in August 2012, as compared to the same month last year.

He said numerous attacks by the Taliban and other armed groups were repelled and the gunmen were ousted from key areas and cities of Afghanistan, adding capacity of the Afghan security forces has also been raised as a result decline in rival attacks were reported.

If we compare Taliban attacks conducted in the current year with attacks in 2010 then the attacks declined by 30 percent, he claimed.

He continued that if attacks in the first seven months of 2012 are compared with the same period in last year then these attacks decreased by 17 percent.

Brigadier General Günter Katz said Taliban were still using roadside bombs which, he said, cause casualties to civilians.

He, however, admitted that Taliban attacks and activities in some areas of the

war ravaged Afghanistan increased this year.

He said ISAF findings suggested that near 80 percent Taliban attacks and operations were conducted in remote districts and far flung areas which has 20 percent population of Afghanistan.

ISAF reports decline in Taliban attacks at a time when some media reports suggested that Taliban were increased.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid rejected ISAF's claim as false and told Afghan Islamic Press (AIP), "We strongly and clearly rejected this claim.

Like the past, attacks by Taliban against the enemy continue while the enemy has retreated from numerous areas of the country and abandoned their major bases which resulted in decline in Taliban attacks."

<http://paktribune.com/news/ISAF-reports-7-decline-in-Taliban-attacks-253597.html>

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanriverdi O. 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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