



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

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## 1. IRAQ

- **Vote on Budget postponed.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The MP, of the Kurdistan Alliance, Muhsin al-Sadoun declared postponement the vote on the federal budget for 2013.

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that the vote on the federal budget is not in the agenda for today's session of parliament because of some amendments to some of its items.

Sadoun did not mention the items that had been affected by the amendments.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GGGILH](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGGILH)

- **Vice president heads Iraq's delegation to Geneva.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Vice President, Khudair Khuzaiie headed the Iraqi delegation to participate in the session 22 of the Human Rights Conference to be held in Geneva today 25, Feb that continues until the 28 Feb.

A presidential statement said today that "Khuzaiie will shed light on the human rights in the new Iraq after 2003 in his speech and the freedom that the Iraqis enjoyed."



The Conference will look at the progress made in human rights in various countries around the world, and the nature of the challenges and difficulties that still face the work and activation of human rights.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GGGILE](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGGILE)

- **Iraqiya coalition: One of our demands is cancellation of the ICC.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Wahda al-Jumaili said that "one of our demands in the Committee of Five is to cancel the Iraqi Central Criminal Court."

She added, in a statement to National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "One of our demands in the Committee of Five is to cancel the Iraqi Central Criminal Court and transfer the terrorism cases to the spatial jurisdiction courts".

The Committee of Five consists of Ibrahim al-Jaafari, head of the National Alliance as its president, and its memberships include Saleh al-Mutlaq, Khalid al-Attayah, Hadi al-Ameri, and Muhsin al-Sadoun.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GGGIJH](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGGIJH)

- **Iraqiya's meeting begins.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The leaders of the Iraqiya Coalition held a meeting, at the residence of leader in the coalition, Saleh al-Mutlaq.

A familiar source said that "The meeting included the leaders of the coalition and its parliamentarians to discuss developments in the political situation in the country and the budget and its approval."

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=GGGIJH](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GGGIJH)

- **Iraq's western provinces dominated by terrorism, says MP**

Baghdad (AIN) -MP Ali al-Allaq of the State of Law Coalition stressed that the provinces of Anbar, Salah il-Din and Mosul are now under the mercy of the terrorism and al-Qaeda.

Allaq stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The last escalation of the demonstrations in the western provinces is not new one, but rather this escalation started with the beginning of these protests when the MP Ahmed al-Alwani was abusing and defaming along with the launch of the protests."

"Those demonstrators seek to provoke the other sides to create disorder and disputes in Iraq to benefit the opponents of the political process," he added.

Ha called "The wise and notable characters in the western provinces to mute the sectarian voices there."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=)

[29140:iraqs-western-provinces-dominated-by-terrorism-says-mp-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29140:iraqs-western-provinces-dominated-by-terrorism-says-mp-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Iraqi parliament's session postponed until further notice**

Baghdad (AIN) -The Iraqi Parliament postponed the regular session of Monday until further notice.

source at the parliament told All Iraq News Agency on Monday "The Speaker of the parliament, Osama al-Nijaifi, decided to postpone Monday session until further notice till the political blocs agree on the draft of 2013 federal budget."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=29141:urgentiraqi-parliaments-session-postponed-until-further-notice-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29141:urgentiraqi-parliaments-session-postponed-until-further-notice-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Parliament postpones vote on Budget law of 2013 for week, says Kurdish MP**

Baghdad (AIN) –The parliament postponed the vote on the Budget law of 2013 which supposed to be conducted on Monday session.

MP, Adil Abdullah, of the Kurdistan Alliance stated to AIN "The vote was postponed for a week due to the disputes among the blocs over the mechanism of paying the dues of the oil foreign companies working in Kurdistan Region."

"The talks among the blocs will go on to reach a final draft for the Budget law," he concluded.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=29139:breaking-newsparliament-postpones-vote-on-budget-law-of-2013-for-week-says-kurdish-mp&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29139:breaking-newsparliament-postpones-vote-on-budget-law-of-2013-for-week-says-kurdish-mp&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Esawi, Turkish Ambassador discuss political crisis**

Baghdad (AIN) –The leader within the Iraqiya Slate, Rafi al-Esawi, and the Turkish Ambassador to Iraq discussed the political crisis and its consequences on the security and economic situation in the country.

A statement by Esawi's office received by AIN cited "Both sides reviewed the general current conditions in Iraq."

“They also discussed the demands of the demonstrations that started two months ago without any real steps to be taken by the Government to implement them despite their constitutional legitimacy,” the statement added.

“They also stressed that ignoring the demonstrators’ demands by the Government continuously will lead the country to unidentified destiny,” the statement concluded.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=29135:esawi-turkish-ambassador-discuss-political-crisis-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29135:esawi-turkish-ambassador-discuss-political-crisis-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Five-Side Commission agrees upon amending Resolution NO. 76**



Baghdad (AIN) –The Five-Side Commission formed by the National Gathering agreed upon amending the Resolution NO. 76 over confiscating the properties of the officials from Baath Party.

A statement by the office of the head of the Commission, Ibraheem al-Jaafary, received by AIN cited “The Five-Side Commission held a meeting at Jaafary’s office where the dialogues and talks continued to respond to the demonstrators’ demands including the Justice and Accountability law.”

“The members of the Commission agreed upon amending the Resolution NO. 76 over confiscating the properties of the officials from Baath Party and they stressed the necessity of keeping on the meetings of the Commission to speed up implementing the demonstrators’ demands,” the statement concluded.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=29130:five-side-commission-agrees-upon-amending-resolution-no-76&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29130:five-side-commission-agrees-upon-amending-resolution-no-76&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Cabinet rejects additions to federal budget**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi Cabinet rejected the additions made by the Parliament, which gave 50 suggestions on the budget, including the addition of funds and amendments for some sections.

Secretary General Ali al-Alaq told IMN added that "the Cabinet did not to waste more time for the budget deliberations".

"Time is more important than the amendments that could be made after endorsing the federal budget", he confirmed.

The parliament failed today to vote on this question, when 85 members approved, out of 231 members.

The Cabinet approved the general budget with the amount of 138 trillion Iraqi dinars.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28rughu\\_hb42rjvylbdaikorc45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=152508&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28rughu_hb42rjvylbdaikorc45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152508&l=1)

- **Call for Premier Maliki to grant more authorities to provinces, MP**

BASRA/ Aswat al-Iraq: National Alliance MP called Premier Nouri al-Maliki to grant the provinces more authorities to implement their duties.

MP Suzan al-Saad, in a statement issued today, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, called Premier Maliki, during his meeting in Basra today, to grant greater authorities for the investment and services budgets.

She added that Maliki's meeting with provinces' governors will provide "greater impetus to their work".

Sources in Basra announced here today that Premier Maliki arrived to attend the South and Mid-Euphrates Governors' conference.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28rughu\\_hb42rjvylbdaikorc45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=152501&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28rughu_hb42rjvylbdaikorc45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152501&l=1)

- **Iraqiya, Kurdish blocs responsible for budget endorsement failure**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Independent MP Kadhim al-Sayadi charged both Iraqiya and Kurdish blocs the responsibility of 2013 budget endorsement failure.

In a statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, he added that "the parliament failed in voting of the proposal made by Iraqiya and Kurdish blocs to return the budget to the government", pointing that "the political differences and the demands of Iraqiya and the Kurds were the main obstacles before endorsing the federal budget".

The parliament failed today to vote on this question, when 85 members approved, out of 231 members.

The Cabinet approved the general budget with the amount of 138 trillion Iraqi dinars.

[http://en.aswatiraq.info/%28S%28rughu%28hb42rjvylbdaikorc45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=152506&l=1](http://en.aswatiraq.info/%28S%28rughu%28hb42rjvylbdaikorc45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152506&l=1)

- **Denominationalists responsible for the explosions, Premier Maliki**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Premier Nouri al-Maliki charged "denominational politicians of being responsible for the explosions", calling to "put them to justice".

During his meeting with south and mid-Euphrates governors and chairmen of provincial councils, he shouldered responsibility on them for the delay in services.

He pointed out that "the provinces, demanding the reforms, did not implement their designed projects in full, but only 26% of their budgets".

Maliki called to adhere to Iraqi unity, provision services, eradicate unemployment and housing crisis, as well as combating poverty through investment projects.

He warned against "vicious campaign to make denominationalism return to the country".

Since 22 December 2012, Anbar province witnessed massive demonstrations and sit-in, in addition to Ninewa, Salahal-Din, Diala, Kirkuk and Baghdad demanding the release of innocent detainees and prisoners, while others called for toppling Maliki's government.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28rughu%28hb42rjvylbdaikorc45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=152507&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28rughu%28hb42rjvylbdaikorc45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152507&l=1)

- **Warnings from fuel crisis in Nineveh**

Shafaq News / Energy and services Commission in Nineveh warned on Monday, from the outbreak of a new fuel crisis in the province during the coming period if it was not voted on establishment of a new oil refinery.



The Chairman of the Energy and services commission in Nineveh, Darman Khtari said in an interview with "Shafaq News", that "he thinks that new gasoline crises will take place in Nineveh in the coming period, unless they vote for the establishment of an oil refinery in the province."

Khtari pointed out "to the arrival of gasoline after a crisis engulfed the city for

several days because of the bombing of the pipeline carrier between Baiji and Hamam Aleel after pumping small amounts yesterday."

Khtari said "five hundred thousand liters is lost every day from Nineveh's' share", alluding to "the arrival of two million, one hundred thousand liters of two million and six hundred thousand liters."

He attributed the cause of the crises in Nineveh province to "the lack of an oil refinery and the far distance between the refinery and the city."

Parking in long queues of cars happens frequently in front of filling stations for long hours in Mosul, which causes suffering of drivers and residents who are demanding officials in the local and federal governments to put an end to that.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5313-warnings-from-fuel-crisis-in-nineveh-.html>

- **Voting on the budget postponed**

Shafaq News / Kurdistan Alliance bloc announced on Monday, the

postponement of voting on the federal budget until resolving the issue of entitlements of the foreign oil companies operating in Kurdistan region, indicating that an oil delegation from the region, headed by the Minister of Natural Resources , Ashti Hawrami will arrive soon to Baghdad to discuss this topic.

The vice president of the bloc, Muhsin al-Sadoun said in a statement in which "Shafaq News" received a copy of it that "despite the efforts and meetings by parliamentary committees with federal government ministers, , deputy Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning , Asala Ali Shukri, Oil Minister , Abdul Karim al-Leabi to resolve the entitlements issue of oil companies operating in Kurdistan Region, as the parties concluded to the need for further study. "

The Vice President of Kurdistan Alliance bloc said that "the budget adjustments call to postpone voting until putting complementary technical aspects on this matter."

The parliament voted at its 12th session held on Saturday, on refusing to return the budget of the federal government to

modify it while ended the second reading of the proposed law regulating the duration of the concerned parties with the work in deputy.

Differences in the Iraqi parliament caused the delay in voting on the largest public budget in the history of the country for 2013 valued at 118 billion dollars, while funds allocated to the security and armed forces still occupies one of its priorities, accounted for 14.37% at about \$ 16 billion.

Oil and gas issue is considered one of the many controversial issues between Erbil and Baghdad, as the first demands the government to expedite the approval of oil and gas federal law to be the reference in how to deal with such wealth and reduce the selective interpretations of the constitutions' paragraphs that considers oil and gas as the property of the Iraqi people and stresses on the constitutionality of the contracts concluded with international companies.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5312-voting-on-the-budget-postponed.html>

- **Kurdistan: Exxon Mobil starts oil exploration**



Shafaq News / Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced on Monday, the start of U.S. oil giant Exxon Mobil with the first stages of oil exploration in the region, and pointed to the constitutionality of its contract with the company and confirmed that this will not impact the relations between Erbil and Baghdad.

The spokesman of KRG, Sven Dzia said in a statement reported for "Shafaq News", that "Exxon Mobil began conducting detection and reconnaissance for locations and fields to explore oil in the first phase of oil exploration, saying that" the second phase is to work in specialized fields " .

"The company continues to do their job according to the contract between them and the region," stressing "the absence of

any legal or constitutional problems in the completion of its provisions."

About the impact on the relations between Erbil and Baghdad, Dzia noted that "the Constitution contains a clear clause that indicates that the new discovery is of the prerogative of provinces or regions management in coordination with the federal government," explaining that "Erbil started from this item in the conclusion of contracts."

Dzia stressed on "the federal government to approve oil and gas law to solve problems," adding that "the exploration, production and export of oil in Kurdistan Region will benefit it and the rest of the provinces of Iraq, because oil imports will be turned to the Federal Treasury."

Exxon Mobil is considered as one of the giant American oil companies that has signed contracts with KRG to explore oil, Federal Ministry of Oil has contracted previously on oil production in the southern fields of the country, while threatened it repeatedly from concluding contracts with Erbil without its knowledge and consent by preventing it from

participating in licensing rounds carried out by the Ministry from time to time.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/5314-kurdistan-exxon-mobil-starts-oil-exploration-.html>

## 2. IRAN

- **Iran, G5+1 Likely to Discuss Bahrain in Kazakhstan Talks**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi said that Iran may raise the issue of Bahrain in the upcoming talks with the world powers.

Speaking to FNA on Monday, Boroujerdi said unlike the western diplomats of the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) who want to confine talks to nuclear issues, the Iranian team of negotiators intends to discuss significant regional issues, including Bahrain, in their talks with the world powers.

"Mr. Jalili (Iran's chief negotiator) is likely to raise the issue of Bahrain in the talks with the G5+1 in Almaty and discuss the

demands of Bahrain's revolutionaries with the western delegations participating in the talks."



He said that Iran has a clear stance on Bahrain and if the US wants to respect human rights and democracy, as it claims, it should respect democracy in Bahrain.

A new round of talks between Iran and the six world powers is slated to begin in Almaty, Kazakhstan, at 1 p.m. local time on Tuesday on will likely continue for two days.

The new round of talks between Iran and the Group 5+1 is slated be held in Almaty's Rixos Hotel tomorrow, and sources in Almaty told FNA that the talks might continue until Wednesday.

Iran's lead negotiator Saeed Jalili arrived in Almaty at the head of a team of negotiators on Sunday to attend the new round of talks with the six world powers.

Prior to his departure to Almaty, Jalili called on the Group 5+1 not to repeat previous mistakes in the next round of talks with Iran, and start negotiations based on a new strategy.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107147550>

- **Russian Envoy Stresses Expansion of Tehran-Moscow Technological Ties**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Russian Ambassador to Tehran Levan Dzhagaryan underlined the necessity for bolstering technological relations between Iran and Russia.

"The level of Iran and Russia's technological ties does not match the political relations between the two countries and they should, thus, be promoted," Dzhagaryan said in Tehran on Monday.

He noted that holding technological fairs and exhibitions can help to the further development of the ties between the two countries, and said, "We hope that we can increase our relations in technological fields as well."

Dzhagaryan said that a workgroup comprised of both Iranian and Russian officials recently held a meeting in Moscow and studied ways of further developing the technological ties and cooperation between the two countries.

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

The two neighbors in 2011 inked an agreement to boost space cooperation, specially in building satellites.

The agreement signed during a meeting between Iranian Space Agency officials and Russian Minister of Communications and Mass Media Igor Schegolev focused on building Iransat satellite.

At the meeting, the Iranian officials requested Russia to boost space cooperation with Tehran and cooperate with Iran in building new generations of satellites and sending astronauts into space.

The two sides also agreed to set up a joint working group to discuss the details of the protocol in biennial meetings.

The Russian official said that Moscow is ready to cooperate with Iran in the area of communications, promising his country will help Iran to manufacture small satellites.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107147528>

- **Zardari to come Tehran to finalize peace pipeline**

TEHRAN, Feb. 25 (MNA) –Pakistani President will arrive in Tehran for a three-day visit on Tuesdays.

Asif Ali Zardari, is coming to Tehran for bilateral talks with Iranian officials and of course to discuss regional issues tomorrow.

The trip is said to be about purchase of Iranian liquid gas, and discussion for constructing of an oil refinery in Pakistan.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1817842>

- **All recognize Iran role in consolidation of peace, security: Kazakhstan**

TEHRAN, Feb. 25 (MNA) –Kazakhstan Foreign Minister has said that all regional and international powers recognize Iran’s indisputable role in consolidation of peace and security.

Saeed Jalili, the Supreme Leader’s representative and the President of Iranian Supreme National Security Council, has met with Erlan Idrissov, Kazakhstan’s FM.

Jalili said that regional security and global peace was dependent upon countries’ well-orchestrated attempt to oppose common threats, and preventing foreign intervention in security arrangements in the region.

“Some powers’ claim to regional security on the one hand, and resorting to pressure and sanctions on the other to impose their own unjustified approaches as contradictory,” he emphasized.

“ given shared position by Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Kazakhstan on peaceful nuclear energy and opposition to nuclear weapons and proliferation, both countries can create new grounds for

bilateral, and regional and international cooperation,” added Jalili.

Erlan Idrissov pointed to Iran’s actual capabilities in the region, and said that “all regional and international powers recognize Iran’s indisputable role in consolidation of peace and security.”

He also appreciated Iran’s acceptance of Kazakhstan’s proposal for hosting Iran and 5+1 talks.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1817824>

- **Iran's IRGC test-fires anti-tank missiles in military drill**

The ground forces of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) have successfully test-fired Tondar and Tousan anti-armor missiles during the Payambar-e A’zam 8 (The Great Prophet 8) military drill.



On the third day of the Great Prophet 8 military exercise on Monday, the IRGC forces fired Tondar missiles from T72S tanks toward mock-up targets. The anti-armor weapons can destroy targets four kilometers away.

The three-day Great Prophet 8 maneuver was launched on Saturday in the eastern areas of the country, including the cities of Kerman, Siriz and Sirjan.

Deputy Commander of the IRGC Ground Forces Brigadier General Abdullah Araqi said on Saturday that The Great Prophet 8 maneuver would involve the exercise of various techniques and tactics of passive defense in asymmetric warfare.

As part of the ongoing maneuvers, the IRGC Ground Forces attacked mock enemy positions using intelligence provided by surveillance drones. Special modern warfare units conducted drills and various

types of unmanned aerial vehicles were also tested.

A 20-mm caliber shoulder-launched anti-aircraft gun, which can be used to shoot down any target as far as 1,400 meters away, was also tested on Saturday.

Over the past few years, Iran has held several military drills to enhance the defense capabilities of its armed forces and to test modern military tactics and equipment.

Last November, Iran's Army and the IRGC conducted a joint drill, codenamed Modafe'an-e Aseman-e Velayat 4 (Defenders of the Velayat Skies 4). The exercises covered an area of 950,000 square kilometers in northeast, southeast, south and central Iran.

The IRGC held a three-day missile drill dubbed The Great Prophet 7 in the central Iranian province of Semnan in July 2012.

In January 2012, the IRGC Ground Forces held the Shohaday-e Vahdat (Martyrs of Unity) military drill in the eastern province of Khorasan Razavi.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/25/290729/irgc-testfires-antitank-missiles-in-drill/>

- **Iran to set up energy hubs in 3 Persian Gulf islands: Official**

The managing director of the National Iranian Offshore Oil Company (NIOOC) says Iran plans to establish three energy hubs in the Persian Gulf islands of Lavan, Qeshm and Siri.

According to the country's development plan, some USD 70 billion should be invested in the upstream sector of the oil industry, Mahmoud Zirkhianzadeh said on Monday, adding that NIOOC plans to turn Lavan Island into a petrochemical hub.

Zirkhianzadeh said some three billion cubic feet of natural gas will be fed into the Lavan Island for it to produce and directly export petrochemical products.

He added that some USD 12 billion and USD 16 billion in investment are respectively needed for the development

of Lavan's upstream industries and petrochemical sector.

The Iranian official further said that Qeshm Island has also been designated as a hub for generating electricity from gas.

He said that Iran's Power Plant Projects Management Co. (MAPNA) will generate electricity from the natural gas fields of Qeshm by constructing a power plant in the island.

Zirakchianzadeh added that the project requires some eight billion euros of investment in the upstream industries and more than seven billion euros for the production of 6,000 megawatts of electricity.

He also said Siri Island will become Iran's gas export hub, adding that some USD 14 billion of investment is needed for the development of the three gas fields of Foruz-A and -B and Binaloud in the island.

The petrochemical sector in Siri Island presents some USD 16 billion in investment opportunities, he said.

Iran, which sits on the world's second largest natural gas reserves after Russia, is making efforts to boost its gas production by increasing foreign and domestic investments.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/25/290722/iran-to-set-up-three-energy-hubs/>

- **Peace and security tied to regional cooperation: Iranian official**

A senior Iranian official says regional countries can ensure peace and security in the region by cooperating and coordinating their efforts in countering common threats.

Regional security and global peace will only be fulfilled if the countries of the region play an active and coordinated role in countering common threats and preventing the interference of foreign countries in the region's security issues, Secretary of Iran Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili said on Monday.

Jalili, who is on a visit to Kazakhstan for the upcoming round of talks between Iran and the P5+1 (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus

Germany), made the remarks in a meeting with Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov.

Iran and the P5+1 have so far held several rounds of talks mainly over Iran's nuclear energy program. The next round of negotiations between the two sides will begin on February 26 in southeastern Kazakh city of Almaty. The last meeting was held in Moscow in June 2012.

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

Over the false allegation, Washington and its allies have imposed several rounds of illegal sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Iran refutes the allegation and argues that as a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Jalili further questioned the sincerity of the claims made by certain world powers concerning their efforts to establish security in the region, saying that the claims contradict their use of pressure and sanctions to impose illogical viewpoints.

Idrissov, for his part, said all regional and international parties acknowledge Iran's undeniable role in establishing peace and security in the region.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/25/290718/iran-urges-security-cooperation-in-region/>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Ehud Barak: I am ready to sacrifice and to apologize to Turkey!**

TEHRAN, Feb. 25 (MNA) –While ago a Turkish Journalist unveiled the news of Turkey and Israeli secret communications, and possible Zionist apology from Turkey for resumption of formal relations and today Ehud Barak talked about his readiness to apologize.

Haaretz newspaper wrote that 'Ehud Barak' the Israeli Defense Minister who is

leaving the Netanyahu government has suggested to take the task of apology from Turkish government due to Israeli attack on Mavi Marmara ship incident, before he retires from politics soon.

Barak has told Netanyahu that in case of his formal apologies to Turkey, all political expenses will be passed on to him for this issue, and this is while he is resigning his post and no longer in power, thus the relations between Turkey and Israel will return to previous status. Therefore there would be no need for a Prime Minister or a President of Zionist regime to apologize to Turkey.

Sometimes ago, a Turkish journalist revealed that Turkey and Israel had secret communications, and possible Zionist apology from Turkey for resumption of formal relations is under way. This Turkish Journalist had written: “with time approaching for Obama’s visit to Palestinian Occupied Territories, secret talks has been underway to bring Turkey-Israel reconciliation, and that Turkey may abandon its condition of ending Gaza siege for revival of relations.

Hebrew Reeshbeit news website quoted a Turkish analyst, who confirmed that the talks would be headed by Jacob Amidror, president of Israeli National Security Council. This website wrote that Turkey would abandon his condition on reviving the relations with Israel if Israel ended siege on Gaza Strip, and Israel, in return, would reimburse the families of victims of Mavi Marmara vessel, and would regret death of Turk citizens.

Turkish daily Yeni Asya had revealed before that despite apparent cold relations between Israel and Turkey, Turkey was fourth largest importer of goods to Israel, and Israeli export to Turkey had 58 per cent increase after Israeli raid in Mavi Marmara vessel.”

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1817852>

- **Palestinian Women's Union condemns Jadarat's death**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- The Palestinian Women's Union on Monday denounced the death of Arafat Jadarat in Israeli prison custody.

The international community must hold Israel responsible for the killing of Jadarat and protect Palestinians from rights violations in Israeli jails, the union said in a statement.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=568897>

- **Abbas: Israel seeks chaos in Palestinian territories**

Palestinian President accuses Israel of stoking unrest in West Bank; says recent days' violent clashes result of Israel's provocation

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Monday that Israel was deliberately seeking to stoke unrest in the occupied West Bank but that Palestinians would not be provoked.

"The Israelis want chaos and we know it but we won't let them," Abbas said in comments at his West Bank headquarters, seemingly in response to an Israeli demand on Sunday that he calm a wave of protest in the territory.

"We want peace and freedom for our prisoners and no matter how hard they try

to drag us into their schemes, we will not be dragged," he said.

Protests in support of Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike in Israeli prisons have been building and gained new momentum with the sudden death of Arafat Jaradat, a former militant of Abbas's Fatah movement, in his cell on Saturday.

Palestinian officials accuse Israel of torturing him to death.

"We lost Arafat Jaradat who was arrested and came back in a coffin and this cannot pass lightly," Abbas said.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office relayed Israel's demand that the Palestinian Authority take all the necessary measures to calm the situation on the ground.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4349246,00.html>

- **Most Palestinian hunger strikers break fast**

Some 1,100 prisoners at Megiddo Prison refuse Monday morning meal, but are expected to resume eating later in the day

By Asher Zeiger and Times of Israel staff



Most of the 4,500 Palestinian security prisoners ended their hunger strike on Monday morning, one day after initiating the protest over the death of inmate Arafat Jaradat, who died on Saturday.

Some 1,100 prisoners at Megiddo Prison, where Jaradat died, continued to refuse food on Monday morning. Israeli Prison Service officials said that they expect the strikers to eat later in the day, but to stage a partial hunger strike again on Tuesday.

Jaradat, 30, died of an apparent heart attack, according to Prison Service spokeswoman Sivan Weizman. The Palestinian Authority has rejected the statement, claiming that Jaradat was tortured to death.

No unusual events were reported on Monday morning at any of the prisons in which Palestinians are being held.

Palestinian officials on Sunday morning warned that another popular uprising was indeed unfolding, but asserted that protesters would stick to the path of nonviolence.

“The death of the prisoner is the culmination of an already tense situation,” Kadoura Fares, a former PA minister and the head of the Palestinian prisoners club, told Maariv. “All of the incidents reveal a clear trend — we’re facing an intifada. The hunger-striking prisoners and the tense demonstrations, the violent clashes during which Palestinian civilians are killed, and the frozen peace process — all indicate that we’re sitting on a barrel of dynamite.”

“It may very well be that Jaradat’s death will turn out to have been the match that lit it,” he added.

The IDF and police are on high alert as unrest is expected on Monday during and after Jaradat’s funeral.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/most-palestinian-hunger-strikers-break-fast/>

- **Thousands attend funeral of Palestinian who died in Israeli prison**

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Thousands of Palestinians attended the West Bank funeral of a Palestinian prisoner who died in an Israeli prison days after being arrested for participating in attacks on Israelis.

Arafat Jaradat, 39, reportedly was buried with military honors Monday, in a village near Hebron. He died Saturday of a heart attack in the Megiddo jail in northern Israel.

News of his death prompted the announcement of a three-day hunger strike by Palestinians in Israeli prisons, and clashes intensified throughout the West Bank.

The funeral follows days of escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank. The West Bank has seen tensions mount recently over the status of Palestinian prisoners, some held without trial for years under

administrative detention. Some of the prisoners have been on extended hunger strikes.

An autopsy was conducted on Jaradat on Sunday afternoon at Israel's Abu Kabir Center for Forensic Medicine, The Health Ministry said in a statement that no signs of trauma apart from those pertaining to resuscitation attempts were found on the body, and that no evidence of disease were found. The coroner is now waiting for microscopic and toxicology reports in order to determine the cause of death, according to the statement. "The initial findings cannot determine the cause of death," the statement said.

The autopsy was conducted in the presence of a Palestinian pathologist and family members.

According to the Israeli daily Haaretz, fellow Megiddo prisoners said Jaradat fell ill after being tortured. Israeli authorities said Jaradat was known to suffer from back pains and other maladies arising from previous clashes with Israeli troops, the newspaper said.

Following the autopsy, Palestinian officials said that Jaradat was tortured before his death and died from that torture.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem announced that it has limited official travel to the West Bank by U.S. government personnel and suspended personal travel to Bethlehem due to the demonstrations over Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

The consulate statement issued Monday also advised U.S. citizens to "defer non-essential travel to and within the West Bank and to exercise an extra measure of caution during this period."

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2013/02/25/3120391/thousands-attend-funeral-of-palestinian-who-died-in-israeli-prison>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Morocco opposition leaders plan strategy**

Opposition leaders in the kingdom are calling on the governing majority to accelerate democratic reforms.

By Naoufel Cherkaoui for Magharebia in Rabat – 24/01/13

Moroccan opposition figures recently met in Rabat to discuss their role in finalising the democratic changes in the new constitution.

The Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) party, the National Rally of Independents (RNI), the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) and the Constitutional Union (UC) participated in the February 15th meeting, which was attended by some forty foreign ambassadors.

"If it is a commonly accepted political practice to hold the government to account for its policy during its tenure, don't we have a right to hold the opposition as well to account for its work?" event organiser Abdelali Habek asked.

"Our goal is not to hold the opposition to account politically, as much as to give it a chance to show its position from the work of the ruling majority and from its own work," he said at the Diplomatic Club conference.

The USFP's Driss Lachguer noted that even though Morocco had allowed opposition parties since independence, "such opposition was denied its rights under the previous constitutions".

"Then came the 2011 constitution to correct that," Lachguer said. It gives "the right of freedom of expression, affiliation, protest and demonstration to every citizen", he added.

Despite the changes, the opposition still faces hindrances, the politician said.



"The internal rules that govern relations between the different mechanisms of parliamentary institutions are usually issued with consensus between the majority and opposition," he told the forum.

The current majority, however, "was keen on internal rules which don't activate the reforms set out under the new constitution", he added.

"These reforms could have brought Moroccans to a legislative institution in which there is real dialogue reflecting what's happening in society, instead of making demonstrators stage violent protests to demand their rights," Lachguer said.

Other opposition leaders hailed the constitutional reforms.

"The new constitution has consolidated the principle of constitutional privilege of the opposition," said PAM Secretary-General Mustapha Bakkoury.

In his turn, RNI political bureau member Abdelaziz Alaoui Hafidi said that the new constitution had built democracy on the concept of participation.

"We believe that the majority shouldn't deal with us as opposition in terms of numbers; otherwise there would only be consultative, not participatory, democracy, and the work of opposition

and government wouldn't be constructive."

"Therefore, the provisions which activate that constitution must be done at the same way," al- Alaoui Hafidi said.

All in all, opposition parties are better off than before the constitutional reforms, said Mohamed Tamaldou, a member of the UC political bureau.

The opposition's "powers have become clearer, and now it has the role of an actual participant in control and legislation", he said.

[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/24/feature-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/24/feature-01)

- **Jihad mafia kills Tunisian youths**

2013-02-22

Radical imams and online salafists are pushing Tunisian young people to answer the call for jihad. Now they're dying by the hundreds in Syria.

By Monia Ghanmi and Yasmine Najjar in Tunis for Magharebia – 22/02/13

Young Tunisian Abdelkarim Jdirine is among the missing.

"One day, he went to the mosque but never returned," his sister Izdihar says. "A few days later, we found a message under our house door telling us that he went to seek martyrdom in Syria."

It is a growing phenomenon: Tunisian jihadists who embrace al-Qaeda ideology and travel abroad to Mali and Syria. And it is starting to kill off a generation.

"My brother doesn't belong to any political parties or groups," Izdihar tells Magharebia at the family's Sayada home. "He got to know someone who convinced him of the idea of jihad."

As many as 132 Tunisian nationals died in and around Aleppo on Thursday (February 14th). According to Express FM, most of those who died in the northern Syria city were from Sidi Bouzid, the birthplace of the Tunisian revolution.

"Tunisian youth leaving their country to fight is not a new phenomenon," former Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali said last June. "Young people have gone to Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia". Jebali said.

Following the Arab Spring events, jihadists started going to Libya, Syria and Mali.

Maghreb fighters in Syria have linked up with groups seeking to topple the regime of Bashar al-Assad, including al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb fighters are reportedly among the latest arrivals to the Syria battle.

University student Omayya Ben Mohamed Noureddine, 25, is another young Tunisian who left home for jihad in Syria.

On December 12th, he told his family that he would be staying overnight with a friend to prepare for exams. He never came home.

"Two days later, an unknown Tunisian called and told us that our son reached Turkey," his father said.

The family learned that Omayya had departed Tunisia legally on December 14th, something that confirmed fears that an organised network was getting young people to Syria.

Handlers for extremist networks use travel agencies to get the recruits to Turkey, says journalist Ali Garboussi, who spent time in Syria. The young jihadists cross onto Syrian soil through the Turkish city of Antakya.

For many of these Tunisian fighters, the process begins when they see online videos calling for jihad, Garboussi adds.

"Recruiters target less educated and unemployed young people through financial incentives and religious fatwas," says Naceur Khechini, a professor of Islamic Sharia.

Radical groups are happy to use these Tunisians as cannon fodder, he adds.

The recruits are reportedly subjected to systematic brainwashing and encouraged to become martyrs.

Mosques in Tunisia have also been cited as having a hand in the crisis.

At some of the country's 6,000 mosques, imams and khatibs are calling for jihad in Syria. But as Ahmed Bergaoui, an advisor to the religious affairs minister readily admits, the ministry cannot control all the mosques in the country.

Slim Briga, a young man who frequents his local mosque, confirms that the jihad message is indeed being delivered to young Muslims.

"Many mosques are now under the control of salafist imams who control them by force," he tells Magharebia.

"In their sermons, they use takfirist speech that calls for jihad and fighting for the cause of God. There are many worshippers who quit these mosques, but unfortunately, many have fallen in the trap that was set up by those people," he says.

His father Abdelmajid Briga chimes in: "They try to wash the brains of our young people and drag them to extremism under the pretext of spreading Islam."

"This is a serious thing that takes place in our country and can sow strife and violence in society. Therefore, we urge the government today to take the necessary measures against those people and to control mosques," he adds.

Incitement at mosques is only part of the picture. Social networking websites use extremist religious speech to indoctrinate young people.

"There are several pages on Facebook that are known to us, and they have several supporters, such as 'Sheikhs of Salafism' in Tunisia," Khaled Yazidi tells Magharebia.

"These pages promote Syria's Jabhat al-Nusra and try to convince us that jihad for the cause of God is the only way to spread Islam and apply the Sharia," he adds.

But Abou Iyadh (Seif Allah Ben Hassine), the leader of Tunisia's Ansar al-Sharia movement and a suspect in the September 14th assault on the US Embassy in Tunis, spoke out earlier this month against the involvement of young Tunisians in the Syria conflict.

Abou Iyadh called on young people, especially members of the Islamist current, not to go to Syria for jihad. Instead, he suggested Tunisian youths begin their extremist struggle at home.

"Tunisia needs its young people and cadres more than any other country," the salafist leader said in a video posted to YouTube on February 5th.

Mouhamed Bou Oud, a journalist specialising in jihadist groups, estimates that there are between 3,500 and 5,000 young people now fighting in Syria.

"There is no certain organisation or group in Tunisia that recruits those jihadists for fighting in Syria," he tells Magharebia. "In fact, recruitment in Tunisia is done through calls at mosques. Deceived Tunisian young people usually go there out of their own volition believing that this is jihad for the cause of God."

But before young Tunisians can begin jihad in Syria, they need training. This is often done in Mali or, to an increasing extent, in Libya.

"Young people go in the first stage to the Libyan city of Ghadames just 70km from the Tunisian border," he explains. "They receive some military training there, then train in Zawiya for another 20 days. After that, they travel from Brega to Istanbul, and then to the Syrian border, where they are handed over to the Free Syrian Army and Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's branch in Syria."

"Scores die but their families will never know," he adds, "because their faces are disfigured or because they don't carry ID documents".

The young Tunisian jihadists may be getting some help from surprising sources.

Rights group "Freedom and Fairness" sends fighters to Syria, a recruit told Tunisia's africanmanager.com last year.

In a separate interview, Marwen Essadki told machhad.com that "with help from Tunisian activists, including members of Freedom and Fairness", he had travelled to Syria via Turkey to fight against al-Assad regime.

Freedom and Fairness Association head Imen Triki, however, denied the allegations.

"Some of the families of the young people who go to Syria for jihad come to us to help them recover their sons," she told Magharebia.

"In addition, we try to bring home some of those who were on their way to Syria through Libya or Turkey after they regretted what they did," she said.

[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/reportage/2013/02/22/reportage-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/reportage/2013/02/22/reportage-01)

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Riot at Syrian refugee camp in Jordan injures three**

Police fire tear gas at some 300 rioters after rumors of sexual assault spark unrest February 25, 2013, 2:02 pm 0

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — A Jordanian official says a nighttime riot at a Syrian refugee camp close to the Jordan-Syria border has left two Syrian refugees and a Jordanian policeman hurt.

Anmar Hmoud, says the rioting in Zaatari camp started late Sunday and stretched into the early hours of Monday. He says it was sparked by false rumors that Jordanian policemen had sexually harassed three female refugees.

Hmoud says about 300 angry Syrian refugees attacked a police post at the camp's entrance, prompting policemen to fire tear gas at the crowd.

He says two Syrian refugee men suffered smoke inhalation and a Jordanian policeman was hospitalized with a broken arm.

Jordan hosts about 400,000 Syrian refugees who fled the civil war at home. The Zaatari camp alone has nearly 80,000 Syrians living there.

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<http://www.timesofisrael.com/riot-at-syrian-refugee-camp-in-jordan-injures-three/>

- **Future of Egypt's National Salvation Front far from certain**

Will the National Salvation Front be able to hold its own in Egypt's wavering political path?

Former Egyptian presidential candidate, Hamdeen Sabahi, center left, speaks during a press conference following the meeting of the National Salvation Front as former director of the U.N.'s nuclear agency and Nobel peace laureate, Mohamed El Baradei, center, and former Egyptian Foreign Minister and presidential candidate, Amr Moussa, center right (Photo: AP)

Egypt's main non-Islamist umbrella coalition, the National Salvation Front (NSF), has been facing increasing criticism lately over their responses to political developments, but the main challenge to its sustainability appears to run deeper.

The NSF, which brings together liberals, leftists and even Nasserists, was established in the wake of the abrupt issuance of President Mohamed Morsi's constitutional declaration on 22 November. These forces came together to resist what they viewed as a flagrant power grab.

The establishment of the front appeared just as abrupt as the declaration it was born to counter. With parliamentary elections on the horizon, questions arise about the NSF's ability to establish a solid foundation in Egypt's political life.

#### Dilemma with younger tiers

The NSF's response to the wave of deadly violence that swept the country in the wake of the uprising's second anniversary on 25 January appears to have deepened an already existing gap between the NSF and the younger ranks of its sub-groups.

Khaled El-Sayed, member of the executive office in the Popular Current led by Nasserist former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi, was at the presidential palace protests that escalated into clashes when he heard that the NSF declared it had withdrawn all its members from the presidential palace perimeter.

"The Front lost major points [with protesters] when it declared its withdrawal from the protests when clashes started, because it gave police forces legitimacy to use excessive violence," El-Sayed told Ahram Online.

Dozens were killed and hundreds arrested during the latest host of clashes. Some of those were members of the NSF's leftist sub-groups, the Popular Current and the Socialist Popular Alliance party.

Many other young party members echoed El-Sayed's sentiments. One day after a document denouncing violence sponsored by the Azhar religious authority on 31 January as an initiative to end the political impasse between protesters and the government, NSF leaders and - notably among them - a strong showing of leading young activists and party members signed a statement criticising the Azhar document.

El-Sayed, who says the Azhar document failed to condemn the violence used against protesters, considers that retribution for the afflicted protesters should be the utmost priority – not replacing the cabinet.

Al Azhar document might be elapsed after all, as the NSF tries to find a way of doing some damage control to appease its younger members who see their overall response to the violence as inadequate.

Last week, the Front set investigation into the violence as the first pre-condition among others for entering into dialogue with the government.

In addition, Sabbahi announced in the same week that his leftist Popular Current will boycott the looming parliamentary elections.

"The Popular Current is not a party. The decision to announce the boycott was merely an effort to appease the youth of the movement who see that holding elections without prosecuting those responsible for killing protesters gives the government legitimacy to repress," said Ahmed Fawzi, member of the political office of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party.

Fawzi, who belongs to the rather liberal camp in the Front, however, sees elections as a necessary step forward, disagreeing with the boycott of the Popular Current's youth.

Ideological difference between the youth on either side of the political spectrum

within the NSF's umbrella is another source for rifts in the NSF.

In addition to differences on what elections represent, according to Fawzi, some members of the Popular Current and the Socialist Popular Alliance parties and their counterparts from the liberal Conference Party, led by former foreign minister Amr Moussa, have been criticising each other over the past weeks.

Some argue the Conference Party should not be part of the NSF, since some consider Moussa a symbol of the Mubarak regime, where he served as foreign minister for ten years.

"Most of the members of the Popular Current rejected the idea of forming a coalition with organisations led by Mubarak-regime figures. It was against what the revolution stood for," El-Sayed emphasised.

Prominent trade unionist and former leftist PM Kamal Abu Eita warned in a statement last week that the NSF could very well collapse under the "anger" the Front's youth are developing towards its leaders.

This concern was, however, downplayed by Abdel-Ghaffar Shokr head of NSF member, the Socialist Popular Alliance: "All [opposition] parties have generational conflicts," Shokr reasoned to Ahram Online last week.

"The more revolutionary youth might be unsatisfied with the leaders' more conservative approach. This type of pressure could be healthy if it prompts the leaders to respond faster to developments so that they do not lose popular support."

The NSF media wing has repeatedly dismissed such claims and insists that all members of the Front agree on the revolution's demands of freedom and social justice. However, it remains unclear whether the Front will find a way to work around the ideological dilemma it faces with its younger tier.

Too politically diverse?

Some critics of the NSF see the group as stillborn, since it includes parties that are too politically different to achieve consensus on any action.

Two weeks ago, reports circulated that there was a closed-door meeting between the head of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and NSF figures Mohamed ElBaradei and El-Sayed El-Badawi.

According to NSF sources, the decision to meet with El-Katatni was made without the agreement of the NSF's leading members. Doubts about this meeting reflecting rifts in the NSF were deepened when the Front's meeting, scheduled for Sunday, was abruptly called off.

In a similar incident, spokesman for the NSF Ahmed El-Borai released a statement distancing the NSF from Amr Moussa's call made on a television programme on Wednesday for a coalition government headed by President Morsi himself – who was fielded by the Brotherhood's political party.

Another sign of rifts was seen in the same week when Sabbahi made the announcement that the Popular Current would boycott the upcoming elections, even though the NSF, of which Sabbahi is part, has not decided to boycott.

The confusion caused by statements and actions by the NSF leaders individually raised doubts about the workability of the NSF's internal dynamics.

"What appeared to the public after El-Katatni's meeting, for example, was that the FJP was communicating with El-Baradei and not the NSF, indicating a lack of coherence in decision-making," Tarek Fahmy, professor of political science in Cairo University, commented.

Ahmed Fawzi, however, downplayed the notion that such actions weaken the NSF's coherence, as he maintains that the Front's main framework is beyond the individual orientations of its sub-groups.

"The NSF is a broad coalition that was formed for the main aim of confronting the Muslim Brotherhood's domination of power. With this aim in mind there is an established level of consensus between the NSF sub-groups that will not be affected by differences in stances related to dialogue or elections," Fawzi justified.

He continues: some members of [hardline] Islamist parties believe elections are

against religion, should that be a reason to view them as inconsistent?

Fahmy, though, still begs to differ.

"The leaders of the NSF each have their own stance on how to approach the government, to the extent that these stances even contradict each other. They also hold different stances from the elections and have different drafts on how the disputed constitutional articles should be amended. Differences in these key issues make it difficult for the Front to retain consistency," Fahmy explained.

Fahmy reckons that the NSF is destined to remain a simply a figurative entity, with no tangible presence on the ground.

"The horizon for the NSF is narrow. It is too politically diverse to have a substantial alternative to offer the public," he said.

What's ahead?

Many observers see that it is not the loose strings on the near future regarding the elections, dialogue, as well as fate of the Cabinet that will affect the NSF's position

in the upcoming phase, but rather their own existential conflicts.

"The demands are known, dialogue will probably not bring anything new to the table. The presidency and the Muslim Brotherhood view that the front is too diverse to function. For that, they are probably betting the NSF will self-disintegrate with time," Tarek Fahmi posits.

Political analyst Sameh Fawzi, however, believes that it will not be that easy for the NSF to fade away.

"The NSF has no clear agenda and existing personal rivalry between its leaders cannot be denied but it is still an important actor in Egypt's political equation since it is the only entity that encompasses the anti-Islamist voting power," Fawzi said.

He continues: However, the real dilemma the Front faces is whether it wants to change the regime or only oppose it; whether it should act as a legitimate opposition to a legitimately-elected president, or whether to act against a president who has lost his legitimacy. You

cannot have both points of view under one roof."

Fawzi believes that choosing a direction, rather than being merely responsive to the developments on the street, will be the defining element of their position to the public.

"By making that choice they will either press for a change in the political game, or play by the existing rules by contesting the elections and competing with Islamists at the ballot box. The real dilemma is that they might not be able to make that choice" he concludes.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/65497/Egypt/Politics-/Future-of-Egyptys-National-Salvation-Front-far-from.aspx>

## 6. SYRIA

- **Syria regime ready to talk 'with all who want dialogue': Muallem**

The regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is ready to talk with all parties, including armed groups, who want dialogue to end the conflict, Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem said on

Monday at the start of talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

"We are ready for dialogue with all who want dialogue, including those who are carrying arms," Muallem said at the Moscow talks with Lavrov, who warned there was "no acceptable alternative" to a political solution and that further bloodshed risked Syria's collapse.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/65538/World/Region/Syria-regime-ready-to-talk-with-all-who-want-dialo.aspx>

- **Syria jihadists claim bus bombing on Hama factory**

The jihadist Al-Nusra Front claimed responsibility for a suicide attack earlier this month on an army factory in the central province of Hama that reportedly killed at least 60 people

The jihadist Al-Nusra Front on Sunday claimed responsibility for a suicide attack earlier this month on an army factory in the central province of Hama that reportedly killed at least 60 people.

"Thank God, your brothers in Al-Nusra Front... carried out a martyrdom (suicide) operation that targeted an army factory in the town of Tal Baraq in Hama province," on February 6, the jihadist group said in a statement posted on the Internet.

According to its account, one of its fighters "drove a bus loaded with 2.5 tonnes of explosives" towards a group of "shabiha" or pro-regime militiamen as they gathered outside the factory to receive their pay and blew himself up.

Al-Nusra said the attack was "in revenge for the Muslim children of the Sunni community who suffered from the crimes of the Alawites and their collaborators."

The majority of Syria's rebels -- like the population -- are Sunni Muslim, while President Bashar al-Assad belongs to the minority Alawite community.

Al-Nusra, listed as a terrorist organisation by the United States, has claimed responsibility for the majority of suicide attacks in Syria's spiralling conflict, which the UN says has left some 70,000 people dead in two years.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 60 people were killed in the factory attack. All the victims were civilian workers at the factory which produced army uniforms, it said.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/65521/World/Region/Syria-jihadists-claim-bus-bombing-on-Hama-factory.aspx>

- **Top Syria Alawite officers defect, sources say**

Top Syrian Alawite military officers have defected from the Syrian regime run by their co-religionist Bashar al-Assad amid political maneuverings by Alawite dissidents and clashes in their coastal areas, sources told NOW.

Jordanian military sources told NOW reported Fadi Saad that "eight high-ranking Syrian officers have found refuge in Jordan along with their families" in the Rajehi Camp for regime military dissidents.

"Everything pertaining to them has been kept under silence so far and all that has emerged so far is that a carefully planned operation of major proportions resulted in

the dissent of the eight Alawi officers,” the sources added.

Meanwhile, Alawite opponents to the regime are making strenuous efforts in order to hold a conference in Cairo and part of the community plans to voice a decisive stance against the Assad regime.

The report added that within Syria, inhabitants of the Alawi area of Al-Zahra held an anti-regime protest in a town square, which turned into slogans against the regime’s army.

“The protest was ended through the use of force by popular committees affiliated to People’s Council member Sharif al-Hadba and Kasser al-Ali,” activists said, adding that eleven people were killed and thirty others injured in the resulting clashes.

NOW’s journalist added that Alawite activists believe that “Assad and Iran are seeking to establish a sectarian army along the coast under the command of Hilal al-Assad, the leader of the [regime] ‘shabiha’ along the Syrian coast” near Tartous.

A Syrian opposition official said in a phone call during which he also said that “Assad’s regime is importing through Hilal al-Assad’s militia Alawi mercenaries from Turkey in order to fight in Syria.”

Syrian activists earlier in the year said that the regime has been building-up a new paramilitary force, trained by Iran, to fight against rebels.

The force, dubbed the National Defense Army, gathers together existing popular committees of pro-regime civilian fighters under a new, better-trained and armed hierarchy, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The popular committees were originally formed to protect pro-regime neighborhoods from rebels.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/top-syria-alawite-officers-defect-sources-say>

- **Syria opposition mulls attending Rome summit**

Coalition chief Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib said Monday that the Syrian opposition would consider participating in the next Friends

of Syria meeting after receiving "specific" promises of support from key nations.

"The leaders of the (Syrian National) Coalition will meet today to discuss promises made by several major countries, which have asked us to cancel the boycott and give clear and specific support for the Syrian people," he told reporters in Cairo.

The Coalition had announced on Saturday its intention to withdraw from an 11-nation meeting of the Friends of Syria in Rome on Thursday and to cancel planned visits to Washington and Moscow in protest at the "international silence" over "crimes committed against the Syrian people."

The boycott decision came after surface-to-surface missiles slammed into a district of Aleppo, killing at least 58 people, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The United States on Sunday urged the opposition group to reconsider pulling out of the Rome summit, which the new Secretary of State John Kerry will attend.



Khatib said on Monday that a visit to staunch Damascus ally Russia would be "postponed until we see how things progress."

"The Russian leadership has a particular moral and political responsibility because they are still supporting the regime with arms," he added.

The opposition leader accused Damascus of rejecting a call for dialogue made at the end of January, saying "permanent procrastination... has crippled the initiative."

"Dialogue is not meant to buy time and procrastinate. The regime rejected even the simplest humanitarian request, which was the release of the detainees. We demanded the freeing of the women first, but the regime did nothing," Khatib said.

But he left the door open to future negotiation.

"We will always consider decisions that could stop the killing and destruction."

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem said on Monday during a visit to Moscow that the government was "ready for dialogue with all who want dialogue, including those who are carrying arms."

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syria-opposition-mulls-attending-rome-summit>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **UN experts probe Iran-linked arms ship in Yemen**

UN experts in Yemen investigated an Iran-linked arms shipment which authorities intercepted in January

UN experts in Yemen on Sunday investigated an Iran-linked arms shipment which authorities intercepted in January, the official Saba news agency reported.

The UN team, escorted by army general Nasser al-Taheri, inspected the contents of the ship which Saba said includes surface-to-air missiles, Katyusha rockets, explosives, ammunition and surveillance systems.

The Yemeni coastguard, in coordination with the US navy, intercepted the Jihan II in the Arabia Sea and authorities have said the ship carried rockets and explosives that came from Iran. Tehran denies any involvement.

Earlier this month the UN envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar, said the Sanaa government had asked the UN's sanctions committee to investigate the contents of the ship and determine where it originated from and who it was destined for.

A 2007 UN resolution bans Iran from exporting arms.

A Yemeni security source has said the arms were destined for Shiite rebels who control the northern Saada province.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/65518/World/Region/UN-experts-probe-Iranlinked-arms-ship-in-Yemen.aspx>

- **Bahrain dialogue dogged by disagreement**

Bahrain's national dialogue, aimed at resolving the political deadlock in the kingdom, is in trouble due to major disagreements between the government and the Shiite-led opposition, participants said Monday.

The opposition insists that representatives of the king should join the talks due to the fact that the Sunni Al-Khalifa monarchy which rules Shiite-majority Bahrain "monopolizes all powers" in the tiny Gulf state.

"Major disagreements emerged Sunday" when the opposition insisted that a representative of the king, and not only of the government, join the talks that began two weeks ago, a participant told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Confirming its stance, the opposition said in a statement: "The absence of authority, specifically a representative of the king, leaves the talks short of a key role player."

It said the Al-Khalifa monarchy "monopolizes all powers which we cannot discuss handing back to the people with parties that hold no authority."

Speaking to reporters late on Sunday, Justice Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ali al-Khalifa, who is also the coordinator of the dialogue, accused the opposition of "retracting earlier agreements that the government will be [the sole] partner at the dialogue."

In an interview with Qatar's Alarab daily, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed al-Khalifa spoke, however, of a "positive" atmosphere at the dialogue.

The talks, in addition to three government ministers, include members of the Shiite-led opposition, Sunni political groups and members of parliament.

Tension meanwhile prevails on the ground in Bahrain, with witnesses reporting daily opposition protests which frequently degenerate into clashes with police.

Protests on the second anniversary of the February 14, 2011 uprising left three people dead, one of them a policeman.

Bahrain has witnessed two years of political upheaval linked to opposition demands for a real constitutional monarchy, with the unrest claiming at least 80 lives, according to international rights groups.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/bahrain-dialogue-dogged-by-disagreement>

- **UAE court upholds life terms for 10 pirates**

A UAE appeals court on Monday upheld life imprisonments handed in May last year to 10 pirates convicted of hijacking a ship east of Oman in the Arabian Sea in 2011, state news agency WAM reported.

The sentences, which equates to 25 years in jail, will be followed by deportation, WAM said.

The report did not give the nationalities of the 10 men, but local media had reported that they were Somalis.

MV Arrilah-I was hijacked in April 2011 while on way from Australia to Dubai.

United Arab Emirates special forces, backed by air force units and in coordination with the Bahrain-based US Fifth Fleet, freed the Abu Dhabi-owned ship a day after it was seized.

The bulk carrier is owned by Abu Dhabi National Tanker Co and National Gas Shipping Co, both subsidiaries of Abu Dhabi National Oil Co.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/uae-court-upholds-life-terms-for-10-pirates>

- **Qatar cuts jail term for maverick poet to 15 years**

A Qatari appeals court on Monday reduced to 15 years the prison sentence handed to a poet accused of incitement against the regime after a lower court had jailed him for life, his lawyer said.

"My client was sentenced today to 15 years in prison," Mohammed Nejib al-Naimi told AFP, adding that the case will now be taken to the court of cassation for the final decision.

Mohammed al-Ajami was arrested after the publication of his "Jasmine poem," which criticized governments across the Gulf region in the wake of crackdowns on the Arab Spring uprisings, with the line "we are all Tunisia in the face of the repressive elite."

Naimi charged that "the appeals court was apparently politicized and does not differ much from the court of first instance."

Throughout the trial, the lawyer has insisted in court that "there was no evidence Ajami had recited the poem he is being tried for in public," a key claim by the prosecution, and that he only read it "at his apartment in Cairo."

Amnesty International has said that Ajami, who was arrested in November 2011, is accused of incitement "to overthrow the ruling system" and "insulting the emir" Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

Naimi, a former Qatari justice minister, said that according to the charges against his client he was liable to a maximum of five years in jail.

Gas-rich Qatar, an absolute monarchy, was not only spared a wave of Arab Spring uprisings rocking the region since 2010, but has also voiced support for the pro-democracy movements mainly through its influential Al-Jazeera satellite channel.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/qatar-cuts-jail-term-for-maverick-poet-to-15-years>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

### • **Kabul orders US forces out of two Afghan provinces**

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has given U.S. special forces two weeks to leave a key battleground province after some U.S. soldiers there were found to have tortured or even killed innocent people

Afghan President Hamid Karzai demanded Sunday the withdrawal of US special forces from Wardak and Logar within two weeks, accusing them of fuelling "insecurity and instability" in the volatile provinces neighbouring the capital Kabul.

"In today's national security council meeting... President Karzai ordered the ministry of defence to kick out the US

special forces from Wardak and Logar provinces within two weeks," said presidential spokesman Aimal Faizi.

"The US special forces and illegal armed groups created by them are causing insecurity, instability, and harass local people in these provinces," he told a press conference.

The announcement would be another blow to the prestige of US-led forces as they prepare to withdraw combat troops from the war against Taliban Islamist insurgents by the end of next year.

The bulk of NATO's 100,000 troops are due to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014. A US Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) spokesman said he was aware of the reported comments by Faizi.

"We take all allegations of misconduct seriously and go to great lengths to determine the facts surrounding them," he said.

"Until we have had a chance to speak with senior (Afghan) officials about this issue we are not in a position to comment further. This is an important issue that we

intend to fully discuss with our Afghan counterparts."

More than 3,200 NATO troops, mostly Americans, have died in support of Karzai's government in the war since the Taliban were ousted by a US invasion in 2001, but relations between the president and the US are often prickly.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/65519/World/International/Kabul-orders-US-forces-out-of-two-Afghan-provinces.aspx>

- **Blast kills two in eastern Afghanistan**

Press TV

February 24, 2013

Two security officers have been killed and three others injured in an incident where an explosive-laden vehicle went off in Afghanistan's eastern city of Jalalabad.

The huge explosion took place in front of Jalalabad's national security office on Sunday, Mohammad Masoum Hashemi, a local security official, said.

So far, no group or individual has claimed responsibility for the incident. However, militants are often blamed for such explosions.

Militants use improvised explosive devices, including roadside bombs, against Afghan forces, foreign troops and civilians.

On February 19, the UN said in its annual report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict that militant-laid improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were responsible for 81 percent of civilian casualties

The UN report also stated that over 2,750 Afghan civilians had been killed in Afghanistan in 2012, taking the toll to nearly 14,730 since 2007.

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

- **Senior Taliban leader captured in eastern Afghanistan: ISAF**

KABUL, Feb. 24 (Xinhua) -- A senior Taliban leader was arrested on Sunday morning in eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar, the coalition forces said.

"Afghan and coalition forces arrested a senior Taliban leader and three other insurgents during an operation in Khugyani district, Nangarhar province, today," the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a press release.

The detained Taliban commander was believed responsible for coordinating and directing insurgent fighters in the province 120 km east of Afghan capital of Kabul, the release said without revealing the name of the captured man.

"He is also suspected of having maintained direct operational control of a significant number of suicide bombers prepared to carry out attacks against Afghan and coalition forces," it noted.

Earlier Sunday, the Afghan Interior Ministry in a statement said that the Afghan police supporting by army and coalition forces detained a total of 22 armed Taliban insurgents in different provinces within the last 24 hours.

The Afghan security forces in partnership with the NATO-led coalition troops have intensified operations against Taliban and

other militant groups recently. But the insurgent groups responded by armed attacks and bombings.

Earlier Sunday, three Afghan security members were killed and four were wounded in two separate suicide car bombings in eastern Nangarhar and neighboring Logar province while the country's security forces killed two suicide bombers and defused their car bomb before targeting a security compound in Kabul.

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

- **Karzai government blamed for inefficient political movements**

By Jawed Rostapoor - 24 Feb 2013, 8:15 pm

Khaama Press

Leader of the National Front — main political opposition coalition of the Afghan government Ahmad Zia Massoud criticized Afghan president Hamid Karzai for creating barriers to form strong political parties in the country.

Afghan president Hamid Karzai was also accused that such steps by him prevents implementation of proper democracy in Afghanistan.

However political analysts and international observers believe that growing corruption in Afghanistan during the recent years was due to lack of strong political parties with proper working agendas.

The observers also believe that majority of the political parties have been formed by specific ethnic groups and do not working agendas that suites the national benefits of Afghanistan.

In the meantime National Front leader Ahmad Zia Massoud blamed president Karzai for supporting conservative and ethnic political parties or organizations and does not believe in modern political institutions that have been formed by the Afghan people.

Despite the Afghan government is blamed for being reckless towards the political parties formation and activities however majority of the Afghan people doubtful regarding the operations of the political

parties during the past ten years and have lost their confidence regarding the honesty towards the political leaders and parties due to the lack of specific programs which can create benefits for the national interest of Afghanistan.

On the other majority of the Afghan people are doubtful regarding the formation of political parties and coalitions by former Muajhideen leaders despite these political parties have been formed with a motive of national interest since Afghans have experienced former Mujahideen leaders activities during the civil war.

In the meantime leader of the National Front Ahmad Zia Massoud said democracy can be implemented in Afghanistan by supporting political parties and movement otherwise Afghans can not expect this from the central government.

He said, “The government of Karzai seeks political and economic benefits in conservative institutions which are not welcomed by Afghan people and therefore Afghan officials including president Karzai do not want that a strong party is formed by civil society and Afghan

people in a bid to implement democracy in the country.”

The formation of political coalition by various political parties is not something new in Afghanistan specifically during the election period however it has been witnessed that the coalitions formed earlier were disintegrated as president Karzai was getting close to win the presidential election.

Political observers the National Front led by Ahmad Zia Massoud is likely to face the same fate as it has happened in the past.

According to reports over 100 political parties were registered with the justice ministry of Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 but majority of the parties do not have members and were formed by a single leader.

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

*\*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.*

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