



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Proces of Iraq

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ORSAM

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1. IRAQ

- **KRG Representative in GS of the Cabinet resumes its normal work after six months of stop.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The Representative of the Kurdistan region resumed its work normally in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers after it stopped more than six months.

Senior Official sources told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "The Representative Office began its work naturally in various fields between Baghdad and Erbil."

The sources pointed out that Dr. Farhad Nematallah, deputy secretary-general of the Council of Ministers, has been assigned to oversee the representative, in addition to his post as Deputy Secretary-General. "

It is worth mentioning that remarkable breakthrough between Baghdad and Erbil happened in the recent period, especially after the announcement of the President of Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani to hold an extended conference of the heads of political blocs later this month in Arbil to

resolve their differences and get out with a new agreement among those blocs.

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

- **An MP expects voting on the budget next Thursday.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The MP, of the state of law coalition, Ahmed al-Abbasi predicted that the budget for 2013 will be tabled to vote in the next session of the House of Representatives on Thursday. "

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that his coalition has asked to postpone the vote on the budget to next Thursday to finalize the preparation of the final version of the budget, and agreed upon it. "

He confirmed the existence of a genuine desire for all the political blocs to approve the budget, because passing it has become an urgent necessity, noting that "the delay in approving the budget will reflect on the rights of citizens and damage the state institutions."

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

- **Barzani, accompanied by a high-level delegation, head to Moscow.**

Arbil / NINA / Kurdistan Region President, Massoud Barzani left Erbil heading to Moscow on an official visit to Russia, accompanied by a high-level delegation.

A statement by the presidency of the region said that "Barzani will meet, during his visit, with senior Russian officials and discussed with them on a number of important issues concerning relations between Russia and the Kurdistan region and the political developments in Iraq and the region in general."

The statement added that the delegation includes Security Advisor of Kurdistan, Masroor Barzani, the President of the region's presidency office Fuad Hussein , the Minister of Natural Resources of the Government of the Region Ashti Hawrami, the Minister of Construction and Housing, Kamran Ahmed Abdullah, the official of Foreign Relations Department of the Government of the region, Falah Mustafa, and a number of advisors. "

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

- **Iraqi Parliament postpones regular session till Thursday**

Baghdad (AIN) -The Iraqi Parliament postponed the regular session of Tuesday till next Thursday.

AIN correspondent reported parliamentary source as saying "The Parliament's chairmanship decided to postpone the session that was devoted to discuss the 2013 federal budget till next Thursday," noting the postponement of the session came due to lack of agreement among the parliament blocs over the vote on the 2013 budget and due to lack of quorum."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28778:iraqi-parliament-postpones-regular-session-till-thursday-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Political blocs lack deal over endorsing General Budget, says MP**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Najiba Najib, the member of the Parliamentary Finance Committee stated that the political blocs did not achieve a deal over endorsing the General Budget yet."

She stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) on Tuesday "The deals are continued among the political blocs to achieve a final deal over endorsing the General Budget."

The parliament chairmanship held a meeting to discuss the General Budget law.

The parliament is supposed to hold its session on Tuesday that includes voting on the General Budget law.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28774:political-blocs-lack-deal-over-endorsing-general-budget-says-mp&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Barzani heads to Russia**

Baghdad (AIN) –The President of Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani, headed to Russia on Tuesday with a high level delegation in a formal visit.

A statement by the Kurdistan Regional Government received by AIN cited "Barzani will meet the Russian key officials to discuss the mutual relations and the

latest political developments in Iraq and the region."

"The delegation comprises Masrour Barzani, the Advisor of the Security Council of KR, Fuad Hussein, the head of the Divan of KR, Ashti Horami, the Minister of the Natural Resources, Kameran Abdullah, the Minister of Housing and Construction and Falah Mustafa, the head of the Foreign Relations within the Foreign Ministry of KR in addition to some advisors," the statement concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28772:barzani-heads-to-russia&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Kurdish denial of Alawi to replace Talabani**

ARBIL/ Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish presidency spokesman denied today the news that Iraqiya bloc leader Iyad Alawi will be the president of Iraq upon American request.

Omeed Sabah, in a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq that "some electronic sites reported that the Kurdish

presidency, upon US request, agreed that Alawi will replace President Jalal Talabani. "Earlier, we denied such news and now we repeat it", he confirmed.

http://en.aswatiliraq.info/%28S%28pcnw3cnjte4f0ijrdr3gkqfy%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152449&l=1

- **Arbil-Baghdad relation discussed in Kurdistan**

ARBIL/ Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish President Masoud Barzani discussed with Parliamentary Kurdish political blocs and the Kurdish ministers in the central government the current political crisis with Baghdad.

Kurdish government source told Aswat al-Iraq that the deterioration of relations between Baghdad and Arbil were also discussed.

Al-Sabah al-Jadeed daily reported yesterday that a Kurdish source disclosed that a US request was made that President Barzani will hold an enlarged conference in Arbil to solve the current crisis, but no denial was made on this news.

The source added that Barzani rejected the idea, because he did the same initiative, but no implementation of its decisions was made.

Barzani insisted that religious clergymen should guarantee the implementation of the decisions to be made, the source added.

On the other hand, Kurdish sources told Al-Sabah al-Jadeed that "there are some information that such conference could be held following the un-announced visit of State of Law delegation and the talks made with the representatives of the Sadrist Trend, Iraqiya bloc and the Kurdish leaders".

No other details were given.

The Kurdish presidency spokesman Omeed Sabah said to the paper that "such news should be published on the official site of the government", but he did not deny the possibility of holding the conference.

http://en.aswatiliraq.info/%28S%28pcnw3cnjte4f0ijrdr3gkqfy%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152451&l=1

- **Turkey Silent on Iran Shelling Of Iraqi Kurdish Border**

The Turkish government has not commented on the ongoing Iranian shelling of Iraqi Kurdistan border areas despite Kurdish rebel claims that Turkish soldiers are carrying out attacks with Iran.

For more than a month, the Iranian military has been heavily shelling the border areas of Kurdistan in clashes with the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), a Kurdish guerrilla group that fights Iran along the Iran-Iraq border.

PJAK, an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, (PKK) which has fought Turkey for decades, claims that Turkish soldiers have joined the Iranian attacks. Turkey has not acknowledged the accusation.

Turkey's silence on the Iranian bombing along Iraqi Kurdistan's borders in Erbil province sharply contrasts with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan government's strong public support for democracy movements in Egypt, Libya and Syria.

Many in Turkey support the country not taking sides, however.

Mazher Bagli, a leading member of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), said the shelling is an issue between Iraq and Iran, and that Turkey "is only monitoring the situation. Both countries are our neighbors and we cannot take sides."

Mahir Kaynak, former head of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) believes the silence reflects Turkey's impartial stance, though he acknowledged that deteriorating regional security would affect Turkey's interests.

"Turkey is doing the right thing not taking any sides in this crisis," Kaynak told Rudaw. "But if the situation gets worse and leads to war, Turkey will have no choice but to intervene to prevent war."

However, a Kurdish politician from Turkey, Tarik Ziaikinci, believes Ankara is pleased that Kurdistan's borders are being bombed.

Ziaikinci told Rudaw, "Turkey doesn't protest Iran's shelling because it wants to use the situation to pressure the (pro-

Kurdish) Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and (PKK leader) Abdullah Ocalan back home.”

Since the shelling began, both PJAK and PKK have claimed that Turkish soldiers are involved in the attacks with Iranian army. Firat news agency, which is close to the PKK, published claims by an Iranian agent who said that at least five Turkish officers have been killed so far in the war with PJAK.

Ziaikinci believes that Turkey is secretly supporting Iran in its recent attacks on PJAK. But Bagli of Erdogan’s ruling AKP party said, “If Turkey wanted to support Iran it would do so openly.”

Avni Ozgurel, a columnist for Radikal newspaper, maintained that any Turkish involvement in the attacks would only complicate the situation.

“If there is any threat to the sovereignty of these two countries (Iran and Turkey) it can be solved by talks with the Kurdistan region,” he said. “Iran and Turkey can foil threats to their territories by exchanging intelligence.”

However, Soli Ozal, professor of international relations at Bilgi University, noted that there were talks in Turkey about attacking the PKK outside of Turkey’s borders following recent clashes with the rebel group.

“Therefore it is likely that Turkey is helping Iran with intelligence,” he concluded.

Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani and Falah Mustafa, foreign relations chief for the Kurdistan Regional Government, have condemned Iran’s shelling of Kurdish border area. Hundreds of villagers have been displaced and at least three people have been killed in July.

Last week, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, a Kurd, said in a press conference that information should be collected about the situation along the border. He said Baghdad is not prepared to take action on contradictory claims by different groups that Iran has crossed the border.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/index.php>

2. IRAN

- **Russia's Duma Member Underline Opposition Western Sanctions against Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Members of Russia's legislative body said the State Duma is against the West's pressures and sanctions on Iran, and expressed the hope that the upcoming talks between Iran and the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) slated for February 26 in Kazakhstan will yield fruit.

The remarks were made by a delegation of Russian State Duma members and in a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi on the sidelines of the International 'Iran and Regional Cooperation in Eurasia' Conference in Tehran on Tuesday.

"Duma supports policies which defy the West's and US's unilateral sanctions against Iran and it is against adopting anti-Iran sanctions," said Vice-Chairman of the Russian State Duma Nikolay Levichev, who is heading the high-ranking Duma delegation.

The Russian legislator pointed to the upcoming talks between Iran and Group 5+1, and said, "These negotiations are very important and we hope that the talks will result in a peaceful solution to Iran's nuclear issue."

The Iranian foreign minister, for his part, pointed to the good and friendly relations between Iran and Russia, and said, "Cooperation between Iran and Russia is important for the advancement of regional goals and that's why the West is worried about proximity of Iran and Russia."

During their 4-day visit to Iran, the Russian legislators are also slated to meet Iranian parliamentarians, including Chairman of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi.

The visit by the Russian lawmakers takes place at the invitation of the Head of Iran-Russia Parliamentary Friendship Group, Mehdi Sanayee.

The Russian MPs are also due to attend an open session of the Iranian parliament

and pay a visit to the historical city of Isfahan.

Last week, the Iranian foreign minister said Tehran and Moscow can become "reliable" partners of each other, given their leaders' determination to further boost mutual cooperation.

Addressing the 10th meeting of Iran-Russia Joint Economic Cooperation Commission in Moscow on Tuesday, Salehi described the meeting as a milestone in the two countries' mutual cooperation, and said the two sides have reached good understandings and separate agreements during the meetings of their special working groups.

"We hope that after the implementation of the agreements held at this meeting, the two countries' cooperation would expand in accordance with the existing capacities," the Iranian foreign minister said.

Salehi reiterated that Iran holds a special view of its ties with Russia, and added, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia can be reliable partners of each other and we hope to promote the two countries'

trade relations more than before in light of the existing determination and will of the two states' high-ranking officials."

Iran and Russia have vast cooperation in different fields, specially in political and economic spheres.



The two enjoy also special position on the international scene and have long held constant consultations on key regional and global issue.

Earlier this month, Deputy chief negotiators of Iran and the G5+1 agreed on the date and venue of the next round of talks between Iran and the six world powers.

Iran's deputy chief negotiator Ali Baqeri and EU foreign policy deputy chief Helga Schmitt in a phone talk on February 5 agreed that the next round of talks between Tehran and the Group 5+1 be

held in Kazakhstan's capital Almaty on February 26.

The last round of talks between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany was held in Moscow in June.

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107145890>

- **FM Raps Arab Parliament for Interfering Remarks on Iranian Islands**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Tuesday lashed out at the Arab Parliament - a legislative body affiliated to the Arab League - for its interfering comments on the three Iranian islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb and the Lesser Tunb, and cautioned it to be watchful of the Zionists' plots.

"The parliament had better pay attention to the Muslim and Arab world issues and its members had better give their attention to the main danger posed to the Muslim world and the Zionist regime's plots and be watchful not to step onto the path which is desired by this regime," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast told reporters in Tehran on Tuesday.

His remarks came after Arab Parliament Speaker Ahmad Al Jarwan urged Iran on Monday to respond to the calls of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to resolve the dispute over the three islands.

Mehman-Parast said, "This parliament might be unwillingly moving on a path which provides for the Zionist regime's interests."

International documents clearly show that the three islands of the Greater Tunb, the Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa which were historically owned by Iran, temporarily fell to British control in 1903. The islands were returned to Iran based on an agreement in 1971 before the UAE was born.

Iran has repeatedly declared that its ownership of the three islands is unquestionable.

Under international law, no state can defy any agreement, which came into being before its establishment.

Yet, the UAE continues to make territorial claims against the Islamic Republic despite historical evidence and international regulations.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107145886>

- **Iran develops 700Km range radars; 3000Km range to come soon**

TEHRAN, Feb. 19 (MNA) –Iran’s Defense Minister says Iran has developed radars with range of 700 Km. “We have plans to develop radars with the range of 1000 to 3000 Km in near future.”

During the 2nd Radar Technology System Conference in Imam Hussein Jameh University Brig. Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, told the audience that over the past years Iran has seen a leap in the field of radar technology and .

“Today we have enormous achievements in various fields of radar [technology], radars with the range of 500 to 700 Km have been manufactured, and radars with the range of 1000 to 3000 Km are under development.”

Vahidi continued that “we have been also working on satellites detection radars; this system will follow the pattern of Active Phased Array Radar (APAR) model.

Vahidi also added that “in the coming months new achievements in national defense radars, naval vessels, vessels aircraft, and submarines will be unveiled.”

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1817473>

- **Indian-style bypassing sanctions**

TEHRAN, Feb. 19 (MNA) – A Western news agency reports that with the payment routes blocked for India to pay for Iranian oil via Turkey, India will pay its debts in Rupiah.

Sanctions taking effect in February 6, severely limits money transfer from India to Iran via Turkish Halbank.

Business Standard, Indian financial daily, wrote that Indian refineries will easily import Iranian oil. IRDA Insurance Company has ensured Indian refineries that no problem would rise for Iranian oil transfer to Indian peninsula.

“Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (Irda) has enabled Indian insurers and reinsurers to help cover Iran crude oil import by Indian refineries,” wrote Business Standard.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1817474>

- **Iran VP heads to Cuba for cooperation talks**

Iran's Vice President for International Affairs Ali Saeedlou is due to visit Cuba to hold talks with senior Cuban officials over bilateral cooperation.



Heading a high-ranking economic, trade and commercial delegation, Saeedlou left Tehran on Tuesday for Cuba's capital, Havana.

Saeedlou is scheduled to hold talks with Cuban President Raul Castro and other senior economic and political officials.

The two countries' officials will discuss various issues including the implementation of joint projects.

Since 2005, Iran has opened six new embassies in Latin America. It now has 11

embassies and 17 cultural centers in the region.

The Islamic Republic has been seeking to expand relations with Latin American countries over the past few years, describing the endeavor as one of its major foreign policy strategies.

Major Latin American nations have also enhanced their diplomatic and trade ties with Iran in recent years while their relations with the United States have been downgraded amid popular demands for an end to dependence on Washington.

Iran's rising popularity in Latin America has raised major concerns in Washington, which regards the region as its strategic backyard and traditional sphere of influence.

On December 28, 2012, US President Barack Obama enacted "Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act" which calls for the US State Department to work out a strategy within six months to "address Iran's growing hostile presence and activity" in Latin America.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/19/289748/iran-vp-heads-for-cuba-for-talks/>

- **P5+1 must recognize Iran's nuclear rights: Spokesman**

If the talks are supposed to lead to results immediately, they [P5+1] should recognize our rights and we will eliminate concerns through a formula which attracts the agreement of both sides."

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman says if the group of six major world powers (P5+1) recognizes the Islamic Republic's rights, Tehran will remove their concerns over the country's nuclear energy program.

"If the talks are supposed to lead to results immediately, they [P5+1] should recognize our rights and we will eliminate concerns through a formula which attracts the agreement of both sides," Ramin Mehmanparast said on Monday.

Iran and the P5+1 -- Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany -- have agreed to hold the next round of talks in Kazakhstan on February 26.

The US, Israel, and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program. Tehran has categorically rejected the allegation.

Using the claim, the US and its European allies have imposed illegal unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

On February 15, Reuters reported that the P5+1 are set to offer easing of Iran's sanctions barring trade in gold and other precious metals in Kazakhstan talks and in return ask Iran to shut down its Fordo nuclear facility.

Mehmanparast denounced the offer, saying the group wants to overlook the rights of a nation through giving the green light for the trade in gold to go on.

Having understood the irrationality of a potential attack against Iran, the West now wants to fuel dissatisfaction among Iranians towards the country's Islamic establishment by imposing sanctions, he said.

Even if the issue of Iran's nuclear energy program is resolved, the West will use human rights, democracy and other Western values as tools to mount pressure on Iran, Mehmanparast added.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/19/289715/p51-must-recognize-our-rights-iran/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

• Prisoners Go on Solidarity Hunger Strike

RAMALLAH, February 19, 2013 (WAFA) – Around 800 prisoners in three Israeli jails declared a one-day hunger strike Tuesday in solidarity with four prisoners who have been on extended hunger strike, according to the Prisoners Club.

It said the prisoners are also pushing for better prison conditions.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21717>

• Presidency Calls to Keep Syria's Palestinian Refugees Out of Conflict

RAMALLAH, February 19, 2013 (WAFA) – A statement by the President’s office Tuesday called on all warring parties in Syria to keep the Palestinian refugee camps in their beleaguered country out of the conflict.

It called on the various Syrian parties to honor the understandings reached on this issue between them and the Palestinian Authority.

President Mahmoud Abbas sent last week a high-level delegation to Syria to discuss the problems facing the refugees there as a result of the two-year-old conflict.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21718>

- **Abbas to Meet Yemen President, Discuss Relations**

SANA’A, February 18, 2013 (WAFA) – President Mahmoud Abbas Monday arrived in Sana’a in an official two day visit, during which he will discuss bilateral relations and other main topics.

Abbas will meet Yemen’s President Abdu Rabu Mansour and other senior figures and discuss relations between the two

countries as well as ways to develop these relations in several fields.

Abbas will also brief Mansour on the ongoing Israeli violations against the Palestinians and their holy sites, the illegal settlement activities and the severe conditions of the prisoners and the striking ones.

He will discuss the progress of the peace process, the financial crisis which the Palestinian Authority is going through as a result to Israel withholding the tax revenues and the reconciliation.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21715>

- **Lapid extends an olive branch to Netanyahu**

By GIL HOFFMAN

Yesh Atid leader reassures PM he can be trusted not to undermine him following 'Post' report revealing Netanyahu's comments.

Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid and Prime Minister Netanyahu at the Knesset swear in, February 5, 2013.

Yair Lapid sent a message to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on Monday, reassuring him that he could be trusted if he includes Yesh Atid in the coalition, sources close to Lapid said.

Lapid sent the message after hearing from The Jerusalem Post that Netanyahu had told Likud ministers on Sunday that the Yesh Atid leader only cared about himself politically rather than the good of the country. Netanyahu had been angered by a statement made by Lapid in which he hinted that he intended to run and win the premiership in the next election.

“We will not undermine you or topple you,” Lapid told Netanyahu. “We want the next government to serve out its term. We have goals to reach and accomplishments to achieve. Do not worry.”

A source connected to Likud Beytenu’s negotiating team downplayed the message from Lapid and said it could not be taken seriously if it was delivered via the press. He said he did not know whether the prime minister had also received it directly.

Earlier, Lapid complained to his faction that no negotiations were taking place with his party. He expressed frustration that Likud Beytenu wanted to talk about ministerial appointments rather than the government’s principles.

“What matters is not portfolios but where Netanyahu wants to lead the nation, to what goals, and according to what values,” Lapid said.

“Once he knows that, it will be easy to form a government.”

Bayit Yehudi party leader Naftali Bennett, who also faced Netanyahu’s wrath in his talk with Likud ministers, joined Lapid’s complaint about the lack of negotiations.

“The government should be formed as soon as possible,” Bennett said. “As soon as [Likud Beytenu] decides to conduct negotiations, I believe it will take 24 hours to reach an agreement. But important principles must be resolved before portfolios.”

A senior Likud official responding to Bennett said that there have been negotiations with his party on all the key

issues, including equalizing the draft, the peace process and security. The official said Bayit Yehudi was offered to be the first party to join the government but it rejected the offer and said it would not join a coalition without Yesh Atid.

Likud officials maintained hope that if Yesh Atid and Bayit Yehudi were left out of the coalition, Labor could join instead, perhaps with Yacimovich becoming finance minister and acting Knesset Speaker Binyamin Ben-Eliezer maintaining his current job. But Labor leader Shelly Yacimovich said unequivocally that joining the government was not an option for her party.

“There is a huge gap between us and Netanyahu,” she said.

“We were contractors of Netanyahu last time, and we know how far that made us fall.

People say we have to join the government to prevent it from being [so bad]. What are we, contraceptives? No portfolio, no matter how senior, will tempt us.”

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=303729>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Ennahda rallies supporters in Tunis**

As Tunisia's political crisis drags on, the ruling Islamist party remains split over a proposed cabinet shakeup.

By Yasmin Najjar for Magharebia in Tunis

Tunisia's ruling Ennahda party on Sunday (February 17th) reiterated its rejection of Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali's proposed technocratic cabinet, Shems FM reported.

Ennahda favoured a coalition government with the possible inclusion of the Republican Party, Fathi Ayadi, chairman of the Islamist party's Shura Council, told the radio station. However, Ennahda opposed forming a government with opposition party Nidaa Tounes, Ayadi said.

"The initiative of a government of technocrats does not meet the needs of the present time," AFP quoted a Shura Council statement as saying.

The Shura Council statement came a day after thousands rallied in downtown Tunis to voice support for the Ennahda-led government.

Ennahda chief Rachid Ghannouchi told the demonstrators that his party was the "backbone of Tunisia", adding that its exclusion would "undermine national unity of the country".

"The conflict in Tunisia is a conflict between supporters and enemies of the revolution from the former regime," Ghannouchi declared. "The government of national competencies called for by the head of the interim government Hamadi Jebali is a coup against the legitimacy of the Constituent Assembly."

Speaking in front of thousands of his supporters and under a banner that read "national unity and support for legitimacy", Ghannouchi said Ennahda would not give up power and that the party condemned violence in all forms.

He also had sharp words for Prime Minister Jebali.

"Anyone digressing from the institutions of the movement and its Shura Council in particular is jumping into the void and will revert to a small size," Ghannouchi said.

His statements came a day after another senior Ennahda leader openly disagreed with his handling of the situation.

In an interview with French newspaper Marianne, Abdelfatah Mourou criticised Ghannouchi's policy and his rejection of Jebali's initiative. The non-partisan initiative is backed by many in the country such as the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Union of Industry and Commerce and the opposition.

At Saturday's demonstration, the protesters came by bus from various provinces and chanted slogans against the opposition parties, insulted Nidaa Tounes and demanded "the maintenance of Ennahda ministers in their positions". The protesters rejected the plan from Prime Minister Jebali, himself a son of the Islamist movement.

"I came today to demonstrate in support of legitimacy and to reject any coup by the

head of the government," Gafsa resident Mohamed Soud told Magharebia.

Meanwhile, opposition activists considered the march a defence of Ennahda's government ministers and their grip on power, which is at stake after the assassination of opposition leader Chokri Belaid.

The rally sparked varied reactions among citizens who wondered about its usefulness at a time when there is significant tension between the political parties.

"I think that this march marked the beginning of the end for Ennahda Movement because the hawks of the movement realised that their plans to divide Tunisians and force them into a cycle of violence have failed," Maya Bellagha told Magharebia.

She added, "I think that Ennahda and its partners from the Congress Party for the Republic have as a goal to hold onto power, and their last concern is the people."

"Frankly I am surprised at citizens coming to march and demanding the continuation of the work of the government; after all, the president proved that the government failed to achieve the benefits of the revolution," commented Mourad Rouis, 33.

"People should come out instead to denounce violence, price increases and the proliferation of arms and terrorism," he added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/18/feature-01

- **Libya anniversary highlights security**

Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan told February 17th celebrants that the "brave young revolutionaries" were critical to the country's future.

By Essam Mohamed for Magharebia in Tripoli – 18/02/13

Libyan authorities on Sunday (February 17th) used the 2nd anniversary of the revolution that toppled Moamer Kadhafi to highlight security improvements.

More than 3,000 flag-waving citizens took to the streets of Tripoli to mark the occasion.



Balloons and fireworks were launched in the sky of the capital, while the streets were filled with cars honking horns.

Prime Minister Ali Zidan seized the occasion to mention the state's security and defence institutions, hail the "martyrs, wounded and missing people who gave the noblest sacrifice", and recognise the revolutionaries.

"Libya is proud of those brave young people and will depend on them in its prosperous future," Zidan said in a recorded speech to citizens.

"The dictator was toppled and Libya triumphed. The election was a success,

the General National Congress (GNC) was elected, the government was formed, and we started to build state institutions based on modern foundations as per the principles and goals of the February 17th revolution," he added.

Armed rebels who joined the Ministries of Interior and Defence patrolled road intersections and roundabouts in cold rainy weather to protect against those trying to hinder peaceful demonstrations.

"The revolution was about freedom and that is why we will not stop people from expressing themselves, nor confiscate their opinions; rather we will defend and protect them," rebel Abdul Bari said.

Zidan noted the failure of those who wanted to ruin the occasion. Libyans have proven that they are a people of will, determination and patriotism, he added.

At al-Tahrir Square in Benghazi, General National Congress (GNC) head Mohamed Magarief addressed the security situation during a speech, saying that it was the responsibility of every citizen.

The security crisis is preventing Libya from moving ahead and allowing the return of foreign companies, Libya Herald reported Magarief as saying.

"We emphasise to our partners our determination that Libya does not become a base for or source of terrorism," AFP quoted the GNC chief as saying.

Security forces were on high alert for the occasion. AFP reported that Libya's borders with Egypt and Tunisia were closed on Thursday for four days and all international flights suspended except at the airports of Tripoli and Benghazi, while checkpoints were set up around the two cities.

Both the GNC head and the Prime Minister highlighted other successes made over the past two years.

Magarief noted that the GNC was working hard to enact legislation related to security, justice, and social and economic conditions.

He said that the parliament was keen to co-operate with the interim government

to enable it to better perform its executive duties.

Magarief also urged displaced Libyans abroad to return to the country.

"The new Libya is for all," he said, adding that those who committed crimes would receive a fair trial upon their return.

University student Wafa Mohsen was interested in hearing what Libya's leaders had to say on the revolution anniversary.

"I am studying law at the University of Tripoli and I know that whoever violates the rules has to assume the consequences," she told Magharebia.

"We want to build a state of institutions and law and we do not want chaos. 42 years of chaos are enough and I invite everyone to unite with the government to build the state," the student added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/18/feature-02

- **Sahel-Sahara summit calls for Mali support**

By Jemal Oumar for Magharebia in
Nouakchott – 18/02/13

The conflict in Mali topped the discussions at the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) summit on Saturday (February 16th) in N'Djamena, Chad, RFI reported.

Leaders called for "support for the on-going political, diplomatic and military process in order to achieve final stability in Mali" and pledged some 760,000 euro support to AFISMA, the African-led international support mission to the country.

Twenty-four heads of state attending the summit expressed concern over the security threat to the Sahel-Sahara region.

Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz spoke to attendees about his country's efforts to secure its borders against incursions by criminals, terrorists and armed Islamist groups.

Ould Abdel Aziz explained that Mauritania was backing its efforts to secure its border with a project to register populations and create secured documents.

The African Union (AU) is prepared to support CEN-SAD efforts to enhance integration and support security in the region, AU Peace and Security Commissioner Ramadan Lamamra said.

Besides security issues, leaders discussed economic development and reforming the Sahel-Saharan body, especially after the death of Moamer Kadhafi.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Chairman Alassane Ouattara, the president of Cote d'Ivoire, called on the group to play its role in the member states' economic integration and move towards greater development.

CEN-SAD group will be forming a mini-ministerial committee in charge with reviewing regulations and bylaws.

"I think that it is about time the member states of this group dealt with the challenges facing them; otherwise it would be useless," commented Ahmed Mouloud Ould Ida, a professor of history at Nouakchott University.

Ould Ida noted that the most prominent of these issues are terrorism and smuggling across the desert and Sahel.

"The Community of Sahel and Sahara States has to face these challenges through concerted security efforts and local development in those countries and by giving rights to Touareg minorities," he concluded.

International relations expert Abu Bakr al-Ansari told Magharebia that he does not expect any major changes to emerge from the summit.

"These states must depend on their own capabilities and make their own decisions themselves," he said.

He added that member states must try to solve internal social problems as the only way to achieve social and political stability.

Chad President Idriss Déby, meanwhile, urged Africans to take responsibility for their own countries.

"We just can't stay like this for more than 50 years after our independence," he said.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/18/feature-03

- **Ratification of Egypt's new elections law could take 45 days: Official**

The process of ratifying a new elections law could take at least 45 days despite plans to call for parliamentary polls within coming weeks, said Mamdouh Ramzi, member of the constitutional and legislative committee in the Shura Council, the upper house of Egypt's parliament.

The Shura Council, currently endowed with legislative powers following the dissolution of the People's Assembly (the lower house of Egypt's parliament) in June 2012, must now amend the draft elections law after certain articles were rejected by Egypt's High Constitutional Court (HCC).

On Monday, the HCC ruled five of the draft law's articles unconstitutional. Ramzi told Al-Ahram's Arabic-language news website that redrafting the law and sending it back to the HCC for review would take at least a month and a half, stressing the impossibility of holding parliamentary polls beforehand.

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

President Mohamed Morsi is expected to call for elections for Egypt's House of Representatives – formally known as the People's Assembly – soon. Presidential sources have recently hinted that the parliamentary electoral process would commence later this week or early next week.

According to Egypt's new constitution, the electoral process should begin on 23 February, 60 days after approval of the new constitution via popular referendum.

Egypt's last lower house of parliament was dissolved by the then-ruling military last summer, based on an HCC ruling against the assembly's constitutionality.

The Shura Council currently holds full legislative powers on a temporary basis until the election of a new House of Representatives.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/65098/Egypt/Politics-/Ratification-of-Egypt-s-new-elections-law-could-tak.aspx>

• **Maronite patriarch alarmed by Lebanon political troubles**

Lebanon's Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Beshara Boutros al-Rai voiced dismay at the effect of political bickering in the country.

"It is disappointing that when politicians disagree the country's economic life becomes disrupted," Rai was quoted as saying by the National News Agency during a meeting with a delegation from the American University in Beirut Women's Union.

"We are in dire need of consensus among the Lebanese."

Rai's remarks come amid deep disagreements over the adoption of a new electoral law for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

The crisis in neighboring Syria where a violent uprising has been raging since March 2011 has widened the rift between supporters of the Syrian regime and pro-Western opponents.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/maronite-patriarch-alarmed-by-lebanon-political-troubles>

- **Lebanese opposition MP: Instincts derailing Christian opposition**

Opposition Future bloc MP Atef Majdalani criticized the opposition Christian parties for their support for the Orthodox law.

“Human instinct cannot be restrained, and unfortunately there’s a party that is playing on these instincts and sadly some of the March 14 forces are [being affected by these attempts],” Majdalani told Ash Sharq radio station on Tuesday.

“There is a concern that the votes on the [Orthodox law] are being affected by these instinctive feelings.”

Majdalani’s remarks targeted the Future Movement Christian allies, namely the Lebanese Forces and the Kataeb Party who had supported the Orthodox law that calls for for proportional voting along sectarian lines.

The opposition MPs criticism came ahead of a parliamentary joint commissions meeting during which the Orthodox law

was approved amid the objection of opposition Future bloc, Progressive Socialist Party and independent Christian MPs who stormed out of the session as a sign of protest.

The law proposal is set to replace the 1960 parliamentary electoral law currently on the books.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese-opposition-mp-instincts-derailing-christian-opposition>

- **Opposition MP: Berri wants electoral law consensus in Lebanon**

Lebanese Future bloc MP Assem Aaraji said that the speaker of parliament was seeking to reach consensus between MPs over a new electoral law.

“Nabih Berri is trying to reach an agreement over a new formula that would enjoy the support of everyone,” Aaraji told Voice of Lebanon (100.5) radio station on Tuesday.

“I hope that he will be able to reach a solution during his consultations prior to [Tuesday’s] session that at least would preserve national co-existence.”

On Monday, the parliament's joint commissions approved the first article of an electoral proposal which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines - the Orthodox Gathering law proposal - after which Future bloc MPs threatened to boycott future meetings if the second article was put to vote.

The meeting came following weeks of deliberation at the end of which the country's competing political forces failed to reach a unanimous agreement to choose a proposal that will replace the 1960 electoral law currently on the books.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/opposition-mp-berri-wants-electoral-law-consensus-in-lebanon>

6. SYRIA

- **Syria foreign minister to visit Moscow February 25**

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem will visit Moscow next week for talks on the near two-year conflict in his country, a top Russian diplomat said Tuesday.

Muallem will be in Moscow on February 25, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said, adding that no date had yet been set for separate talks with the Syrian opposition, the RIA Novosti news agency and Interfax news agencies reported.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriatestnews/syria-foreign-minister-to-visit-moscow-february-25>

- **Official: Russia sending four more warships to Mediterranean**

Russia is sending four more warships to the Mediterranean Sea, the defense ministry said on Tuesday, as the crisis in Syria worsens and Moscow takes measures for a possible evacuation of citizens.

The four landing ships will join an escort ship and smaller vessels that are already on duty in the region, the defense ministry said in a statement to Russian news agencies. A military source quoted by RIA Novosti said their main task could be taking part in a possible evacuation of Russian citizens from Syria.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/official-russia-sending-four-more-warships-to-mediterranean>

- **SNC official: Hezbollah in Syria to secure Iranian arms flow**

A member of the opposition Syrian National Council said that Hezbollah's alleged intervention in Syria aims at securing itself a safe transfer of Iranian weapons.

"Hezbollah's intervention in the defense of the Syrian regime has strategic aims that include securing a safe channel for the flow of weapons to the [Shiite] party that are carried by Iranian military vessels through the Tartous port," Yasser Najjar said in remarks published on Tuesday by Kuwaiti daily Al-Rai.

The opposition official also called on the Lebanese government to adopt "a decisive stance" regarding Hezbollah's "violation of Syria's sovereignty."

On Sunday, a Hezbollah official said that three Lebanese Shiites have been killed in clashes in Syria, as the opposition accused

the Shiite militant group of fighting alongside its Damascus regime allies.



Syria is witnessing a violent uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which has so far killed more than 70,000 people since its outbreak in March 2011, according to figures released by the United Nations.

The news came amid deepening schisms within the Lebanese political circles over the Syrian crisis between supporters of the Syrian regime led by Hezbollah and pro-Western opponents to which the Future Movement is affiliated.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/snc-official-hezbollah-in-syria-to-secure-iranian-arms-flow>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Seven die as Yemen military aircraft crashes in Sanaa: Medics**

At least seven people killed following deadly helicopter crash near site of main protest square in Yemen

A Yemeni military aircraft ploughed into a building in a residential neighbourhood of Sanaa on Tuesday killing at least seven people, mostly civilians, the emergency services said.

The pilot and six civilians were killed in the crash which occurred near Change Square, an epicentre of the revolt that ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The toll is expected to rise as the aircraft crashed and badly damaged a building which houses residences and shops.

An AFP correspondent reported several ambulances reaching the scene of the crash while helicopters flew overhead.

Television footages showed thick black smoke billowing from the burning

wreckage of the aircraft as residents gathered around it.

In November, an Antonov M26 of the Yemeni air force crashed during a training mission in a northern district of Sanaa, killing all 10 occupants.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/65127/World/Region/Seven-die-as-Yemen-military-aircraft-crashes-in-Sa.aspx>

- **GCC issues démarche protesting Aoun's Bahrain stance**

Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary General Abdul Latif al-Zayani presented Lebanese Chargé d'Affaires in Riyadh with a démarche protesting recent remarks made by Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun regarding the Bahrain anti-regime movement.

The démarche stated that Aoun spoke of the Bahrain situation in an “offensive and misleading way and conveyed interests and commitments that everyone is aware of and that have nothing to do with the truth or reality.”

Last week, Aoun criticized the international community for failing to

support the demands of anti-regime movement in Bahrain.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Najib Miqati called on Sunday his Bahraini counterpart Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa and told him that “Lebanon respects Bahrain’s sovereignty and the decisions of its leaders and does not interfere in its internal affairs.”

Miqati added that “some positions taken by Lebanese leaders [in reference to Aoun’s remarks] are personal opinions and do not represent the Lebanese government’s point of view.”

Demonstrations have shaken Bahrain since it crushed a Shiite-led uprising against the ruling Sunni regime in March last year.

The kingdom came under strong criticism from international rights groups over the deadly crackdown.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/gcc-issues-dmarche-protesting-aouns-bahrain-stance>

- **UAE agrees to grant Bahrain \$2.5 billion**

The UAE on Monday signed an agreement with Bahrain under which it will donate \$2.5 billion to its protest-hit neighbor as part of a Gulf aid program to it and Oman, the BNA state news agency said.

Under the memorandum of understanding signed in Manama by the government of Bahrain and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, the oil-rich state will release the aid package over a period of 10 years, "\$250 million annually," BNA said.

The grant will be directly managed by the Abu Dhabi fund, BNA said.

It is earmarked for development projects in the kingdom that continues to face daily protests by members of its Shiite majority, nearly two years after a deadly crackdown on demonstrations against the Sunni al-Khalifa ruling dynasty.

The six Gulf Cooperation Council states decided at a meeting in March 2011 to establish a \$20-billion fund to finance development projects in Bahrain and

Oman, which has also seen protests calling for reform.

In addition to Bahrain, Oman and the UAE, the GCC includes Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

The aid package was pledged days before Saudi-dominated Gulf troops rolled into the island kingdom to boost its security forces which went on to quell protests in mid-March 2011.

The total amount of the grant to Bahrain and Oman is to be divided equally between the four other GCC states.

Bahrain signed similar framework agreements with the Kuwait Fund For Arab Economic Development in September and the Saudi Fund for Development in December, BNA said.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/uae-agrees-to-grant-bahrain-25-billion>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Pakistan orders operation after deadly bombing**

Following weekend bombing in Pakistan targeting Shiite Muslims in southwestern city of Quetta, which killed 89 people and sparked protests, Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf orders operation

Pakistan's prime minister ordered an operation Tuesday in the southwestern city of Quetta following a weekend bombing targeting minority Shiite Muslims that killed 89 people.

It's unclear whether the order will appease thousands of Shiites protesting in Quetta for a third day. The protesters have refused to bury the bombing victims until the army takes control of the city and launches a targeted operation against sectarian militants attacking them.

A statement issued by Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf's office that announced the operation provided no details about who would carry it out or who would be targeted. Shiites have criticized police and paramilitary troops under control of the Interior Ministry in Quetta for failing to protect the minority sect, which make up about 20 percent of the country's population of 180 million.

Radical Sunni militants have stepped up attacks against Shiites over the past year because they do not view them as real Muslims. Violence has been especially bad in Baluchistan province, where Quetta is the capital, which has the highest concentration of Shiites in the country. A double bombing at a billiards hall in January in Quetta killed 86 people.

The bomb that ripped through a produce market on Saturday, killing 89 people, was hidden in a water tank that was pulled into the market by a tractor. The militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has claimed responsibility for the attack, as well as the one against the billiards hall in January.

The prime minister's order did not specify whether Lashkar-e-Jhangvi would be the target of the upcoming operation. Shiite leaders in Quetta have also demanded the army go after another banned sectarian group, Sipah-e-Sahaba, which has also targeted Shiites.

The order simply stated that the prime minister has ordered a "targeted operation aimed at eliminating those responsible for playing with lives of

innocent civilians and restoring peace and security in Quetta."

Pakistan has launched numerous military operations against militants in recent years, but the focus has been on the Pakistani Taliban, who have been waging a bloody insurgency against the state that has killed thousands of people.

Rights organizations have criticized the government for not doing enough to target militant groups attacking Shiites. They explain this apathy by pointing to past connections between the country's military and anti-Shiite militants, and also allege the sectarian groups are seen as less of a threat than the Taliban because they are not targeting the state.

Last year was the bloodiest in history for Pakistan's Shiites, according to Human Rights Watch. Over 400 were killed in targeted attacks across the country, at least 125 of whom were died in Baluchistan.

With two massive bombings targeting Shiites in as many months this year already, 2012 looks like it could be even worse.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/65124/World/International/Pakistan-orders-operation-after-deadly-bombing.aspx>

- **21 Taliban killed in operations across Afghanistan: Interior Ministry**

Press TV

February 18, 2013

Afghanistan's Ministry of Interior Affairs says that at least 21 Taliban militants have been killed and 21 others were arrested in military operations across the war-torn country.

The ministry announced in a statement on Monday that "Afghan National Police (ANP) in partnership with army and the NATO-led coalition forces conducted nine cleanup operations in nine provinces, killing 21 armed Taliban (militants) ... and detaining 21 other armed suspects over the last 24 hours."

At least five Taliban militants were also wounded during the operations, the statement added.

After more than a decade of war, Washington has repeatedly been blamed for failing to keep its promises of bringing peace and security to Afghanistan.

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 led to years of invasion; insecurity is rising across the country despite the presence of thousands of foreign troops in Afghanistan.

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

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

- **Heavy clashes reported in Daikundi province of Afghanistan**

By Sayed Jawad - 18 Feb 2013, 8:09 pm

Khaama Press

According to local authorities in Daikundi province of Afghanistan heavy clashes took place between Afghan security forces

and militants on Monday morning in Kajran district.

The officials further added the clashes started early Monday morning and is still continuing.

Provincial security chief Juma Guldi Yardam confirming the report said fight between Afghan security forces and militants started around 6:30 am and militants were still resisting Afghan security forces until evening today.

He said the incident took place after several militants equipped with heavy weapons attacked security check posts in Kajran district from Baghran area of Helmand province.

Daikundi province is among the peaceful provinces of Afghanistan however the province is neighboring volatile southern Helmand province where militants are occasionally carrying out insurgency activities in this province.

In the meantime Mr. Yardam said at least two militants were reportedly killed and three others were injured following the

clashes while three Afghan security forces were also injured.

He also said further reserve troops are prepared to be deployed to the fighting area if clashes were not ended.

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

- **High-ranking Pakistani Taliban leader arrested in Afghanistan**

By Ghanizada - 18 Feb 2013, 8:31 pm

Khaama Press

According to reports a high-ranking Pakistan Taliban leader has been arrested by Afghan security forces in eastern Nangarhar province.

Maulavi Faqir, the former second-in-command of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was arrested along with four other suspected militants while he was trying to enter Pakistan's Tirah Valley from eastern Nangarhar province of Afghanistan.

An Afghan intelligence official quoted by Dawn News Agency said, "Maulvi Faqir and his four accomplices who had entered Nangarhar from Bajaur Agency were

apprehended near Basawal on Torkham Road near the border of Tirah Valley.”

Faqir reportedly led the Taliban in Bajaur for years, and he is also tied to some of al Qaeda’s top leaders, including the group’s emir, Ayman al Zawahiri. He was removed from power by chief Hakimullah Mehsud at a council meeting.

In the past, Faqir sheltered Ayman al Zawahiri and other senior al Qaeda leaders; one of the first US drone strikes in Pakistan targeted Zawahiri and other top commanders in an area controlled by Faqir.

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

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