



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

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1. IRAQ

- **Al-Anbar chieftains: Throwing water and stones during the visit of south tribal delegation is unacceptable (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

05 Feb 2013

The delegation of the tribal chieftains and notables of the south, has announced that it suffered aggression and throwing of water and stones during its visit to the sit-in square in Al-Ramadi city, stressing that this is an unacceptable act.

The popular committees stressed that a number of those who attacked the delegation were arrested, pointing out that they belong to a certain party that aims to misrepresent the protests.

Members of the tribes' delegation stressed that the tribal chieftains and notables of Al-Anbar do not agree on the actions of these individuals and attempted to prevent them

-"Shaykh Hamid al-Shawki , head of the tribal chieftains council of Al-Anbar Governorate, has expressed optimism over the presence of the delegation of the tribes of southern and central Iraq in Al-

Anbar, stressing that they reached an agreement over the protesters' demands."

-"The governors and heads of the provincial councils of central and southern Iraq, have agreed to commit to Iraq's unity and sovereignty within the framework of the constitution, support the political process, and praise the role of the security sources in maintain security. The governors and heads of the provincial councils of central and southern Iraq, stressed during their meeting which discussed the current crisis, their support to the protesters' constitutional and legal demands, rejecting, at the same time, the calls for over throwing the government, the threatening and provocative slogans, in addition to the regional attempts to interfere in Iraq's domestic affairs.

- **Maliki's coalition: sectarian speech of Nujaifi made him lose his legitimacy to be the Parliament's Speaker (Shafaq News)**

05 Feb 2013

Shafaq News / State of Law coalition (SLC) described on Tuesday, the Parliaments' Speaker Osama Nujaifi's last speech from Samarra province as "sectarian", and

made him lose his legitimacy to continue in his post.

The member of SLC, Haitham al-Jubouri said in an interview for "Shafaq News", that "Nujaifi's sectarian discourse in the crowds of demonstrators in Samarra made him lose his legitimacy to continue in his post."

Jubouri in which his coalition waved earlier that it will collect signatures to replace Nujaifi considered that "the parliaments' Speaker recent statements were disappointing."

The head of the parliament, Osama al-Nujaifi said last Saturday, addressing the demonstrators in Samarra city that "It's time now to return seized rights to their owners with regard to justice, balance, dignity and equal rights," he also said, "You are the vanguard of the striving nation that are demanding their rights and must take it by all you can do".

A number of Iraqi provinces of Sunni majority are witnessing demonstrations and sit-ins since more than a month ago, demanding to release the detainees and women detainees , cancel a number of

laws and decisions which they deem that it cause injustice like the Justice and Accountability Law and Article 4 terrorism and others.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5054-malakis-coalition-sectarian-speech-of-nujaifi-made-him-lose-his-legitimacy-to-be-the-parliaments-speaker-.html>

- **Clans' delegations of six provinces sign in Samarra a charter "to save Iraq through a new constitution (NINA)**

05 Feb 2013

Tikrit / NINA /--More than a thousand tribal leaders, dignitaries and well known members of tribes representing six provinces, including the capital Baghdad, signed at a conference held in Alhaq courtyard in Samarra city today a charter for "saving Iraq through a new constitution".

Clans' elders and notables who represent the provinces of Salahuddin, Anbar, Nineveh, Diyala, Kirkuk and Baghdad, confirmed in a final statement their constant well to "unify the just and legitimate demands and to save Iraq from the precipice of the current crisis.

MP Shaalan Likrayim said for Salahuddin, said to NINA: "This conference is held for support the just and legitimate demands and to remedies, injustice, marginalization and exclusion suffered by the people of these provinces.

He stressed that "all Sheikhs conferees reject foreign agendas that interfere with the affairs of Iraq and its people from the south to the north, and that all our demands are fair national and far from sectarianism.

- **Minister of Peshmerga: Iraqi Defense delays solving the problems between the region and Baghdad (Shafaq News)**

05 Feb 2013

Shafaq News / Peshmerga Minister , Jaafar Sheikh Mustafa hold on Tuesday, the Iraqi Ministry of Defense the responsibility of delaying the resolve of the existing problems and tensions between Erbil and Baghdad, as he emphasized that the regional government is upset from this matter.

Sheikh Mustafa said in a statement received by "Shafaq News" during a meeting with South Korean consul in

Kurdistan Region, Kim Jonk Hyun as they have discussed tensions that exist between the regional government and the federal government and sais that, "the Ministry of Peshmerga had done all its effort to resolve this issue."

Sheikh Mustafa said that "unfortunately the Iraqi Ministry of Defense does not pay attention to these problems and delay solving them with different excuses, which made Kurdistan Regional Government upset by these actions."

The Minister of Peshmerga, called to consolidate the relations between the Ministry of Peshmerga and the South Korean Defense Ministry and try to cooperate more between the two parties in the military field and exchange information.

For his part, the South Korean consul in the meeting said that "they want to expand relations with Kurdistan Regional Government on an ongoing basis, and they are making all their efforts to perpetuate this issue in a better way."

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5057-minister-of-peshmerga-iraqi-defense->

[delays-solving-the-problems-between-the-region-and-baghdad-.html](#)

- **Anbar provincial council demands the withdrawal of the army from the cities of the province (NINA)**

05 Feb 2013

Ramadi / NINA /-- Anbar provincial council urged the central government to withdraw army troops stationed near some of cities after receiving police forces of the province the security file.

The head of Anbar provincial council Jassim Halbusi said to NINA reporter : "The security situation in Anbar is stable, pointing to the latest reinforcing the province police forces by 2000 elements who were admitted to quick training courses to bolster security, warning from agitating the protesters.

He ended : "The presence of the army in the districts and the areas of Anbar is unnecessary , and will have harmful impact on the security situation, especially in villages and rural areas where provocation are ongoing by some army patrols.

- **Change Movement submits bill on limiting Iraqi Kurdish president's powers (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

05 Feb 2013

Kurdish Change movement has stressed that it submitted a draft law to the Kurdistan parliament speakership, signed by 52 MPS, to limit the centralization of power with the Kurdistan Region president in the future, Change movement MP Latif Mustafa told the IMN news centre, that the suggested draft law limits the authority of the region's president and makes the post honorary, stressing that there are political reasons behind the rejection to refer the draft law to the parliamentary Legal Committee.

- **Sadr orders holding combined Friday Prayer throughout Iraq (NINA)**

05 Feb 2013

Najaf (NINA) – Leader of the Sadrist Trend, Muqtada al-Sadr, ordered holding a combined Friday Prayer in all provinces.

Source at Sadr's Office in Najaf told NINA on Tuesday, Feb. 5, that Sadr made a condition that the prayer not to include dissidents or spoilers.

It is worth mentioning that during his visit to the Sheikh Abdul Qader Shrine, in Baghdad, Sadr performed a combined prayer, he also paid a visit to Our Lady of Salvation Church.

- **Hakeem asserts that Christians in Iraq are not a quantitative addition rather they represent qualitative addition (NINA)**

05 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), Ammar al-Hakeem, asserted that Christian in Iraq do not represent a quantitative addition or being measured in accordance with their number, but they represent a qualitative addition.

A statement issued on Tuesday, Feb. 5, by the SIIC said that Hakeem in his meeting with Bishop Avak Asadorian, head of the Christian Armenian Rite in Iraq said that Christians in Iraq are not a quantitative addition or considered according to their number, rather they are a qualitative addition and an important part of Iraqis' diversity.

For his part, the head of the Armenian Rite thanked Hakeem for his continuing

calls for unity of the Iraqis to adopt dialogue in solving political crisis and for his defending all Iraqi sects.

- **Hamoudi: SIIC exerts earnest efforts to address current crisis in Iraq (alliraqnews)**

05 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The head of the Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee and leading figure within the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, Humam Hamoudi stressed that "The SIIC exerted concerted efforts with all political sides to reach consensuses that help resolve the tensed situation."

Hamoudi stated that "We are still exerting earnest efforts and movements to create points of understanding that help address the successive crises in the country and bring the democracy back to its right path."

"The new crisis over the current protests necessitates adopting wisdom in addressing it, moreover the violation of the constitution will create serious crises that endanger the whole political process in Iraq," he concluded.

- **Rejection of forming any militias, Interior ministry (Aswat al-Iraq)**

06 Feb 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Interior ministry "utterly" rejected that any "personal or party entity will form an armed group under any name or connotation".

In a statement, the ministry warned over passing the legal system and "move outside the legitimate powers", because the government has the means "to fight terrorism and impose law".

Some media organs reported that "someone called to establish an army to counter militias and terrorist organization who will work in some Iraqi regions", the statement added.

The ministry warned everyone who will make a crack in the social fabric on "denominational or party" bases.

"These attempts and calls are made for media and political propaganda", the statement added.

Secretary General of Hizb Allah (Iraq) announced Monday the formation of a militia called "al-Mukhtar army" to

support the government in "fighting against corruption, terrorism, terrorist groups and Shiite protection", pointing that "the formation of this army is a positive step in the light of turning the Sunnis into terrorist milieu".

- **Qasim Arajı rejects forming armed groups outside the state (NINA)**

05 Feb 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Member of Parliamentary Security and Defence Committee and head of Badr Parliamentary bloc, Qasim al-Araji, said that he rejects establishing armed groups outside the state.

Araji told NINA on Tuesday, Feb. 5, "Establishing armed groups tears down the state and the country; pointing out the necessity to restrict arms in the hands of the state, whoever wants to express support it has to take to the street demonstrating in its support, not through forming armed groups."

Araji added, "There are contradictory statements made by the Iraqi Hizbullah group, some time they are against the government and another time they are against it; we are not in need of armed

groups, rather we are in need of rational active authorities, tribal sheikhs to put an end to the political crisis and consolidate national unity."

He added that establishing armed organizations leads to instigate commotion during which the Iraqis will pay the price.

Secretary General of Iraqi Hizbullah, Wathiq al-Batat, said on Monday that he is waiting for green light from the government to establish Melitia Mokhtar Army to fight terrorist organizations in Iraq and protect the Shiites.

- **MP: threatening to form militias, confirms the government's double-standard policy in handling certain components of the people (NINA)**

05 Feb 2013

Baghdad/ NINA/-- MP ,Walid Abboud Mohammadi for Iraqiya Slate coalition said in a statement today: "The formation of militias is contrary to the Constitution, which banning the formation of militias outside the framework of the regular armed forces, denouncing the remarks made yesterday publicly by a militia

leaders on TV as talking in press conferences threatening and intimidating.

Mohammadi wandered about the unmotivated freedom enjoyed by such a leaders as the Constitution or the laws pointing out that the overlooking by the state of such remarks because they are made by someone belonging to a certain sect will create harmful impact on this sect and on other components " urging the government to take decisive action and not applying with double standards, he said.

The Iraqi Hezbollah earlier announced the formation of what he called Jayshi-Lmokhtar / chosen Army / "to support the government.

The General Secretary of the party Wathiq Albattat said at a press conference held yesterday in Baghdad: "This Army will be a supportive to the directions given by the central government.

- **Shahristani instructs to avoid carrying out any old arrest warrants in Diyala (alliraqnews)**

05 Feb 2013

Diyala (AIN) -The head of the seven-side ministerial commission, Hussein al-Shahristani instructed the security forces to avoid implementing any old arrest warrants but after updating it by the personal rights prosecutors as well as forming a commission to consider cases of 6000 detainees who are not involved in murders.

Shahristani said in a press conference attended by AIN reporter "The security forces were instructed not to carry out any old arrest warrant but after updating it by the private right prosecutors," pointing out "We also instructed the service ministries to provide the general services to the citizens in Diyala province."

- **Life imprisonment issued against police Brigadier (alliraqnews)**

06 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Criminal Court sentenced a police officer with a Brigadier rank to a life imprisonment.

The official Iraqiya satellite channel reported that "The criminal court issued a life imprisonment verdict against a police Brigadier for assisting the bodyguards of Tariq al-Hashimi to assassinate a police

Colonel on Mohamed al-Qasim highway in Baghdad province."

The Supreme Criminal Court issued several death verdicts against Tariq al-Hashimi and several of his bodyguards for being involved in criminal cases

- **Maliki, Mursi discuss bilateral relations (Aswat al-Iraq)**

05 Feb 2013

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Premier Nouri al-Maliki discussed today with Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi the latest developments on international arena and developing bilateral relations in all fields.

Press sources in Cairo said that President Mursi held the talks to expand economic cooperation and the participation of the Egyptian companies in Iraq reconstruction.

Maliki arrived in Cairo to attend in the 12th Islamic Summit due tomorrow in Cairo.

- **Maliki's office: Maliki to meet Turkish President, Kuwaiti Emir in Cairo (alliraqnews)**

05 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Premier, Nouri al-Maliki will meet the Turkish President, Abdullah Gul and the Kuwaiti Emir, Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah on the margins of the Conference of the Islamic Cooperation Organization in the Egyptian Capital, Cairo, on Wednesday.

A statement by Maliki's office received by AIN cited "Maliki and the accompanying delegation arrived in Cairo on Tuesday afternoon to participate in the Conference of the ICO that is being held in Cairo in the sixth and seventh of February where the Egyptian President, Mohammed Mursi, received him and welcomed his visit."

"Properly Maliki to conduct several meetings with some of the presidents such as Sabah and Gul," the statement concluded.

Maliki was accompanied by the Minister of Higher Education, Ali al-Adeeb, the Minister of Culture, the Acting Defense Minister Sadoun al-Dulaimi and the Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari.

- **Kuwait FM meets Iraq, Lebanon counterparts, Arab League chief (KUNA)**

CAIRO, Feb 5 (KUNA) -- Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met here Tuesday the foreign ministers of Iraq and Lebanon Hoshyar Zebari and Adnan Mansour respectively.

Sheikh Sabah also met Secretary-General of the Arab League Nabil Al-Arabi. The meetings were held on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) ahead of an OIC summit here on Wednesday.

During their talks, they discussed regional and international issues and the latest regional, international, Arab and Islamic developments.

The talks were also attended by several officials of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Kuwaiti Ambassador in Egypt Rasheed Al-Hamad.

- **500 Syrian refugees arrive daily in Kurdistan Region (NINA)**

05 Feb 2013

Erbil (NINA) – The Government of Kurdistan Region said that it receives 500 Syrian refugees a day, adding that that at

present there are about 70 thousand refugees in the Region.

Assistant head of the Region's Foreign Relations Department, Dindar Zebari, discussed with representatives of foreign organizations in the Region demanding urgent aid to Syrian refugees in Kurdistan Region.

Zebari added that the international grant to the Region on 2012 was only \$ 6 million, which is a small amount in comparison with international grants allocated to Syrian refugees.

He called on donors to allocate suitable amount to the Region through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations, affirming that the refugees refuse to return to their country until the situation settles.

- **Iranian President: Western, regional countries behind plot to divide Iraq (alliraqnews)**

05 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Iranian President, Ahmedi Nijad, revealed that some western and regional countries are behind a conspiracy to divide Iraq.

In an interview with Mayadin Satellite Channel, he said "Any problem that takes place in Iraq will negatively affect the regional countries as well."

"Iran is less affected country in case Iraq is to be divided since Iran has good relations with the communities close to its border," he added.

"The Sunni-Shiite sedition is a proposal by the new imperial powers," he stressed, mentioning that "Iran does not interfere in the internal affairs of any country but it supports the freedom of the nations in expressing their demands."

"Iran supports Palestinian, Egyptian and Bahraini as well as other regional peoples equally," he concluded.

- **Turkey permits Iraqis to enter via four cities (Aswat al-Iraq)**

06 Feb 2013

BASRA/ Aswat al-Iraq: Turkish General Consul said here that "Iraqis are permitted to enter Turkish territories from four airports".

Consul Farouq Qaimaqchi told Aswat al-Iraq announced that Iraqis will be able to have visas from other countries, unlike the past they should have the visa while travelling from Baghdad directly only.

He expected hopes that this move will finally lead to lift the visa procedure between the two countries.

- **Iraq participates in Ministerial meeting held in Rome (alliraqnews)**

05 Feb 2013

Baghdad (AIN) - Undersecretary of bilateral relations and policy planning, Labeed Abbawi, participated, at the ministerial conference held in Rome for the period of 3-4 / February / 2013 concerning the proposals of the new methodology for the reform of the Security Council.

A statement by the Ministry received by AIN cited "The Undersecretary expressed Iraq's positive position of the desired reform process, which has become an urgent necessity and a matter of debate and consultation within the corridors of the United Nations in light of the common international challenges experiencing a remarkable continuous surge at various levels that require concerted international

efforts to face effectively and coordinately."

"The conference called by foreign ministers of Italy and Spain, attended by representatives of more than 65 countries," the statement concluded.

2. IRAN

- **Official Urges Int'l Community to Recognize Iran's Regional Clout**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior Iranian foreign ministry official said Iran has shown a successful performance in its plans for boosting national security and regional influence, and called on the international community to acknowledge Iran's growing power.



Addressing a conference on National Security and Foreign Policy held here in Tehran today, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Oceania Seyed Abbas

Araqchi said the country is moving in the direction of power and might, and said, "The move enjoys legitimate interests and capabilities which should be recognized and respected by the international community."

"We have started this move since the beginning of the fourth decade (of the life of the Islamic) Revolution (four years ago) and we will emerge as a regional and international power," he added.

Araqchi said different factors have contributed to Iran's growing influence, including Iran's military power and defense preparedness, geographical position, Iran's neighbors, territorial stretch, lengthy borders, access to free seas, financial feedback, economic power and trade and industrial capacities as well as foreign policy.

In relevant remarks in December, Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said Iran enjoys such a powerful and vast regional influence that it cannot be ignored by the world powers

"In the past, Iran had been known as a US-backed power ... but today it has reached

a point that no world power can ignore its influence in the region," Larijani said at the time.

"Today, Iran has achieved a scientific and technological power that the West has resorted to adventurist moves against the Iranian nuclear and missile academy in the last few years to hinder this growing scientific trend," the Iranian speaker said.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107142328>

- **Spokesman: Sanctions to Help Iran Decrease Dependence on Oil Revenues**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast underlined the positive outcomes of sanctions and pressures for Iranian economy, saying that pressures and embargos pave the way for Iran to end its dependence on oil revenues.



Addressing a National Security and Foreign Policy conference here in Tehran today, Mehman-Parast said the West is using Iran's current dependence on oil revenues as a leverage to impose pressure on Tehran, meaning that such pressures can stimulate Iran to end its dependence on oil income.

"We have used these threats as an opportunity and we hope the planning underway in the country would end that dependence," he stated.

"We will stand and confront this move (sanctions) and our trade ties will double if we work out a good plan for restriction on oil transactions," Mehman-Parast said.

His remarks came as the new US sanctions, started today, will prevent Iran from reclaiming earnings it gets from its oil exports trade except to buy goods from the country concerned.

The United States has aggressively ramped up its use of financial sanctions this year to pressure Iran to abandon its civilian nuclear program.

In December, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Iran plans to decrease the share of oil revenues in its next year state budget, the Iranian president announced on Wednesday.

"As regards the next year budget, we are moving to decrease the share of oil revenues to the minimum as much as possible. An oil-based budget is not reasonable since we are a great and advanced country and will decrease our spending," Ahmadinejad told reporters at the time.

He added that the government has cut a large amount of unnecessary spending and focused on key and necessary spending.

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 NPT entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

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

Tehran has repeatedly said that it considers its nuclear case closed as it has come clean of IAEA's questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107142322>

- **Former Tehran prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi released from detention**

The caretaker of Iran's Social Security Organization and Tehran's former

prosecutor has been released from detention.



The Office of Tehran's Prosecutor earlier announced that Saeed Mortazavi was arrested on Monday night, but did not give any reason for the arrest.

On February 3, Iran's Majlis voted to dismiss Labor and Social Affairs Minister Abdolreza Sheikholeslami over his failure to remove Mortazavi from his post as the head of the Social Security Organization.

During the open impeachment session, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad played a tape showing a meeting between Mortazavi and Fazel Larijani, the brother of Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani.

The video purportedly showed Fazel Larijani attempting to use his family's political status for financial gain. Fazel Larijani has declared that he would file a lawsuit against Mortazavi and President

Ahmadinejad for what he called an intrusion of privacy.

Mortazavi has been previously accused of involvement in the deaths of three detainees in Kahrizak Detention Center during the unrest following the 2009 presidential election in Iran.

In December 2009, a statement from the Judicial Organization for the Armed Forces announced that, according to forensic information, three of those detained during the country's post-election events died while being held at the Kahrizak facility.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/06/287553/extehran-prosecutor-mortazavi-released/>

- **Iran, Egypt can help bring about unity among Muslims: Al-Azhar Sheikh**

Sheikh of Egypt's Al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tayyeb says Tehran and Cairo can join hands to foil the Western plots of sowing discord among Muslims.

The top Egyptian cleric said in a meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Cairo on Tuesday, "We

respect you as someone who, apart from his political responsibilities, tries to help the realization of unity among Muslims,"

Tayyeb also stated that Al-Azhar scholars make every effort to eradicate discord among Muslims, and to fight Islamophobia and enmity toward Shia Muslims.

Tayyeb added that discrepancies should not create tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims. He once again hailed the fatwa issued by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in 2010 that prohibits insulting the companions of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and his wives.

On Tuesday, the Iranian president began a historic visit to Egypt to attend the 12th summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Ahmadinejad was received by Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi upon his arrival at Cairo International Airport. He is the first Iranian head of state to visit Egypt in 34 years.

Iran severed its diplomatic ties with Egypt in 1980, after the Islamic Revolution of

1979, because Egypt signed the Camp David Accords with the Israeli regime and offered asylum to former Iranian dictator Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

Morsi also visited Iran in August 2012 to attend a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement. It was the first visit of an Egyptian president to Iran in more than three decades.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/06/287538/iran-egypt-contribute-to-muslim-unity/>

- **Iran to study US talks offer if Washington changes behavior: Ahmadinejad**

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks during a meeting with the editors-in-chief of Egyptian media in Cairo, Egypt, February 5, 2013.

Remarks by US officials are new and positive and we hope that positive changes are made in their behavior too. If we witness positive changes in their behavior, then we will study it (the proposal) with a positive attitude."

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says the Islamic Republic will study the US proposal for direct talks provided that Washington makes positive changes in its behavior.

"Remarks by US officials are new and positive and we hope that positive changes are made in their behavior too. If we witness positive changes in their behavior, then we will study it (the proposal) with a positive attitude," Ahmadinejad said in a meeting with the editors-in-chief of Egyptian media in Cairo on Tuesday night.

Ahmadinejad is on a visit to Egypt to attend the 12th summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

His comments came in response to a question about US Vice President Joe Biden's offer of direct talks with the Islamic Republic.

Speaking at the 49th annual Munich Security Conference in Germany on February 2, Biden said Washington was ready to hold direct talks with Iran over the country's nuclear energy program.

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

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/06/287529/iran-to-study-us-offer-if-change-occurs/>

- **Iran considers as forbidden non-civilian use of nuclear energy: FM**

Non-civilian nuclear activities are not and have never been part of the Islamic Republic of Iran's plans and we believe it to be forbidden and haraam (religiously forbidden)."

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi says the Islamic Republic considers as religiously forbidden the use of nuclear energy for non-civilian purposes.

Salehi made the remark in a meeting with a group of scholars, political analysts, foreign ambassadors and diplomats in Germany on Tuesday.

The Iranian foreign minister also rejected the allegations against Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program.

"Non-civilian nuclear activities are not and have never been part of the Islamic Republic of Iran's plans and we believe it to be forbidden and haraam (religiously forbidden)," Salehi stated.

On February 22, 2012, Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said Iran considers the pursuit and possession of nuclear weapons "a grave sin" from every logical, religious and theoretical standpoint.

The United States and the Israeli regime allege that Iran's nuclear activities have been diverted towards non-civilian purposes and, based on the claim, Washington and Tel Aviv have at times adopted an aggressive stance towards Iran.



<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/06/287528/noncivilian-nenergy-forbidden-iran/>

- **Ikhwans: Ahmadinejad visit to Egypt, a blessing from Revolution**

Iran has categorically rejected the allegations; and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has never found any evidence during its inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities to support the claims.

Answering a question about US Vice President Joe Biden's recent offer of direct talks with Iran, Salehi said Washington should stop issuing threats and mounting pressure if it is serious about entering negotiations with Tehran.

"If US officials are serious about their readiness to hold talks, they should know that pressure and threats are not consistent with an invitation to talks," he said.

Speaking at the 49th annual Munich Security Conference in Germany on Saturday, Biden said Washington was ready to hold direct talks with Iran over the country's nuclear energy program.

TEHRAN, Feb. 6 (MNA) – A senior member of Muslim Brotherhood says Ahmadinejad's visit to Egypt is a prelude to normal relations between Iran and Egypt.

In an interview to Al-Alam on Tuesday, Jamal Taj al-Din said that Ahmadinejad's visit to Egypt is a blessing from Egyptian people's revolution of January 25th. "In previous regime, a visit by Iranian officials to Egypt was a redline, since Egyptian authorities feared Western and Zionist anger," he added.

Taj al-Din assessed Ahmadinejad's visit an opening of Iran-Egypt relations and a step forward to improve approximation of Islamic sects.

On possible topics of discussion between two presidents, he said that one topic would be ways of boosting cooperation among Islamic countries, especially

between Egypt and Iran, normalizing political and economic relations.

“No doubt that Syrian crisis will be an important discussion topic for both countries to end bloodshed in Syria,” he added.

Taj al-Din believed that Egypt and Iran could develop good relations, and end their problems in a way conducive to benefit of both countries and Islamic world.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1810393>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Fatah, Hamas to meet in Cairo**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Fatah and Hamas officials will meet Wednesday in Cairo to follow up on prior reconciliation agreements and elections, a Fatah official said Wednesday.

Yahya Rabah told Ma'an that the delegations representing both factions will meet in Cairo to discuss the work of the

Palestinian Central Elections Commission's work, which is to resume this month.

Rabah said voting centers would re-open within days, and voter cards will be reissued over a 10-day period.

The long-embattled reconciliation deal, signed in 2011, once again ground to a halt until a renewed push earlier this month.

A PLO meeting set for Friday in Cairo will select members of a joint government in addition to selecting the leadership of the PLO.

An official from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said Tuesday that elections for the PLO's Palestinian National Council were likely to be held in six months.

Jamil Mezher told Ma'an that he hoped a PLO reform committee summit scheduled for Friday would facilitate implementing the reconciliation deal between rival Palestinian political factions.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=562602>

- **Obama to visit Palestine, Israel in spring**

TEL AVIV, Israel (Ma'an) -- US President Barack Obama will visit the region in March to restart the Middle East peace process, an Israeli television station reported Tuesday.



Channel 10 reported that aides to the American leader were in the region preparing for a March 20 visit that would include cities in Israel as well as the occupied West Bank.

The report quoted political sources as saying Obama's trip will come after the new Israeli coalition government is sworn in. He will try to push forward peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Meanwhile White House spokesman Jay Carney told reporters that Obama planned

to visit the West Bank and Jordan as part of the upcoming trip to the Middle East.

Earlier, Carney confirmed Obama would travel to Israel in the spring, his first trip to the country since taking office, but dates for the trip were not released. Obama will meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian and Jordanian leaders during the tour, Carney said.

A White House official told Reuters that Obama and Netanyahu discussed the matter in a telephone call on Jan. 28.

"The start of the president's second term and the formation of a new Israeli government offer the opportunity to reaffirm the deep and enduring bonds between the United States and Israel and to discuss the way forward on a broad range of issues of mutual concern, including Iran and Syria," the official said.

"Additional details about the trip -- including the dates of travel -- will be released at a later time."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=562499>

- **Situation in Palestine Threatens Two-State Solution, says SI**

LISBON, February 5, 2013 (Wafa) – The Socialist International (SI) Tuesday said that the tense situation in Palestine and peace process impasse threatens the two-state solution.

It said in a statement following the Socialist International conference in Lisbon that even though the Palestinians are continuing their non-violent struggle and international activism, the Israeli occupation continues to enforce major controls.

“Israel keeps Gaza under siege, and deepens the occupation by building more colonies and settlements on Palestinian land and widening its hold on Jerusalem in the east and in the South,” it said.

SI pointed out that despite of the Arab spring inability to create a stable democratic rule capable of exerting pressure to advance towards the achievements of peace in Palestine, Palestinians have achieved a victory by being admitted as an observer state to the United Nations; an achievement highly supported by SI and its members.

It said that the recent “Palestinian demonstration in Gaza, which included all Palestinian parties [and] gathered [around] 1.2 million people who celebrated the birth of Fateh, called for the unity of all Palestinians behind their legitimate government, and added strength to the position of Arab progressive forces, calling for democracy based on pluralism, free elections and national unity.”

SI affirmed its commitment to its historic position which supports the Palestinian people’s right to freedom, independence, unity and statehood, including their right to non-violent struggle for freedom and independence.

It said that it is committed to the achievement of a peace, between the Israelis and the Palestinians, based on the recognition of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital and on the 1967 borders living side by side with its Israeli neighbor in peace, security and harmony.

SI insisted that in order to the achievement of peace to be implemented

"a total cessation of settlement activities by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory must be achieved, leading to speedy negotiations on the basis of the internationally-supported terms of reference."

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21626>

- **Shapiro: Obama Israel trip 'without precondition'**

Obama to meet Israelis to discuss Iran, Syria, Palestinians, US envoy says, adding US president to "consult," not "interfere." Netanyahu meets with Obama at White House

US President Barack Obama's upcoming visit to Jerusalem - the first of its kind since he entered the White House in 2009 - will be without precondition, US Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro told Israel Radio on Wednesday morning.

Obama will discuss three main issues with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu: restarting the peace process with the Palestinians, the Iranian nuclear program and the civil war in Syria and the risks it poses to Israel, Shapiro told Israel Radio.

"President Obama very much respects the Israeli political process," he said. "He won't intervene in elections or coalition talks, and he will arrive after a new government is formed. They agreed that the start of his second term and the new Israeli government will be a good time for him to come and renew the deep connection that is ongoing between Israel and the US."

Shapiro added that Obama is coming without preconditions, but rather as in the framework of consultation on all issues facing both Israel and the United States.

The trip is widely seen as an effort by Obama to kick-start a moribund peace process between Israelis and Palestinians amid other roiling regional concerns, such as the Arab Spring and the Iranian nuclear program. He came under a great deal of criticism for not visiting Israel during his first term, something that many believed would have reassured a jittery Israeli public of his support, even though he did visit countries nearby such as Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. He was last in Israel as a presidential candidate in 2008.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=302284>

- **Netanyahu vows to change electoral system**

By GIL HOFFMAN

PM: Likud, Yisrael Beytenu to meet in order to bridge gap on electoral reform; Liberman suggests presidential system.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu promised the joint Likud-Yisrael Beytenu faction on Tuesday that significant changes would be made to the electoral system at the beginning of his new term.

Stabilizing the electoral system is the primary demand of Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Liberman, as well as a key issue for likely coalition partner Yesh Atid.

In his ceremonial speech to the newly sworn-in Knesset, Netanyahu said it was wonderful that ministers and committee chairmen were able to do their jobs for four years because his last government lasted that long, but that more had to be done to ensure political stability for the future.

“It cannot be that the country facing the most challenges should suffer from instability and a weak electoral system,” Netanyahu said in the speech.

The prime minister told the Likud Beytenu faction that meetings would be held soon, to bridge the gaps between the Likud and Yisrael Beytenu on electoral reform.

Transportation Minister Israel Katz, who chaired a coalition committee on the issue in the outgoing government, said the two parties had already come closer on key electoral reforms.

Liberman has given up his hope for an electoral system that resembles a presidential system, which no other party backed.

The Likud has abandoned its support for direct regional elections for part of the Knesset, that once had the backing of Labor and Kadima, but that Labor leader Shelly Yacimovich opposes, and Kadima no longer has enough power to advance.

Katz said the Likud and Yisrael Beytenu agree on raising the electoral threshold from 2 to 3 percent.

In the last Knesset, Shas, United Torah Judaism, and Bayit Yehudi opposed such a move, but all three parties can now support it because Bayit Yehudi and UTJ have grown and Shas has lost mandates due to small parties that might not have run, had the threshold been higher.

The Likud and Yisrael Beytenu also both back making it harder to topple a government by requiring a special majority for no-confidence votes. Legal advisers are investigating whether such a change could be implemented in the current Knesset.

Two issues on which the Likud and Yisrael Beytenu are divided are limiting the size of the cabinet and whether the leader of the largest party should automatically be prime minister.

Yisrael Beytenu, like Yesh Atid, wants there to be only 18 ministers, while the Likud wants more.

Katz warned Liberman in the faction meeting that making the leader of the largest party prime minister automatically would result in ad hoc coalitions of parties

ahead of elections just for the sake of winning.

He warned that this could cause “chaos,” because a prime minister could be elected who would not be the leader of the largest bloc in the Knesset.

Liberman responded that his support for the change was “not holy” and a source close to him said he was willing to compromise.

Culture and Sport Minister Limor Livnat called upon Netanyahu to take action to change the system for electing the party’s MKs while he changes the electoral system of the state. She complained that the present system of holding primaries among the party’s members enabled people who do not vote Likud to decide the party’s Knesset slate.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=302246>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Mali terror leaders caught near Algeria**

By Walid Ramzi for Magharebia in Algiers
– 05/02/13

Secular Touareg rebels in northern Mali on Monday (February 4th) announced the capture of two senior terror leaders near the Algerian border.

Fighters from the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) arrested Ansar al-Din's third-in-command, Mohamed Moussa Ag Mohamed, as well as a leading figure in the Movement for Tawhid and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Oumini Ould Baba Ahmed, as they tried to flee a French assault towards the Algerian border.

Ag Mohamed "was called Ansar al-Din's number three, but in reality he was the brain of the organisation", Kidal official Abdoulaye Toure told AFP.

He was allegedly in charge of amputating thieves' hands in Timbuktu, while Ould Baba Ahmed is accused of taking part in kidnapping several French hostages.

The two terror chiefs were being brought to Kidal, according to the MNLA, where the secular group shares power with Ansar

al-Din splinter group Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA).

"The Touareg movement's announcement of the arrest of those two Ansar al-Din and MUJAO leaders is a good will message about Touaregs' readiness to support international efforts to retake the area and their confirmation of support of French forces," said Taher Ben Thamer, a retired military officer.

MNLA offered to support France's mission by tracking down the Islamists. It also offered to hold peace talks with the government of Mali in an attempt to heal the rift between the north and south.

Meanwhile, El Khabar reported that French forces in Mali were moving into the second phase of their operation, focusing on eliminating leaders of armed groups and destroying the Islamists' arms depots.

Since Sunday, the French army has been launching air raids targeting supply bases and training camps used by al-Qaeda-linked terrorists in Tessalit, near the Algerian border, one of the main gates leading to the Ifoghas Mountains.

Algeria has not issued any formal comment on the military operations taking place near its border.

During a parliamentary session Sunday, Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci was asked about the impact of the situation in Mali on Algeria.

"The Malian authorities are making an effort which we hope will be successful," Medelci said. "Although the current situation allows us to be optimistic, there are still problems facing the Malians. Some countries are helping them so security and stability can be restored in their country and so they can build their own state and look forward towards development."

"The situation in Mali is up for Malians who are making a great effort to get out of this crisis," he added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/05/feature-01

- **Tunisia security forces on high alert**

By Monia Ghanmi for Magharebia in Tunis
– 05/02/13

Facing fresh threats of home-grown terrorism and following the terror siege at the In Amenas gas complex, Tunisia is beefing up security at oil installations, particularly along its southern border.

"Highly trained and armed combat units were sent to important sites in the Tunisian desert to protect oil and gas fields in the desert triangle of the country," TAP quoted security sources as saying on Tuesday (January 29th).

Given a rise in terrorist threats and the expansion of Islamist militant movements in the Maghreb, the Tunisian government put the nation's armed forces on high alert to prevent terrorists from launching any attacks in the coming days, national security experts said.

The new security measures went into effect after Tunisian security officials recently dismantled suspected terrorist cells, discovered illicit caches of weapons scattered about the country and the government extended the state of emergency through March 2nd.

the same time, the recent ouster of terrorist groups by French forces in northern Mali forced terrorists to flee into the Libyan desert near southern Tunisia, said Bassel Torjmen, an expert on terrorism in the Maghreb.

"This situation exacerbates the risk of terrorist operations similar to In Amenas in the Algerian desert and the southern Tunisian region of the oil fields, where many oil companies operate, and could become a potential target for these groups that have started experiencing organizational collapse and disintegration due to the fighting in Mali," Torjmen told Magharebia.

"There is another threat ... to be expected from groups linked to al-Qaeda in Tunisia. They could launch terrorist acts to draw media attention away from Mali, and to try to confuse the countries in the region and compel them to put pressure on France to halt its military operations in Mali," he added.

Young Tunisians have joined the ranks of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali, and AQIM could activate its sleeper

cells in Tunisia in "just a matter of time", Torjmen said.

A jihadist in police custody recently confessed that AQIM was planning a series of attacks in Tunisia similar to the Algeria gas field siege last month, Echorouk reported.

Jihadist Derbala Laaroussi (aka Abu Talha Tounsi) told police interrogators that dozens of fellow militants were training in northern Mali for imminent terrorist attacks to be co-ordinated with Tunisian sleeper cells, the Algerian daily reported.

"The current security situation requires vigilance by Tunisian security forces, and regional security co-ordination, in view of the difficult situation faced by countries in the region," Mohamed Benzekri, a professor of international relations at the Université de Droit Tunis, told Magharebia.

"Thus we are in need of solidarity and security co-operation to ensure comprehensive control of common borders and find ways to combat terrorism, a problem that is complex and ever growing," he said.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/05/feature-02

- **Libya vows to improve security**

By Essam Mohamed in Tripoli and Mawassi Lahcen in Casablanca for Magharebia – 04/02/13

A United Nations building in Tripoli was hit by two homemade bombs last week amid continuing concerns about the security situation in Libya.

Two explosive devices were thrown at the unoccupied UN office in the Gurji area of Tripoli on January 29th. One exploded, while police dismantled the other one.

"A bomb blast caused minor damage to the building and broke several windows. A second bomb was found later, and successfully dismantled by Libyan police who arrived quickly and efficiently to the site," said Radhia Achouri, spokeswoman for the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

"The opposition of armed groups to the military intervention in Mali may aggravate the security situation in Libya, especially since there are still about 200,000 armed fighters in the rebel brigades in Libya," UNSMIL chief Tarek Mitri said.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Ashour Shuwail said the day following the attack that training for security forces was underway, with 26,000 applicants. He pointed out that training was progressing quickly despite the lack of infrastructure.

He explained that decent work opportunities would be found for rebel leaders and that surveillance cameras would be installed within a month in Tripoli as well as at the entrances of Sebha and Benghazi.

Shuwail also held a recent meeting in Tripoli with the military council and local councils, the Shura Council and rebel leaders during which an agreement was achieved to prepare a joint plan to secure the city of Tripoli and organise public activities.

"The plan includes a ban on carrying guns inside Tripoli as well as a ban on medium and heavy weapons and illegal organizations within the city," Interior Ministry spokesman Majdi al-Orfi said. "It will also activate the role of the traffic police and secure city entrances by manning checkpoints."

At a press conference last Wednesday, Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan touched on the Mali situation as well as the In Amenas terror attack, saying Libya co-operated with Algeria on security matters.

"I think that what happened in Algeria could happen anywhere else as well," the Libyan premier added. Zidan explained that the air force, the defence ministry forces and a number of former revolutionaries were now guarding the border.

"Libya is recovering now and it is inaccurate to say that security is lacking in Libya, but there is a partial security flaw that can occur even in other countries, which is natural," Zidan said.

For his part, Libyan businessman Sami Ramzi commented that violent jihadists

were exploiting the situation and the devout nature of Libyans.

However, he said Libyan tribes "strongly reject the takfiri jihadist ideas of those militant groups". He specifically pointed to the reaction of residents in al-Bayda and Derna, where he said "jihadist quarters were attacked by the sons of these cities and expelled".

"The same scene took place in Benghazi after the events of the U.S. Embassy. All of the children of Benghazi attacked those battalions and took over their headquarters amid bloody events where the people of Benghazi prevailed," Ramzi said.

He attributed the on-going instability and the emergence of radical groups to "the absence of a constitution and the delay in the formation of the army and police".

Meanwhile, Libyan academic researcher Mohamed Meftahi pointed to the recent arrest of Muhammad Jamal al-Kashif (a.k.a. Abu Ahmad) in Egypt as "an indication of the beginning of the war on al-Qaeda in Libya". Abu Ahmad was

reportedly linked to the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi.

"The arrest reflects the commitment of the Libyan government to dry up the sources of terrorism and prevent al-Qaeda from controlling Libyan arms and smuggling them abroad," Meftahi said

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/02/04/feature-01

- **France condemns slaying of Tunisian opposition leader**

French President Françoise Hollande condemns killing of Tunisian opposition leader, expresses concern over increase of violence in the leading Arab Spring country

France on Wednesday condemned the murder of Tunisian opposition leader Shoukry Belaid and expressed serious concern about a surge in political violence in the North African country.

"This murder robs Tunisia of one of its most courageous and free voices," President François Hollande said hours after Belaid, a harsh critic of Tunisia's

Islamist-led government, was shot dead as he was leaving his home.

"Throughout his public life, Shoukry Belaid fought for freedom, tolerance and the respect of human rights with a deeply rooted conviction that dialogue and democracy should be at the heart of the new Tunisia," Hollande said in a statement.

"It is this message of unity and the rallying of Tunisians to the cause of fundamental freedoms that his assassins wanted to destroy."

Hollande called on all political players to respect the ideals that led to the 2011 overthrow of former dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

"France is very concerned by the increase in political violence in Tunisia and calls for the respect of the ideals of the people expressed during the revolution."

Belaid's family have accused Ennahda, the Islamist party that heads Tunisia's coalition government, of being behind the murder.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64164/World/Region/France-condemns-slaying-of-Tunisian-opposition-lea.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **US urges Europe to act against Hezbollah**

Following Hezbollah's reported involvement in Bulgarian bus attack last summer which killed 5 Israeli tourists, Secretary of State John Kerry urges Europe to take 'immediate action' to crack down on the group

The United States on Tuesday pressed Europe to help choke off funds and aid to Hezbollah after Bulgaria blamed the militia group for an attack that killed five Israeli tourists in July.

"We strongly urge other governments around the world – and particularly our partners in Europe – to take immediate action to crack down on Hezbollah," new Secretary of State John Kerry said.

"We need to send an unequivocal message to this terrorist group that it can no longer engage in despicable actions

with impunity," he added in one of his first statements since taking up the reins of US diplomacy.

The Lebanon-based Muslim Shiite group Hezbollah has been on a US terror blacklist since 1995 after a series of anti-American attacks, including the bombing of the US embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut in the 1980s.

However, the militia – which is an ally of Syrian leader President Bashar al-Assad and funded by Iran – is also the most powerful faction in Lebanon's cabinet, controlling 18 out of 30 seats, and is the country's most powerful military force.

Washington has been actively pushing the European Union to also take steps to ban Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

The US fears that as it has been "squeezing" Hezbollah the group has looked for "other places to do their banking, to do their plotting," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said.

"Our concern has been that Europe has been one of the places that they have exploited."

Kerry, who discussed the issue during talks Tuesday with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, said the Bulgarian finding was "clear and unequivocal: Lebanese Hezbollah was responsible for this deadly assault on European soil."

The bus bombing, in which five Israeli tourists and their Bulgarian driver were killed at Burgas airport, was part of "a stepped-up terrorist campaign by Hezbollah... around the world over the past year," Nuland warned.

President Barack Obama's top counter-terrorism adviser John Brennan, his nominee to lead the CIA, also called on European states to take "proactive action" to uncover Hezbollah's infrastructure, financing and networks.

US officials also praised Bulgaria for its professional and comprehensive investigation into the attack, vowing Washington would stand with the government in Sofia as it fights terrorism.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also said the European Union should draw the "necessary conclusions" about Hezbollah following the investigation, hinting the group should be placed on a terror watch list.

Nuland acknowledged however there were differences among EU states about how to deal with Hezbollah, given that it is part of an elected government.

"There are varying views about whether... there's a difference between the military wing and the political wing. You know that our view is that we don't recognize a distinction, but different governments have different views," she said.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64143/World/Region/US-urges-Europe-to-act-against-Hezbollah.aspx>

- **Bulgaria says Hezbollah behind deadly anti-Israeli attack**

Canadian and Australian nationals linked to Hezbollah are reportedly responsible for Bulgarian bomb attack in July which killed five Israeli tourists

The Bulgarian government said Tuesday that two people with Canadian and Australian passports linked to the Lebanese militia movement Hezbollah were behind a bomb attack in July that killed five Israeli tourists.

"We have information on financing and membership of Hezbollah for two people including the bomber," Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov told reporters.

"They had Canadian and Australian passports ... (and) lived in Lebanon since 2006 and 2010," he said.

The bombing on a bus carrying Israelis at Burgas Airport on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast, the deadliest attack on Israelis abroad since 2004, also killed the Bulgarian bus driver and the bomber. Some 30 people were wounded.

Israel immediately blamed Iran and its "terrorist proxy" Hezbollah but until now Bulgarian investigators have stopped short of blaming anyone for the 18 July attack.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64115/World/Region/Bulgaria-says-Hezbollah-behind-deadly-antiIsraeli.aspx>

- **Britain urges Lebanon cooperation in Burgas investigation**

Britain's Foreign Secretary William Hague called on Lebanese authorities to cooperate with the Bulgarian government's investigation into the bus attack in Burgas.

"We call on the Lebanese government to fully cooperate with the investigation," Hague said in a press release on Wednesday.

He also reiterated that the operation was "an appalling and callous act of terrorism," and underscored the importance of its perpetrators being "brought to account."

On Tuesday, the Bulgarian government said that two people with Canadian and Australian passports linked to the Lebanese militia movement Hezbollah were behind the July 2012 Burgas bomb attack in which five Israelis were killed.

The foreign secretary also announced that he will discuss with the EU the "measures we can now take to continue to make our citizens safer."

The perpetrators of this appalling and callous act of terrorism need to be brought to account.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/british-official-urges-lebanon-cooperation-in-burgas-investigation>

- **Hezbollah operations harm expats, MP says**

MP Marwan Hamadeh slammed Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah for not taking into consideration his actions' repercussions on Lebanese expatriates.

"[Nasrallah's group] is using Canadian and Australian passports... with no consideration to the repercussions [of this act] on hundreds of thousands of expatriates and on their reputation as well as Lebanon's," Hamadeh told Al-Joumhouria newspaper in comments published Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the Bulgarian government said that two people with Canadian and Australian passports linked to the Lebanese militia movement Hezbollah were behind the July 2012 Burgas bomb attack which left five Israeli tourists dead

in what was the bloodiest attack on Israelis abroad since 2004.

Following these accusations, Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Miqati expressed the country's readiness to cooperate with Bulgarian authorities on investigations into this matter.

In turn, Interior Minister Marwan Charbel said that the cabinet will discuss in its Wednesday meeting the case of Hezbollah's alleged implication in the Bulgaria attack.

However, he told Voice of Lebanon (100.5) Radio that "Bulgaria should have informed Lebanon of the investigations before they were finalized."

National Liberal Party leader MP Dori Shamoun also commented on Bulgaria's accusations against Hezbollah, saying that these allegations "will make things worse."

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/hezbollah-operations-harm-expatriates-mp-says>

6. SYRIA

- **UN eyes 1.1 million Syria refugees amid 'crisis fatigue'**

United Nations claims the number of people fleeing fighting in Syria could reach 1.1 million by June, as it warns of crisis "fatigue" among developed nations

Israel will 'regret aggression against Syria':
Iran

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres said the international community needed to support a \$1 billion plan, pushed by his and other international groups, to address the needs of those displaced by the Syrian conflict. The UN on Wednesday stated that the number of people fleeing the fighting in Syria could reach 1.1 million by June.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is "the most dramatic crisis we are facing today," he said, adding developed nations, including those in Europe, needed to accept more refugees, as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have done.

Guterres said the refugee problem in Syria is getting worse as the government of President Bashar al-Assad and opposition

groups continue their bloody battles for the control of the energy-rich nation.

In April last year, the UNHCR recognised a total 33,000 Syrian refugees, but the agency is now registering an additional 35,000 people every week, he said.

"That puts enormous pressure on the UNHCR's capacity and resources to deliver protection and assistance," he said.

But, he acknowledged political leaders may find it hard to convince electorates of the need to act when faced with a multitude of demands on their sympathies.

"Last year, simultaneously, we had four refugee crises. Mali, Sudan/South Sudan, Syria and Democratic Republic of Congo," he told a press conference in Tokyo.

"Inevitably... there is certain fatigue because crises are so many. There is not capacity in public opinion to follow them with the same kind of interest," he said.

But, he warned, each was important.

"All these crises are creating hundreds of thousands of refugees, at the same time, they correspond to... global threats to peace and security," he said.

The former Portuguese prime minister stressed that helping refugees and stabilising the resource-rich but unsettled nations in Africa and the Middle East, was in the economic interests of rich countries, including Japan.

Guterres was making a routine visit to Japan to ask for its continued support, most of it financial, for his agency.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64160/World/Region/UN-eyes--million-Syria-refugees-amid-crisis-fatigu.aspx>

- **Suicide bomber hits Syrian intelligence compound in Palmyra**

A car bomb exploded in a military intelligence compound in the eastern Syrian town of Palmyra on Wednesday, causing dozens of casualties among security personnel and militiamen loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, local opposition campaigners said.

A bomb destroyed part of the back wall of the sprawling compound near the Roman-era ruins and then a suicide car bomber drove through, exploding the car and destroying parts of the facility, they added.

They said it was not immediately clear how many people had been killed in the blast and clashes which followed. Video footage taken from afar, which could not be immediately verified, showed a large cloud of thick smoke rising from behind buildings in the city.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64152/World/Region/Suicide-bomber-hits-Syrian-intelligence-compound-i.aspx>

- **Main group in Syria opposition rejects talks with regime**

The Syrian National Council, the main component of the opposition National Coalition, on Tuesday rejected the possibility of holding any talks with the regime as offered by the head of the umbrella group.

"The Syrian National Council has already told the people of the revolution of its

commitment to its principles and objectives... the overthrow of the Syrian regime and all its parts, the rejection of any dialogue with it, and the protection of the revolution so that it does not become hostage to any international commitments," it said in a statement.

National Coalition chief Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib announced last week he was willing to hold talks with the Assad regime, subject to conditions including the release of 160,000 detainees.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/main-group-in-syria-opposition-rejects-talks-with-regime>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Saudi cleric urges veil for baby girls

Comments about veiling two-year-old girls by Saudi cleric provoke anger and ridicule in Saudi Arabia

A Saudi cleric has said baby girls should be veiled to avoid sexual harassment, in remarks broadcast on television that

sparked outrage in the conservative kingdom.

"Girls should wear the veil from the age of two," said Abdullah Daoud on Islamic television Al-Majd, adding that Saudis should follow the example of South Asian countries.

"If a girl is sexually desired, her parents should cover her face and force her to wear veil," to protect her against perverts, he said.

Some practicing Muslims believe that girls must begin wearing head covers such as the veil from the age of puberty.

Daoud's comments, in an interview which was posted on the Internet, sparked an outcry across social networks and the local press, with prominent cleric Salman al-Audah joining the protests.

"We hope that these aberrant statements will not be exaggerated and taken as fatwa (religious edict)," Audah told AFP on Tuesday.

Saudi columnist Badria Al-Bisher slammed Daoud for his proposal of veiling little girls,

"instead of proposing a stern law curbing sexual harassment, and school and media awareness campaigns."

Saudi tweeters also vented their fury.

"What level of moral deterioration have such people reached?" asked lawyer Abdulrahman al-Lahim on Twitter, claiming that "sex obsession" is behind such statements.

"The best solution is to exile women, old or young, to remote countries, as long as we have men acting like animals," wrote female Saudi journalist Halima Muthffar on Twitter.

Women in Saudi Arabia are deprived of many rights that are considered basic elsewhere, including the right to drive, and cannot travel without proper authorisation from their male guardians.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64105/World/Region/Saudi-clerics-urges-veil-for-baby-girls.aspx>

- **Serbia, Saudi Arabia establish diplomatic ties**

Serbia has established diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia for the first time since the 1990s break-up of the former Yugoslav federation, aiming to "step up economic cooperation", a foreign ministry statement said Tuesday.

Saudi Arabia was the only country in the Arab world with which Serbia did not have diplomatic ties, the ministry said.

Faced with a decrease of foreign investments necessary to revive its ailing economy, Serbia has recently stepped up contacts with Arab countries.

Trade Minister Rasim Ljajic recently said Belgrade would propose a number of investment projects to Riyadh, without elaborating.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/serbia-saudi-arabia-establish-diplomatic-ties>

- **Egypt reassures Gulf monarchies over ties with Iran**

Egypt will not improve its ties with Iran at the expense of undermining Gulf Arab security, Foreign Minister Mohammed Kamel Amr said on Tuesday as Iranian

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made a landmark visit.

"The security of Gulf countries is a red line for Egypt," Amr said on the eve of an Islamic summit, in a bid to reassure Sunni Arab nations in the Gulf wary of a rapprochement with Shiite Iran.

"Egypt's relations with any country, particularly Gulf nations, will not be made at the expense of their security," he said.

Ahmadinejad arrived on Tuesday in Cairo to attend the three-day Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit that opens on Wednesday in the Egyptian capital.

His visit is the first by an Iranian president to Egypt since the 1979 revolution -- the same year Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel. A year later Tehran severed ties with Cairo in protest at the agreement.

Ahmadinejad has said that strengthening bilateral ties with Cairo would be a main aim of his visit.

"I will try to pave the ground for developing cooperation between Iran and Egypt," he was quoted as saying by IRNA.

Iran has been reaching out to Egypt since Islamists came to power in the wake of the 2011 revolution that ousted veteran president Hosni Mubarak.

Mubarak's successor, Mohamed Morsi who hails from the influential Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, has responded cautiously to Iranian efforts to revive ties, amid differences between Cairo and Tehran over Syria.

Ties between Shiite Iran and the Sunni-ruled six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council - Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates -- have been strained since Gulf troops rolled into Bahrain in 2011 to help put down Shiite-led protests.

In December leaders of the GCC held their annual summit and issued a statement saying they "reject and denounce" Iran's "continued interference" in their internal affairs.

The GCC added that Tehran must "immediately and completely stop these actions and policies that increase regional tension and threaten security and stability."

On Tuesday the Egyptian foreign minister insisted that Gulf Arab security "is part and parcel" of Egypt's security.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/mena/egypt-reassures-gulf-monarchies-over-ties-with-iran>

Kuwait court jails three opposition ex-MPs, lawyer says

A Kuwaiti court on Tuesday sentenced three former opposition MPs to three years in jail for criticizing the emir in public, their lawyer said.

"The verdict against Khaled al-Tahus, Falah al-Sawwagh and Bader al-Dahum is three years each with immediate effect," Mohammad al-Jumia wrote on his Twitter account while attending the court session.

The three were arrested after making remarks at a public gathering on October 10 deemed offensive to the Gulf state's ruler Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah.

Tuesday's verdict is not final and can be challenged in the court of appeals and the supreme court.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwait-court-jails-three-opposition-ex-mps-lawyer-says>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• U.S. Suspends Afghan Airline Ban

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
February 5, 2013

The U.S. military has suspended its decision to blacklist Afghanistan's largest private airline.

The move comes after the Afghan government agreed to conduct its own investigation into claims that Kam Air was being used for drug smuggling.

A U.S. military statement released on February 4 said the airline would be allowed to continue working on U.S. military contracts during the Afghan investigation.

The U.S. military said it would support the Afghan government investigation by providing information on the drug-trafficking claims.

It said it would consider what steps should be taken after the Afghan government completes its investigation.

The U.S. banned the airline from its list of potential military contractors last month, saying it was smuggling opium.

The airline rejected the allegations. The Afghan government demanded proof of drug trafficking.

Based on reporting by AFP, AP, and "The New York Times"

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

- **Afghanistan welcome reversing Kam Air from US blacklist**

By Sayed Jawad - 05 Feb 2013, 2:16 pm

Khaama Press

According to a statement released by office of spokesman and director general of communications of Afghanistan foreign ministry, the Afghan government

welcomes the decision by the United States military to return its business relations with Kam Air to normal.

The source further added, This was the right decision to take.

"The Afghan government remains committed to conducting a full investigation into this whole matter, including through the examination of any and all evidence provided by the US military." the statement added.

The U.S. military has lifted a ban on contracts with an Afghan airline suspected of drug smuggling after the decision to blacklist the carrier sparked anger throughout the Afghan government.

In a statement released late Monday, the military said it had temporarily removed Kam Air from its blacklist pending an investigation into the allegations by the Afghan government. U.S. law prohibits the American government from contracting with companies with ties to enemy forces.

The US had banned Afghanistan's largest private airline from its list of potential military contractors, claiming the

company on its civilians flights was conveying “bulk” quantities of opium to neighbouring Tajikistan, the Wall Street Journal revealed last week.

The United States military does not directly contract with Kam Air, but the lines are somewhat blurry because the military pays for many activities by the Afghan government.

The ban of one of Afghanistan’s largest commercial airlines rankled many inside the Afghan government at a particularly sensitive time in talks for a long-term agreement for U.S. forces in the country.

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

- **IMF, Afghanistan Reach 'Understandings' On Reform Path**

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

February 5, 2013

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) says it has reached an agreement with Afghan authorities on a series of reforms that need to be implemented so the country can receive its next aid tranche.

The announcement was made following a two-week visit to Afghanistan by an IMF team.

The IMF granted Afghanistan a \$133.6 million credit line in November 2011 to assist the country as foreign military forces withdraw during 2014.

The IMF has so far disbursed two installments totaling around \$36 million.

An IMF statement said the IMF team had reached "understandings" with Afghan authorities on a reform path.

The initiatives include submission of new laws to parliament, the strengthening of the capital of banks, the strengthening of customs measures, and preparations to implement a value-added tax.

With reporting by AFP

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

- **Afghan newspapers looking with pessimism to trilateral summit in London**

KABUL, Feb. 5 (Xinhua) -- Local newspapers in Afghanistan are looking with pessimism to the trilateral summit of

President Hamid Karzai, his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari and their host, British Prime Minister David Cameron in London to bring Taliban on negotiating table.

In the summit where the peace process in Afghanistan and Kabul- Islamabad relations were discussed, which concluded on Monday, the three leaders announced satisfaction over their talks at a joint press conference in London on Monday.

The government of Afghanistan is struggling to find a way to talk with the Taliban and other insurgent groups over initiation of peace dialogue which ends the bloody chapter of more than a decade of war in the country, the English daily The Afghanistan Express writes in its editorial on Tuesday.

"Afghan, British and Pakistani leaders held a trilateral meeting in London to smooth the way for peace talks with Taliban and to strengthen cooperation on security and other bilateral issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan," it added.

It also added that Presidents Karzai and Zardari have agreed to spare no effort for

cutting a peace deal within next six months.

"The six-month timeframe for reaching a deal with Taliban seems to be too wishful, as the Taliban does not seem to be prepared for beginning talks with the government of Afghanistan in next months," the editorial said.

Another newspaper, the Daily Mandegar in its Tuesday's editorial writes, "the trilateral summit in London would benefit Taliban and Pakistan and not the peace process in Afghanistan."

"Like the past, benefiting from the so-called peace process, more Taliban will be released from Pakistani jail after London summit and Pakistan would continue to support Taliban in future," Daily Mandegar added.

Hasht-e-Subh is another local newspaper which focused on the summit, noting no peace efforts will deliver unless Pakistani military is enough pressed to take necessary action against Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistani soil.



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"If Britain wants to play its due role in developing cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan it should exert pressure on Pakistan army to dismantle Taliban safe havens inside Pakistan," the daily Hasht-e-Subh writes in an article published in its Tuesday's edition.

yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.

<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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