



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

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dış Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

06 MARCH 2013

NO: 1560

1. IRAQ.....	3
• Kuwaiti PM receives UN chief envoy to Iraq (Kuwait News Agency)	3
• Sihail, UNDP delegation discuss formation of National Council for Waters in Iraq (alliraqnews)3	
• Health Ministry, representative of WHO discuss supporting medical services project (alliraqnews)	3
• Nijaifi says government meets “little” of demonstrators' demands (alliraqnews)	4
• Mosque speakers in Tikrit call for general strike on Wednesday (NINA).....	4
• Nujaifi: Barzani starts his initiative to solve the crisis today (NINA)	5
• Deza'e denies that Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region will visit Baghdad on Wednesday (NINA)	5
• Initiatives for settling crisis to fail due to non adherence of some sides, says Jumaili (alliraqnews)	6
• Mutlaq calls for the return of al- Iraqiya Ministers (Shafaq News).....	6
• Nijaifi discusses problems of Federal Budget's ratification with parliament blocs' leaders (alliraqnews)	7
• House of Representatives adjourn to tomorrow voting on budget for lack of quorum (NINA) ..	7
• Faili Kurds list participation in Baghdad's local elections announced officially (Shafaq News)...	7
• Planning Ministry plans to exclude IHEC from regulations of fund release (alliraqnews)	8
• Iraq PM pardons 33 Egyptian prisoners (Al-Masry Al-Youm).....	9
• Oil Ministers of Iraq, Egypt, Jordan to hold meeting (alliraqnews).....	9
• Hakim, during welcome for Qindiel, calls Sheikh Al Azhar to visit Iraq (alliraqnews).....	10
• Qindiel: Egyptian delegation to visit Iraq to discuss Egyptian debts (alliraqnews).....	11
• Egyptian delegation leaves Baghdad (alliraqnews).....	11
• Zebari discusses with Swedish envoy bilateral relations, status of Iraqi community in Sweden (NINA)	11
• Nujaifi calls on Sweden to reconsider procedures relating to repatriating Iraqi refugees (NINA)12	
• Abbawi, Canadian Ambassador discuss expected visit of Canadian Migration Minister to Iraq (alliraqnews)	12
• Iranian Foreign Minister visiting Karbala (NINA).....	13
• Iraqi says it has foiled incursion by Syrian gunmen (Trend News)	13
• Russia condemns killing Syrian, Iraqi soldiers in Iraq (alliraqnews)	14
2. IRAN	15
• Iran: World Powers' Proposals More Logical Than Before.....	15
• Official: Iran Plans to Start Oil Production in South Pars Field Soon.....	16
• Iran, Pakistan Invite UAE Deputy PM to IP Gas Pipeline Inaugural Ceremony	17
• Iran exports \$52m worth of gasoline despite sanctions	19
• Iran, Iraq, Syria sign telecommunication agreement	20
• US offers to talk with Iran in 'good faith,' takes threatening tone.....	21
• Sanctions against Iran are not working, US commander says.....	23
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	24



• Australia: No sign Zygier involved in Hamas assassination	24
• Al-Qaeda gunmen study IDF patrols on Israeli-Syrian border.....	26
• Turkey appoints ambassador to ‘Palestine’	27
• Hagel tells Barak US will keep funding Israeli missile defense.....	28
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	30
• Foreign jihad lures Tunisian youth	30
• Libya insecurity deals economic blow	32
• Mauritania mulls Mali deployment.....	34
• Mali conflict in bloodiest phase yet: France.....	36
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	38
• March 8 fumes over electoral decree	38
• FSA: Tensions with Hezbollah spread to include all Lebanon	40
• Aoun accuses Lebanon president, premier of “blackmail”	42
6. SYRIA.....	43
• Syrian refugees top 1 million, UN says.....	43
• Kerry: Weapons from US allies are reaching Syrian moderates.....	44
• Struggling to hang on in Syria's devastated Deir Ezzor	45
• Syria military pounds Homs for fourth day	47
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	49
• Yemen president rejects bid to broker Qaeda truce.....	49
• Saleh-era officials agree to appear at Yemen bombing trial.....	49
• Iran rejects Gulf claims of "interference".....	51
• HRW, Amnesty urge Saudis to halt execution of 7 men	52
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	53
• General Says 20,000 Troops Should Stay in Afghanistan	53
• Kabul Bank Heads Sentenced for Corruption.....	54
• 4 insurgents killed, 8 detained in Afghanistan: ISAF	55
• NATO concerned about public reaction to 2014 Afghan presidential election	56

1. IRAQ

- **Kuwaiti PM receives UN chief envoy to Iraq (Kuwait News Agency)**

KUWAIT, March 5 (KUNA) -- HH the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Iraq Martin Cobler on Tuesday.

The UN official had been accompanied by Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Other Kuwaiti officials present were Amiri Diwan Advisor Mohammad Abulhassan, Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Khaled Al-Jarallah, the Foreign Ministry's Director of Coordination and Inspection Khaled Al-Maghamis and the Prime Minister Diwan's Undersecretary Sheikh Fahad Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2296487&language=en>

- **Sihail, UNDP delegation discuss formation of National Council for Waters in Iraq (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The first Deputy Speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Qusai al-Sihail, discussed with a delegation of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) the formation of the Iraqi National Council for Waters.

A statement by the Sihail's media office reported on Tuesday "Sihail received a delegation of the UNDP chaired by the Council's head, Peter Bachelor, with attendance of world experts. The conferees discussed the issues associated to the water resources sector and the formation of the National Council for Waters in Iraq as well as discussing the pending issues with Iraq's riparian countries."

"The UNDP presented a review about the experiences of the countries which have councils for waters and the importance of forming such councils in developing a sound strategy to administrate the waters sectors and how to deal with the riparian countries," the statement added.

- **Health Ministry, representative of WHO discuss supporting medical services project (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Ministry of Health discussed the project of supporting the medical services in Iraq that is implemented by the European Union in coordination with the World Health Organization.

A statement by the Ministry received by AIN quoted the General Director of Planning Department in the Ministry, Chasib Lateef al-Hachami, as saying “The Department held an extended meeting with the members of the leading Committee within the Ministry and the representative of the WHO, Sayed Jaafar, to discuss the agenda of the first meeting that will be held during the next days with wide participation by the Ministries.”

“Since 2005, the EU has become the main patron for the funds granted to support the medical sector in Iraq,” he added.

“These programs resulted in noticeable upgrade in the lives of the Iraqi people by developing the medical services presented to them,” he concluded.

- **Nijaifi says government meets “little” of demonstrators' demands (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, Osama al-Nijaifi, the leading figure within the Iraqiya Slate, stressed that there is no progress in the file of answering the demonstrators' demands

Nijaifi said in a press conference on Tuesday "The Iraqi government did not deal seriously with the demonstrators' demands and what was done in this regard is simple and unimportant."

"The arrests and tortures are still ongoing in the provinces that witness demonstrations where four demonstrators have died in Diyala," he added.

"The procedures of the ministerial commission formed to consider the demonstrators' demands are inadequate," Nijaifi concluded.

- **Mosque speakers in Tikrit call for general strike on Wednesday (NINA)**

05 March 2013

Tikrit (NINA) – Mosques' speakers and preachers in Tikrit called on Tuesday evening, Mar. 5, the public and government officials for a general strike on Wednesday, Mar. 6, in support of protestors in various provinces.

Peoples Committees and protest coordinators in Samara, Tikrit, Baiji, Dour and Tuz-Khormato declared a general strike until the demands of the protestors and demonstrators are met.

- **Nujaifi: Barzani starts his initiative to solve the crisis today (NINA)**

05 March 2013

BAGHDAD / Nina / The Speaker, Osama Nujaifi announced that the President of the Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani began today his consultations with the Iraqiya coalition, Ahrar bloc and other blocs to resolve the political crisis.

He said in reply to a question by the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / during a press conference held today 5, March: "We will see, during these consultations, the possibility of solving problems through the National Conference.

Nujaifi added: "Barzani is respectable by us and we hope the success of his initiative.

- **Deza'e denies that Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region will visit Baghdad on Wednesday (NINA)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Spokesman for the Government of Kurdistan Region, Seveen Deza'e, denied reports that the Region's Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, is to visit Baghdad tomorrow, Wednesday, Mar. 6.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) web site quoted Deza'e saying that news point out that the Region's Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, will visit Baghdad on Wednesday, are not true, because no date is set for such a visit, which should be suitable for both the Region and Baghdad.

Pointing out that Parliament's blocs have not yet reached an agreement on the Budget; he asserted that the Region's Prime Minister visit to Baghdad and meeting with Maliki will cover outstanding issues between Baghdad and the Region.

Two days ago, Deza'e announced that Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani intends to visit Baghdad in the coming days.

He added that the visit will be followed by a visit by Prime Minister Nuri al-Malik to the Region to meet with its officials to discuss a number of issues.

- **Initiatives for settling crisis to fail due to non adherence of some sides, says Jumaili (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Wihda al-Jumaili, of the Iraqiya Slate stated that any imitative to settle the crisis will fail due to the non adherence of some sides in its resolutions.

In a press statement received by AIN, she said "The crisis in Iraq and the initiatives to settle it are not in the same size where the lack of confidence among the political sides will result in failing these initiatives,"

"Settling the crisis can be achieved by responding to the demonstrators' demands in addition to not releasing judicial warrants against the politicians," she concluded.

- **Mutlaq calls for the return of al-Iraqiya Ministers (Shafaq News)**

05 March 2013

Shafaq News / MP of al- Iraqiya list , Ibrahim al-Mutlaq demanded on Tuesday, al- Iraqiya ministers to return after putting a condition to implement all the protesters' demands and accused the government of “ Procrastinating” those demands.

Mutlaq said in a press conference held in the parliament attended by "Shafaq News” that "the government is still working to delay the demands of the demonstrators and the protesters since more than two months ago and is still working with the delay way without achieving any demand of their legitimate demands."

Mutlaq added that "this situation makes us assure as members of the parliament including what we have pledged to protesters not to give up their demands in any way."

"Al- Iraqiya ministers must not forget the public who brought them to what they are today and they should not act individually away from the consolidated resolution of



the list, but not to make their return to the government without interest and benefit."

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5418-mutlaq-calls-for-the-return-of-al-iraqiya-ministers-.html>

- **Nijaifi discusses problems of Federal Budget's ratification with parliament blocs' leaders (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Osama al-Nijaifi, is holding currently a meeting with leaders of the parliament blocs to discuss the problems that hinder the vote on the federal budget of 2013.

Source at the parliament told All Iraq News Agency (AIN) on Tuesday "The meeting will discuss the possibility of reaching an agreement concerning the vote on the federal budget and resolve all the problems which disturb the vote on the budget."

- **House of Representatives adjourn to tomorrow voting on budget for lack of quorum (NINA)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad / NINA /-- After adjourning before noon today for half an hour its today session for lack of quorum , House of Representatives adjourned definitely the session to tomorrow for lack of quorum also.

The session was earmarked for voting on the 2013 state budget, to twelve o'clock noon on Wednesday, for lack of quorum.

It is noteworthy to mention in this context that the House of Representatives postponed two times its yesterday's session which was earmarked also for the same purpose and postponed to today for lack of quorum .

- **Faili Kurds list participation in Baghdad's local elections announced officially (Shafaq News)**

05 March 2013

Shafaq News / Baghdad announced on Tuesday that brotherhood Faili Kurds list will participate in the provincial elections.

It was decided for the Faili Kurds to participate in elections by quota system, giving them seats in Baghdad and another in Wasit.

The head of the list, Ismail Sayeh Mir said in a news conference attended by "Shafaq News" that "The Faili Kurds brotherhood list will participate with the number 519 and will take part in the local elections in Baghdad through two candidates, Fouad Ali Akbar and Wydad Rajab."

He added that "our list represent the aspirations and hopes of our people who have suffered from injustice, marginalization and exclusion for decades, as we emphasis on the peaceful coexistence and application of the Constitution in all its provisions."

"We affirm the necessity of the participation of Faili Kurds in all legislative and executive institutions in the Iraqi federal government, and not to allow bidding and trading with struggle and national heritage for this segment," he added.

The campaign was launched for Iraq's provincial council's elections, at the beginning of March.

The Iraqi Supreme Commission for Elections has ratified on the candidates totaling eight thousand and one hundred

candidates, indicating that the commission are names may ratify in case the Commission might ratify it if it was excluded from being included with accountability and justice commission's procedures.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/5419-faili-kurds-list-participation-in-baghdads-local-elections-announced-officially-.html>

- **Planning Ministry plans to exclude IHEC from regulations of fund release (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Minister of Planning, Ali al-Shikri, assured that his Ministry plans to exclude the Independent High Electoral Commission from the regulations of the fund release to help in performing its duties.

A statement by the Ministry received by AIN cited "Shikri and the delegation of the IHEC discussed number of issues related to the performance of the IEHC concerning the information and financial sides."

"Shikri confirmed the Ministry readiness to help the IHEC through the Central

Department of Census within the Ministry,” the statement added.

“New job opportunities approved for IHEC to enhance its cadres in their mission of conducting the Provincial Councils elections then the parliamentary elections in 2014,” the statement mentioned.

“Direct invitations for companies to implement projects for the IHEC were approved,” the statement concluded

- **Iraq PM pardons 33 Egyptian prisoners (Al-Masry Al-Youm)**

05 March 2013

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki pardoned all 33 imprisoned Egyptian nationals in Iraq on Tuesday, following a meeting with Egyptian Prime Minister Hesham Qandil in Baghdad.

The Egyptian delegation had requested some prisoners be released during talks, but did not ask for a blanket pardon.

Qandil left Cairo on a private plane monday for a two-day visit, accompanied by six ministers and about 60 Egyptian businessmen, sources at Cairo

International Airport told Turkish News Agency Anadolu.

This is the first visit of a high-ranking Egyptian official to Iraq since the election of Mohamad Morsy as President in June of last year.

Egyptian Petroleum Minister Osama Kamal told the press this week that Egypt would offer Iraq help refining its oil in Egyptian refineries.

Edited translation from Al-Masry Al-Youm

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/iraq-pm-pardons-33-egyptian-prisoners>

- **Oil Ministers of Iraq, Egypt, Jordan to hold meeting (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Oil Ministers of Iraq, Egypt and Jordan will hold a meeting to discuss the possibility of installing an oil pipeline to export the oil among the three countries.

The Egyptian Oil Minister, Osama Kamal, stated in a pres conference on the margins of the visit of the Egyptian delegation to Baghdad, "The Iraqi and Egyptian oil

ministries signed an agreement over providing Egypt with 4 Million oil barrels of the crude oil monthly by Iraq by the Iraqi Oil Trading Company SOMO."

"The agreement will suit the need of Egypt of the oil where it produces 22 thousand tones daily and consumes 35 thousands," he added.

"A meeting among the Iraqi, Jordanian and Egyptian Oil Ministers will be held within the next week to install an oil pipeline that exports the oil among the three countries," he pointed out, assuring that "The participation of the Egyptian companies, Petrogent and Anpi, was in the installation of the pipeline was discussed during the meeting where the Iraqi side welcomed them according to the conditions of the Iraqi oil ministry."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29645

- **Hakim, during welcome for Qindiel, calls Sheikh Al Azhar to visit Iraq (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The head of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, Ammar al-Hakim, discussed with the Egyptian Prime Minister, Hisham Qindiel, the prospects of enhancing the Iraqi-Egyptian bilateral relations.

A statement by Hakim's office cited on Tuesday "Hakim welcomed on Tuesday, Qindiel and his accompanying delegation, where he described the visit of the Egyptian top delegation to Iraq as good step to deepen the historical relations between both countries."

Hakim called to "Ease the obstacles that face the Iraqis who wish to visit Egypt and to find administrative facilitations to develop the economic communication between Iraq and Egypt."

The head of the SIIC stressed that "The religious and sectarian tensions witnessed by the region are adopted by political agendas," describing Iraq and Egypt as qualified to draw right path for promoting love and peace in the region."

He called "Sheikh of Al-Azhar to visit Iraq and meet with Najaf religious authorities, highlighting the influential role of the

Najaf Religious Authority and Al-Azhar in promoting love and harmony among the region's peoples."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29649:](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29649)

- **Qindiel: Egyptian delegation to visit Iraq to discuss Egyptian debts (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

(AIN) -The Egyptian Prime Minister, Hisham Qindiel, announced that "Egypt will send a delegation to Baghdad to discuss the Egyptian debts payable on Iraq.

Qindiel said in a press conference at Cairo International Airport to clarify the outcomes of his recent visit to Iraq "An Egyptian delegation will visit Iraq to discuss the Egypt's debts on Iraq. Our talks with the Iraqi officials also tackled the file of the Egyptian prisoners in Iraq."

The Iraqi Cabinet has decided on Tuesday to settle the Egyptian debts payable on Iraq.

- **Egyptian delegation leaves Baghdad (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Egyptian delegation headed by the Egyptian Premier, Hisham Qindeel, left Baghdad heading to Egypt.

A source within the Iraqi Foreign Ministry stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The Egyptian delegation left Iraq through Baghdad International Airport."

The Egyptian delegation arrived in Baghdad on last Monday where it met the Iraqi key officials and held several meetings to discuss the means of developing the mutual relations.

The visit included meetings done by 60 Egyptian businessmen with their Iraqi counterparts in addition to signing some agreements in the oil, industry, trade and electricity fields.

- **Zebari discusses with Swedish envoy bilateral relations, status of Iraqi community in Sweden (NINA)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, discussed with the Head

of Political Department at the Swedish Foreign Ministry, the relations between Iraq and Sweden and means to develop them, as well as the status of Iraqi community in Sweden, as well as voluntary return of Iraqi refugees.

A statement issued on Tuesday, March 5, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that discussion in the meeting touched on the Syrian crisis, Syrian refugees in neighboring countries and the crisis effects on Iraq and the area.

Swedish Ambassador to Iraq, Yorken Leenstrum, and Foreign Undersecretary attended the meeting.

- **Nujaifi calls on Sweden to reconsider procedures relating to repatriating Iraqi refugees (NINA)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad / NINA /--Parliament Speaker Osama Nujaifi, appealed during receiving today Swedish Foreign Minister Advisor Swedish government to reconsider procedures relating to repatriating of Iraqi refugees.

A statement by Nujaifi office stated that Speaker called during his meeting with

Swedish Foreign Minister Advisor Ambassador Bjorn Arval "to ease procedures relating to this issue due to the tense security conditions experienced by the country.

For his part, Arval expressed : "concern of the European Union of the deteriorating security situation in the region and in Iraq in particular as is very susceptible to be affected by sectarian conflict , noting that there is a profound interest on the issue and that Sweden will strongly push other parties toward discuss Iraq and file human rights file in Iraq during the upcoming meeting of the EU foreign ministers to be held during the current month of March.

- **Abbawi, Canadian Ambassador discuss expected visit of Canadian Migration Minister to Iraq (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The Foreign Ministry Undersecretary for Political Planning Affairs, Labid Abbawi, discussed with the Canadian Ambassador to Iraq, Marc Kozdki, the arrangements required for the expected visit of the Canadian Minister of Migration, Jason Kenny, to Iraq.

A statement by the Iraqi FM cited "Abbawi received the Canadian Ambassador to Iraq on Tuesday where they discussed the bilateral relations between both countries and the preparations for the Canadian Minister of Migration's visit to Iraq as well as the expected visit of the Canadian Foreign Minister, John Baird to Iraq."

"The two sides discussed the regional events as well," the statement concluded.

- **Iranian Foreign Minister visiting Karbala (NINA)**

05 March 2013

Karbala / NINA/--Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, visited Karbala city today to participate in the inauguration ceremony of the new gold frame which encases the tomb of Imam Hussein (AS).

Media office of Hussein shrine said to NINA reporter : " About 130 religious and political figures from outside Iraq and from Iraqi provinces participate in the ceremony, including representative of Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, three Iraqi ministers, a number of Kuwaiti National Assembly members and Kuwait Ambassador in Baghdad as well.

The golden frame is weighing 12 tons, gilt of gold ,silver and precious stones.

- **Iraqi says it has foiled incursion by Syrian gunmen (Trend News)**

5 March 2013

Iraq's Interior Ministry on Tuesday said it had foiled an attempt by unidentified Syrian gunmen to infiltrate its territory, amid growing signs that Syria's civil war was spilling over into its eastern neighbour, DPA reported.

"Iraqi border guard forces prevented a group of armed men from crossing into Iraqi territory at the al-Qa'im sector in al-Anbar," the Ministry said.

The statement came a day after 40 Iraqi and Syrian soldiers were killed in an attack on a military convoy in the province of al-Anbar, at a border crossing located about 550 kilometres west of Baghdad. Reports indicated that the Syrian troops targeted had been receiving medical treatment in Iraq.

The Sunni speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Osama al-Nujaifi, called for Iraq's armed forces to remain strictly neutral and

confine themselves to guarding the border.

Much of Iraq's Sunni population sympathizes with Syrian rebels, while Shiite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is an ally of Iran, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's main backer.

<http://en.trend.az/regions/met/iraq/2126549.html>

- **Russia condemns killing Syrian, Iraqi soldiers in Iraq (alliraqnews)**

05 March 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –Russia condemned killing the Syrian soldiers in Iraq.

The spokesperson of the Syrian Foreign Ministry, Aksandar Lokshvishtin, said in a press statement received by AIN "Killing the Syrian soldiers in Iraq assured the expansion of the Syrian crisis to the neighboring countries."

"Moscow condemns this criminal action in the Iraqi territories which resulted in killing 48 Syrian and 9 Iraqi soldiers in addition to injuring some others from both sides," he added.

"We warned from the expansion of the Syrian crisis to the neighboring countries which threaten the security of those countries," he pointed out, assuring that "The terrorist are free in the border inlets."

Earlier, The Iraqi Ministry of Defense declared in statement on Monday night "Nine Iraqi soldiers were killed and few others were injured while 48 Syrian fugitive soldiers were killed and ten others were wounded due to an armed attack that was waged by terrorist groups who sneaked into the Iraqi territory from the Syria."

"The response will be decisive and severe and we will use all available means against whoever tries to disturb Iraqi borders security," the statement added.

"Several of the unarmed wounded Syrian soldiers, due to the continued fights in Syria, resorted to Iraq for medical treatment," the statement continued saying.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29648:](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29648)

2. IRAN

• Iran: World Powers' Proposals More Logical Than Before

TEHRAN (FNA)- Senior Iranian Foreign Ministry officials said the latest proposals offered by the six world powers to Iran during the recent talks in Almaty, Kazakhstan, were more logical than their previous offers.

"The 5+1 raised its proposals in a more logical way than before," Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast told reporters during a weekly press conference in Tehran on Tuesday, adding that the latest talks between Iran and the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) were reigned by a different atmosphere.



"To reach a final understanding other measures might be needed, but the new orientation of the 5+1 led the atmosphere towards a direction which made the proposals assessable," added the spokesman.

Mehman-Parast described the Almaty talks as a first step, and said the two sides still need to raise their viewpoints in the experts meeting due to be held later in March in Istanbul, Turkey, to work out an agreement.

He said if the talks continue to move on a logical platform and the opposite side attempts to bring the world powers' approach close to Iran's proposals, an agreement will be achieved.

"Such a new approach contains reduction of sanctions and giving up the attitudes which have been shown to the Iranian nation in an incorrect manner," the spokesman underlined.

Iran and six world powers last week agreed on further meetings after two days of talks in Kazakhstan, the first since negotiations broke down in June, 2012.

Following the meeting, both the chief negotiators of Iran and the G5+1 described their talks as a "turning point". While both Iran's lead negotiator Saeed Jalili and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton - who leads the delegations of the world powers in talks with Iran - said they now have a positive outlook about future talks, Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi told the Austrian TV that a deal is possible now.

Salehi also on Sunday said that Tehran is now waiting to see gradual removal of the western sanctions.

During the talks Iran and the world powers agreed to hold an experts meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, on March 17-18 and then continue their talks at the level of their top negotiators in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on April 5-6.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107150122>

- **Official: Iran Plans to Start Oil Production in South Pars Field Soon**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran will start oil production in the South Pars field in the first half of the next Iranian year (starts

March 21), an Iranian energy official announced on Tuesday.

The accomplishment of the construction of "the oil platform and the start of drilling will take place in the first three months of the next (Iranian) year and if FPSO (Floating Production, Storage and Offloading) vessels are supplied (in time), oil production from the South Pars will start in the first half of the next year," member of the Petro-Iran Company's board of directors Nasrollah Zarei said.



"94% of the oil platform has been built and once drilling is finished and the drilling rig is separated from the jacket, the platform will be transferred to the production site," he said, adding that the company will be ready to transfer the platform to the production site in May.

Last year, Managing Director of the Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) Mousa Sourı said the company will start drilling in the

oil layer of the South Pars Oil and Gas Field soon.

Souri said that the company has gained permissions to buy or lease a floating storage vessel and that his company had started negotiations to this end.

According to Souri, the POGC dispatched the first drilling rig to the shared part of the layer in May and a second one in June, 2012.

Souri noted that drilling of 7,000 meters in layer A2 completed in May and drilling another 7 thousand meters started in June.

"If floating production, storage and offloading (FPSO) unit starts operations on schedule, oil production from the layer will come on line at the end of the current (Iranian) year (ending on March 20, 2013) or early next (Iranian) year," he said.

"Development of the layer needs \$800mln of investment," Souri said.

Souri concluded that initial production from the South Pars oil layer is estimated at 35,000 barrels per day.

The South Pars Oil and Gas field is located in the Persian Gulf, North of Iran's maritime border with Qatar. The South Pars gas field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which are in Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, i.e. the North Dome, are in Qatar's territorial waters.

The South Pars gas field holds 8 percent of total gas reserves of the world and half of the country's proven gas reserves as well as is the host of the most important industrial complexes of the country and the most important part of oil industry's value chain.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107150332>

- **Iran, Pakistan Invite UAE Deputy PM to IP Gas Pipeline Inaugural Ceremony**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari invited UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Presidential Affairs Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahayan to attend the inaugural ceremony of the construction of the

Pakistani side of the IP gas pipeline next week.

During a meeting with Sheikh Mansour in Abu Dhabi today, Iranian Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Mohammad Reza Fayyaz submitted the Iranian and Pakistani presidents' joint invitation to the Emirati official.

Ahmadinejad and Zardari had previously sent separate letters of invitation to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum as well as other regional leaders to attend the ceremony.

The Iranian and Pakistani presidents are slated to inaugurate IP gas pipeline on March 11.

President Ahmadinejad will travel to Pakistan next week to attend the same ceremony.

On Thursday, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari wrapped up a two-day visit to Tehran during which the two sides finalized the remaining issues pertaining to the gas project.

During his stay in Tehran, the Pakistani president met Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei and his counterpart Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

During his meeting with Zardari, Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to the gas pipeline which is due to take Iran's rich gas reserves to Pakistan as a crucially important instance of Tehran-Islamabad cooperation, and called for ignoring the opposition shown by certain actors to the development of Iran-Pakistan relations.



He reminded Pakistan's urgent need to stable and secure energy resources, similar to every other country, and added, "They Islamic Republic of Iran is the only country in the region which enjoys secure energy resources and we are ready to supply Pakistan's need in this ground."

Last month, Iranian and Pakistani oil ministers inaugurated construction of the 781 km of Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline in Pakistan's soil.

An Iranian-Pakistani joint contractor has been commissioned to begin construction of the IP gas pipeline.

The Iranian oil minister and his accompanying delegation agreed with their Pakistani counterpart to set up a joint contracting company between the two countries in a bid to complete the construction of the IP gas pipeline in next 15 months.

The IP gas pipeline stretches from Iran-Pakistan border to Navabshah region in Pakistan and it covers 781 km of the total 1,881 km of the pipeline.

Apart from it, both countries also discussed the finances involved in the project. The interest rate for Iran's 500-million-dollar loan to Pakistan and the date for the start of the repayment of the loan by Pakistan were among other topics in the discussions.

Demand for natural gas in Pakistan has outstripped supply in recent years, putting existing reserves under immense pressure.

The 2700-kilometer long pipeline was to supply gas for Pakistan and India which are suffering a lack of energy sources, but India has evaded talks. In 2011, Iran and Pakistan declared they would finalize the agreement bilaterally if India continued to be absent in the meeting.

According to the project proposal, the pipeline will begin from Iran's Assalouyeh Energy Zone in the south and stretch over 1,100 km through Iran. In Pakistan, it will pass through Baluchistan and Sindh but officials now say the route may be changed if China agrees to the project.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107150310>

- **Iran exports \$52m worth of gasoline despite sanctions**

TEHRAN, March 6 (MNA) – Iran exported 56,000 tons of gasoline, valued at \$52 million, in the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2012-February 18, 2013).

The figure showed 100 percent increase compared to the same period in the previous year despite sanctions which have been imposed against the country.

Meanwhile, on February 4, Iranian MP Mehdi Mousavinejad said that cutting gasoline imports in the current time is not feasible, because domestic production does not meet demands, the YJC news website reported.

The country has not reached self-sufficiency in gasoline production, he said, adding that cutting gasoline imports will damage the transportation sector.

At the beginning of 2012, the United States and the European Union imposed new sanctions on Iran's oil and financial sectors with the goal of preventing other countries from purchasing Iranian oil and conducting transactions with the Central Bank of Iran.

U.S. sanctions entered into force on June 28, while EU bans on Iranian oil imports came into force on July 1.

In October, the EU approved another major package of economic sanctions on Iran.

In October 2012, ISNA quoted National Iranian Oil Production and Distribution Company's managing director Alireza Zeighami as saying that Iran is currently producing 25 million liters of premium gasoline per day, meeting euro-4 and euro-5 standards.

The country's gasoline output is projected to hit 70 million liters per day by the end of the next Iranian calendar year, he added.

He also said that diesel oil output will reach 95 million liters per day by the end of the current Iranian year, of which 25 million liters meet euro-4 and euro-5 standards.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1818347>

- **Iran, Iraq, Syria sign telecommunication agreement**

Iran, Iraq and Syria have signed a tripartite telecommunication agreement aimed at establishing an optical fiber network linking the three countries.

The agreement was concluded by the representatives of the Telecommunication Infrastructure Company of Iran (TIC), Iraq's Al-Sard Group and Syria Telecom at a meeting hosted by TIC in the Iranian capital, Tehran, on Tuesday.

Based on the telecommunication deal, data and voice signals will be transmitted from Iran to Iraq and then to Syria and European countries.

“In line with its international macro policies, TIC seeks to establish telecommunication connections with all neighboring countries and the new opportunity that will be created by the [planned] optical fiber via Iraq will have mutual benefits for the three countries and will also be highly beneficial for the region,” said TIC Managing Director Mahmoud Khosravi.

The project will enable Syria to utilize TIC's network via a secure and reliable route for communicating with other countries across the world.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/06/292146/iran-iraq-syria-ink-telecom-deal/>

- **US offers to talk with Iran in 'good faith,' takes threatening tone**

On February 7, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei rejected any talks with the United States under pressure and threats, saying, “An offer of talks makes sense only when the side [that makes the offer] shows its goodwill.”

US Secretary of State John Kerry says Washington is ready to negotiate with Iran over its nuclear energy program in “a spirit of good faith,” while a top American general claims the US ‘can bring Iran to its knees.’



“I will repeat what the [US] president has said and what I have said a number of times. We are prepared through P5+1 and negotiating process to engage in a serious proposal... We look forward to doing so in the spirit of mutual respect, and a spirit of good faith in order to get this resolved

peacefully,” Kerry told ABC News in Doha on Tuesday.

The US secretary of state also told CBS News on the same day, “Clearly, if Iran steps up in good faith, and is prepared to take steps to prove that their program is peaceful... I’m confident President Obama will meet them in an appropriate way to get where we want to go, which is still a peaceful resolution of this problem.”

Meanwhile, General James Mattis, the commander of the US Central Command, has said that the US-engineered sanctions on Iran are not working.

Addressing a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Tuesday, Mattis claimed that Tehran was “enriching uranium beyond any plausible peaceful purpose.” The top US commander also stated that Washington had a number of ways to bring Iran to its knees.

On February 7, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei rejected any talks with the United States under pressure and threats, saying, “An offer of talks makes sense only when the

side [that makes the offer] shows its goodwill.”

The latest round of the talks between Iran and the P5+1 - the United States, Russia, China, France, and Britain plus Germany - was held in the Kazakh city of Almaty on February 27-28. The two sides agreed to convene again in the city on April 5-6 to continue the talks after holding “expert-level” talks in the Turkish city of Istanbul on March 17-18.

The United States, the Israeli regime, and some of their allies accuse Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program. Iran categorically rejects the allegation.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has conducted numerous inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities, but has never found any evidence showing that Iran’s nuclear energy program has been diverted to military objectives.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/06/292143/us-maintains-dual-approach-on-iran/>

- **Sanctions against Iran are not working, US commander says**

A top US commander says the US-engineered sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran are not working.

General James Mattis, the commander of the US Central Command, made the remarks at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Tuesday, the Associated Press reported.

Mattis also told Republican Senator Lindsey Graham that Tehran's "nuclear industry continues."



Earlier in the day, the world powers of the P5+1 group -- the United States, Russia, China, France, and Britain plus Germany -- underscored their commitment to finding a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear issue, saying, "We reaffirm our continuing support for a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue."

They added that they "take note of the useful meetings [held on February 27-28 in Almaty, Kazakhstan] to carry on a constructive diplomatic process, which will be pursued actively in the months ahead on the basis of reciprocity and step-by-step approach."

The P5+1 also noted that the objective behind next meetings will be to restore "international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program."

Following the Almaty talks, Iran and the P5+1 group agreed to meet again in the city on April 5-6 to continue the negotiations after holding "expert-level" talks in the Turkish city of Istanbul on March 17-18.

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 the European Union have imposed several rounds of illegal sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Iran rejects the allegations, arguing that as a committed signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it has the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities but has never found any evidence showing that Iran's civilian nuclear program has been diverted to nuclear weapons production.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/03/06/292111/iran-sanctions-not-working-us-general/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Australia: No sign Zygier involved in Hamas assassination**

SYDNEY (Reuters) -- Australia had no evidence that a dual Australian-Israeli citizen and suspected Mossad spy, who died in jail in Israel in 2010, had been involved in the assassination of a Hamas arms procurer in Dubai, Foreign Minister Bob Carr said on Wednesday.

Carr also said Australia had found no evidence of the misuse of any of the Australian passports taken out by the man, Ben Zygier, who had changed his name several times and obtained new Australian passports each time.

However, Carr said the Zygier case raised unresolved questions about Australian passports held by dual citizens who work for a foreign government, and said Australia would lodge the strongest possible protest if it was found that Israel had used an Australian passport for spying.

"We have our own sources. None of them have information at this time that one of his passports was misused. But we are very alive to the possibility," Carr said as he released a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade report into the case.

"Certainly we would regard it as intolerable that any government would make use of Australian passports for intelligence-gathering purposes," he told reporters in Sydney.

Zygier was arrested in February 2010. At the same time, Australia had complained

to Israel after it emerged Australian passports had been used in a mission to assassinate a Hamas arms dealer in Dubai, which the Gulf emirate blamed on Israel.

On Feb. 19 this year, Israel confirmed for the first time the affair concerned Zygier, who had earlier been named in an Australian Broadcasting Corporation television report.

One of Zygier's lawyers later linked him to Mossad, the Israeli spy agency.



The Zygier case remains the subject of gag orders in Israel.

A judicial inquiry in Israel found Zygier, 34, hanged himself in December 2010 with a sheet tied to the bars over a window in the bathroom of his heavily guarded cell.

Carr ordered an investigation into the case last month, saying he would ask Israel's government for details of how Zygier, a father of two, died in a supposedly suicide-proof cell. His death fueled conspiracy theories in both countries.

Carr said Israel had not responded to requests for information, nor explained the lack of a response. Australian officials and intelligence agencies still did not know why Zygier was jailed and what charges he faced, except that the charges carried a maximum penalty of up to 20 years' prison.

Israel has said he was detained under an alias to avoid serious harm to national interests.

Carr said Zygier had lived in Israel for 10 years and confirmed he worked for the Israeli government, although he did not say whether he worked in Israeli intelligence.

"There's a lot about this that is odd," Carr said.

Carr's inquiry found shortcomings in the handling of the case by Australian

authorities but noted that Zygier had received 50 visits from his family and lawyer between the time of his arrest and death.

No requests for consular assistance had been received, the report found.

Carr had initially said the Australian government had not been informed of Zygier's incarceration. He later acknowledged Australia's chief intelligence agency had been informed about the issue as early as February 2010.

Australia's independent Inspector General of Intelligence and Security said on Wednesday there was no evidence the spy agency had done anything wrong and there would be no formal inquiry its role.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=571905>

- **Al-Qaeda gunmen study IDF patrols on Israeli-Syrian border**

By Aaron Kalman

Al-Qaeda operatives fighting the Syrian regime have been watching and studying IDF patrols along the border with Israel,

from only meters away on the other side of the fence.

Members of the al-Furqan group — affiliated with the global al-Qaeda organization which has acted in Yemen and Iraq — were filmed close to Israel's border, out in the open, in footage screened by Israel's Channel 10 on Tuesday night.

In a number of videos uploaded to the internet, the fighters can also be seen holding various munitions, including old anti-tank rockets and heavy machine guns. The Israeli-Syrian border, as seen by al-Qaeda militants on the Syrian side of the fence (photo credit: screen capture/Channel 10)

The Israeli-Syrian border, as seen by al-Qaeda militants on the Syrian side of the fence (photo credit: screen capture/Channel 10)

Sources in the IDF believe the gunmen affiliated with these and other terror groups are currently preoccupied with fighting President Bashar Assad's regime, and that if they plan on turning their focus on Israel they won't do so before they

have more control in Syria, the TV report said. Plainly, though, it added, the decades of relative quiet for Israel on its border with Syria are coming to an end, and a year from now, Israel might have to brace itself to thwart cross-border attacks.

The latest reports confirm a Times of Israel story last week which said Assad's forces have largely left the Syrian side of the Golan Heights. The footage screened on Tuesday included film taken in the Quneitra area of the Golan, the TV report said.

Though the ongoing fighting in Syria is not directed at Israel, the IDF and Israeli security officials are keeping a close watch on the situation in the neighboring country, preparing for any development, the report said, adding that some in the IDF are suggesting that Israel seek to reach out to some of the more moderate Syrian rebel groups with an eye on the post-Assad future.

In recent months, stray shots and mortar shells have fallen on the Israeli side of the border several times, including in two incidents last week, and the fence was rebuilt and drastically improved.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/al-qaeda-gunmen-study-idf-patrols-on-israeli-syrian-border/>

- **Turkey appoints ambassador to 'Palestine'**

Turkey has appointed an ambassador to the 'State of Palestine', Palestinian Ma'an News Agency reported Tuesday night. Akir Ozkan Torunlar, Turkey's current consul-general, is taking on the new honorific title as the nation's representative to Ramallah.



Though the Palestinians enjoy non-member state status at the United Nations, a "State of Palestine" is not recognized by most countries.

Tornular met with PA Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki in Ramallah, according to the report, who thanked the Turkish diplomat for his nation's support of last

year's successful Palestinian bid for non-member state status at the United Nations.

Israel and Turkey enjoyed close diplomatic and business relations for years, but a gradual deterioration in ties was accelerated with the May 2010 Gaza flotilla incident, in which clashes between pro-Palestinian activists and IDF troops aboard the Mavi Marmara ship resulted in the deaths of nine activists, eight of them Turkish citizens, and injuries to several Israeli soldiers.

Relations between Ankara and Jerusalem have since remained sour, with Turkey demanding an apology, and compensation for the families of those killed, as prerequisites for the renewal of ties.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/turkey-appoints-ambassador-to-palestine/>

- **Hagel tells Barak US will keep funding Israeli missile defense**

Despite financial constraints, administration will maintain Israel's qualitative military edge, new secretary of defense promises in warm first confab with foreign counterpart

WASHINGTON — US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel told his Israeli counterpart Ehud Barak Tuesday that while the US continues to believe there is still time to address the threat of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons through diplomacy, that window is closing.



In his first meeting with a foreign defense chief, the newly appointed Hagel expressed his strong commitment to Israel's security, including maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge and continued US support for missile and rocket defense systems in spite of fiscal constraints, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little said.

In their two-hour meeting, the leaders discussed the range of security interests shared by the US and Israel, including the need for the Syrian regime to maintain control over its chemical and biological weapons. The two leaders also pledged to

continue US-Israel contingency planning to counter that potential threat.

The high-level meeting included Hagel's deputy Ash Carter and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey.

On Iran, Hagel reiterated that President Barack Obama is committed to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, with all options on the table.

Both leaders agreed that the United States-Israeli defense relationship has never been stronger than during the Obama administration and that both nations will continue this unprecedentedly close cooperation.

Hagel noted that he and Barak have had an outstanding working relationship dating back to Barak's days as prime minister. He expressed his desire to visit Israel soon and Barak stated that Israel looks forward to hosting him in the near future.

Hagel faced a grueling nomination process. As a conservative Republican — nominated by a Democratic president —

who has expressed critical views of Israel and Washington's Israel supporters, opposition to Hagel's nomination came from many quarters. Now installed as the Pentagon's top civilian, Hagel seems to be going out of his way to mend fences, say observers.

Barak and Hagel met at 10 a.m. Tuesday at the Pentagon, two days after Barak spoke at the AIPAC Policy Conference taking place in the city.

Speaking at the AIPAC policy conference Monday, Barak offered a prediction that was interpreted by many at AIPAC as an endorsement of Hagel. "As secretary of defense, he will no doubt serve his country with the same pride and honor with which he served on the battlefield and in Congress," Barak said.

"The secretary is honored that Minister Barak will be the first foreign counterpart that he will host at the Pentagon," a Pentagon official told Reuters earlier in the week, adding the two have known each other for more than a decade.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/hagel-tells-barak-us-will-keep-funding-israeli-missile-defense/>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Foreign jihad lures Tunisian youth**

Tunisia is "facing a scary ogre snatching our youth", a human rights official warns.

By Yasmine Najjar in Tunis for Magharebia
– 05/03/13

Young Tunisian men have been dying in Syria for months. Now women are responding to what they perceive as their own call for jihad. Magharebia met with Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH) Vice- President Balkis Mechri-Allagui in Tunis to learn more about the new phenomenon.

Magharebia: The Al Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant is fighting Bashar al Assad's regime. How is this al-Qaeda-linked jihadist group getting Tunisians to Syria?

Balkis Mechri-Allagui: We were the first to warn of the growing phenomenon of

religious extremism after we conducted an investigation on the topic. As for the phenomenon of attracting young men and women to answering the call to join the jihad in Syria, we often receive families of those young people asking for help to bring their children back from the hell of war.

Magharebia: A Wahhabi cleric in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Mohamed al-Arifi, issued a fatwa that permits fighters to marry few hours with girls as young as 14. In Tunisia, the parents of a 16-year-old girl released a video accusing al-Nusra of abducting her and taking her to Syria. How widespread is this problem?

Balkis Mechri-Allagui: Although the number of young girls involved is small, we are not concerned by numbers as much as we are concerned with the presence of this case in our society.

What we know is that there are girls being attracted to go to Syria for jihad, and therefore we must stand up against this problem. When news first emerged about young people going to Syria for jihad, many slandered the media and the figures

who called for attention to this point, and accused them of lying.

We are now facing a scary ogre snatching our youth because we did not address the topic from the beginning.

Magharebia: Where do these Tunisians in Syria come from?

Balkis Mechri-Allagui: We have received solid information that groups of young people, particularly in the south of Tunisia who used to be drug addicts, switched overnight to become jihadists. Now they have money and big cars equipped to cross the desert and are able even to obtain forged passports.

They are attracting unemployed youth and brainwashing them in order to ship them to Syria in the name of jihad. All this is done for money that they receive from outside.

Magharebia: So how does this process begin?

Balkis Mechri-Allagui: The starting point is the sprawling primary schools that adopt radical educational approaches. This

phenomenon would help in the development of the young militant. Then there are mosques, where some sheikhs are teaching messages that encourage jihad. Then there is the most important factor: the lack of will or inability of the Tunisian government to confront this phenomenon, which threatens Tunisian youth.

Let's also not forget the calls made by some in front of high schools, which is a dangerous phenomenon, especially since the minister of education has not opened an investigation into it, but is investigating youth dancing inside their schools. This is considered a scary silence by the concerned authorities. There are also associations with Islamist backgrounds that encourage young people to go to Syria.

Magharebia: How can we get them back home?

Balkis Mechri-Allagui: Frankly, the process of bringing back these young people who end up regretting the ordeal of going to Syria after their arrival on the scene is complex. It is difficult for us as civil society, and even for the authorities,

because Tunisia does not have diplomatic representation in Syria and this makes matters worse. Besides, Tunisian authorities have not shown a clear will to prevent the extraction of young people wanting to fight.

Magharebia: Do you have any plan to confront the problem?

Balkis Mechri-Allagui: On February 10th, we organised a national conference against violence. All participants confirmed the need to safeguard the democratic transition. They called for finding a new security policy in order to provide safety and to depoliticise the houses of worship that have become instrumental for political propaganda.

Death threats made against political figures opposing the Islamist government are coming from there. It was one of the factors that led to the assassination of Chokri Belaid and this is what the interior ministry confirmed during the investigation. We also came out with recommendations to protect secondary schools from calls for jihad. We noted the same for primary schools.

In addition, there is the need to prevent Gulf and Levant sheikhs from inviting Tunisians to fight in Syria.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/05/feature-01

- **Libya insecurity deals economic blow**

Libya's persistent unrest is now jeopardising the country's economic recovery, with natural gas exports now on hold.

By Essam Mohamed for Magharebia in Tripoli – 05/03/13

The Libyan army on Monday (March 4th) took over security at the Mellitah oil and gas complex, Libya Herald reported. The complex stopped operations and workers were evacuated Saturday following deadly clashes between the Zintan and Zwara militias.

The plant, located 60km west of Tripoli, is jointly operated by the National Oil Corporation and Italy's Eni.

"The site has been secured by the army last night. But the gas supply has not yet resumed," Abdelfattah Sharkan, the president of the board of directors at the Mellitah Oil & Gas Company, said Monday. Sharkan said he hoped production would resume "in the next two days".

According to Zuwara Congressman Nouri Abu Sahmein, "These clashes broke out after three Zintan brigade members attacked a checkpoint in Sabratha. One of them was wounded and taken to Zuwara for treatment. After that, one of them assaulted the person who helped them in Zuwara."

He noted that locals in the area, both Arabs and Amazighs, tried to find a solution to the problem at the gas complex.

He also said that he contacted Prime Minister Ali Zidan, intelligence chief Salem al-Hasi, General National Congress (GNC) head Mohamed Magarief, as well as Undersecretary of the Interior Ministry for Security Affairs Omar al-Khadhraoui to contain the situation.

Mellitah Oil & Gas Company evacuated a number of foreign workers for fear of renewed clashes. Meanwhile, others staged a sit-in demanding security in society.

"The strange thing is that these armed groups have problems with the complex management although they receive large amounts of money for guarding it," Ezem, a resident of Zuwara, said.

Meanwhile, he expressed his surprise over the failure of state to control rogue militias made up of former revolutionaries.

"It was the Libyans who liberated their country, and the credit in that doesn't go for a certain region over another or a certain tribe over another," he said. "This reminds me of Sirte and Kadhafra tribe at the time of Kadhafi."

Maha al-Sabry, a public sector employee, said "the state must seize control of government and oil facilities and projects".

"We've had enough chaos from these security and military brigades," al-Sabry

added. "We want to build a strong army and an effective police force."

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/05/feature-02

- **Mauritania mulls Mali deployment**

Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz announced his country could take on a more active role in the war in northern Mali.

By Jemal Oumar in Nouakchott for Magharebia – 05/03/13

Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz said Monday (March 4th) in Nouakchott that the country was ready to join a UN force in Mali.

"If the situation changes... there will be nothing preventing Mauritania, as a UN member, from sending troops to the north (of Mali) or in the country's western regions to provide stability and security," Ould Abdel Aziz said at a joint press conference with his visiting Niger counterpart Mahamadou Issoufou.

Both Niger and Mauritania share the same views on the anti-terror fight and rule out negotiations with terrorists, Ould Abdel Aziz added.

"We will take on this responsibility as soon as possible," he stated.

The war on terror in northern Mali is being waged by allied forces from France, Mali, members of the Economic Organisation of West African States (ECOWAS) and other African states.

According to AFP, several members of the regional bloc ECOWAS have volunteered hundreds of troops to take part in a military force to support the embattled transitional government in Bamako.

But few foreign troops have been actively involved alongside France on the frontlines of the nearly two-month-old operation with the exception of Chad, whose seasoned desert fighters have spearheaded the hunt for militants.

Ould Abdel Aziz justified his country's reluctance to participate in the war in northern Mali, by saying, "Mauritania did not participate because it is not a member

of ECOWAS, while the matter concerned member states from this group."

The president reiterated Mauritania's commitment to offering assistance to French and Malian forces. "Mauritania, which is not ready to engage in a war on those groups, is on the other hand playing a vital role in preventing terrorists from infiltrating and resorting to its territory, and encircling them in the north of Mali in order to enable Malian units to intervene and finish them off in their dens, and I think that is a very important role." The President noted.

The demands of the Touareg in northern Mali and their relations with the state of Mali were not absent from the joint press conference held by the two presidents.

"The position of Mauritania with regard to the crisis in Mali takes into account the problem of terrorism that has been present in northern Mali since 2001 due to its loose handling by the central government, for exactly twelve years now," Ould Abdel Aziz said. "Yet there are legitimate demands posed by the population of northern Mali that are related to essential infrastructure, health,

water, electricity and education, and these are legitimate demands."

Related Articles

Loading

"However," he stated, "there are other demands that are unacceptable because they affect the unity of the state of Mali and we were and will remain against them and refuse to listen to them."

The Mauritanian president added, "still we wish that the parties to the conflict in Mali would find solutions to those problems by fairly sharing the limited wealth among the population."

Political analyst Hussein Ould Medo commented on Mauritania's new decision to take on a more active role in fighting terrorism in northern Mali, "this doesn't mean that Mauritania insists on a rapid intervention in the on-going war against terrorists, but should be understood as meaning that Mauritania could intervene in the event of the deployment of peacekeepers under the auspices of the United Nations only."

"The option of a Mauritanian military intervention in the on-going war has not

and will never be met with a consensus within the internal political class. Therefore the regime cannot make such a step unless it provides justifications that would satisfy all Mauritians," he added.

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2013/03/05/feature-03

- **Mali conflict in bloodiest phase yet: France**

French soldiers from the 2e REP legionnaires regiment look at a map as they patrol in the desert in Northern Mali. France said Monday for the first time that a key al-Qaida leader in Mali is probably dead, Tuesday March 5, 2013 (Photo: AP)

France said Tuesday that dozens of Islamist militants have been killed in the bloodiest phase of the Mali conflict to date, but it remained unclear if key commander Mokhtar Belmokhtar was among them.

Chadian President Idriss Deby Itno on Monday reiterated his belief that Belmokhtar had been killed during fierce fighting in recent days in the Ifoghas

mountains on Mali's northeastern border with Algeria.

Deby said his government had only refrained from displaying the body out of respect for Islamic principles.

But French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Tuesday it was not clear that Belmokhtar, the mastermind of the January assault on an Algerian gas plant that left 37 foreign hostages dead, had been killed.

"We can't be sure it is him," Le Drian said. "If the Chadian president can bring us proof, so much the better. If it is true, it would be very good news but it would not resolve everything."

An Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) source who on Monday confirmed the death of another prominent militant, Abdelhamid Abou Zeid, insisted that Belmokhtar was still alive and fighting.

Various photographs of fighters killed in the area have been broadcast by Chadian television but are not of sufficient quality to establish with any certainty that either man is dead.

Besides the uncertainty, French officials have also been guarded about the reports for fear that any statement smacking of triumphalism could further endanger French hostages being held in the region.

The families of four French hostages believed to be held in the Ifoghas region have called for a pause in military action to allow for negotiations on their release.

Le Drian said he had reason to believe all 15 French hostages held in various parts of Africa were still alive.

"Suffice to say, if the kidnapers had killed any of them, they would have made it known. We understand the anguish of the families but we are doing everything we can to secure the release of their relatives," he said.

Le Drian said dozens of militants had been killed in recent days, including 15 overnight.

Stopping the 'peril' of extremism

Chad, which has lost 27 of its soldiers in the fighting, put the toll of Islamist

fighters slain in the Ifoghas at 70 and has said eight have been taken prisoner.

Chad's Foreign Minister Moussa Faki told AFP Tuesday that the government knew it would suffer losses in the northern Mali operation but deemed the risk necessary to fight the "peril" of Islamist extremists in the region.

"We are in a situation where we need to act to contain the peril where it is. If not, there is the risk that it will spread," he said.

Three French soldiers have been killed since the intervention was launched in January in response to a push south by hundreds of AQIM and other fighters who took control of northern Mali last year.

The French forces met relatively little resistance as the Islamist groups were pushed back from central Mali. Malian officers have said dozens of the rebels were slain during the opening weeks of the campaign but those claims have not been verified.

At the same time ethnic Tuareg separatists in north Mali have accused

Malian soldiers of committing atrocities during the conflict and called on the International Criminal Court on Tuesday to launch an investigation.

"Soldiers have engaged in acts of torture, summary executions and forced disappearances" in several areas including Timbuktu and Gao, the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA) said in a statement.

French and Chadian troops were now involved in a "pincer movement" against rebels based in the Ametettai valley, the French defence chief said.

Le Drian warned that the high-risk operation in the rugged terrain was likely to go on for some time because of the need to secure neighbouring valleys.

French officials say their operation in the Ifoghas, during which troops have seized more than 50 weapons caches, has already confirmed their worst fears regarding the "industrial" scale of AQIM and its allies' operation in Mali.

Plans were under way meanwhile to meet future security needs as the head of the

EU training mission in Mali announced that a first battalion of Malian troops trained by EU instructors should be operational by July.

French General Francois Lecointre said the reference point for the trainers would be the Chadian army, which was well-adapted to its environment, and not a sophisticated Western-style army.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/66210/World/International/Mali-conflict-in-bloodiest-phase-yet-France.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• **March 8 fumes over electoral decree**

The March 8 coalition launched a heated campaign against Lebanon's premier and president for their signing of an electoral decree to move forward with the June 9 parliamentary elections, saying the move aimed to revive the much criticized 1960 electoral law.

Free Patriotic Movement officials spearheaded the alliances' strongly worded responses on Tuesday, while

March 14's Future Movement issued a statement backing PM Najib Miqati and President Michel Suleiman's move.

"It is a black day in the history of [Lebanon's] executive authority when the voting bodies are called to participate in the elections based on the 'dead' law [in reference to the 1960 electoral law]," FPM MP Ibrahim Kanaan read in a statement issued by March 8 MPs following a gathering in Downtown Beirut.

"Overturning the joint commissions' decision [to adopt the Orthodox proposal] is a dangerous precedent that threatens democracy," their statement added.

Lebanon's top two leaders on Monday signed on to the decree inviting voters to participate in the elections, while the country's political parties have yet to agree on an electoral law to govern the vote. If no new law is agree upon, the 1960 law will be used.

Miqati in an interview late Monday said the Orthodox Law—which is backed by the FPM and other March 8 parties as well as March 14's Lebanese Forces and Kataeb Party—would not be brought up for

discussion in the cabinet, which sparked the ire of the FPM.

"Nobody can say that the Orthodox proposal will not pass... because it is only up to the parliament to decide that," Kanaan said later on Tuesday following a meeting of March 8 MPs with Speaker Nabih Berri in Ain al-Tineh.

Kanaan's political boss, party leader MP Michel Aoun, raised the temperature of the rhetoric later Tuesday, calling Miqati and Suleiman's rejection of the Orthodox law "political blackmail."

"[Suleiman and Miqati] expressed judgments about the Orthodox electoral law that they are not entitled to express," he also said.

Meanwhile, the Future Movement offered praise to their political foe Miqati, commending the signing of the electoral decree.

"The bloc reiterates its commitment to holding the elections on time... [which can only happen] in the presence of a neutral government," the Future Movement said in a statement released on Tuesday.

Miqati on Monday had also expressed his readiness to step down from his post in order to pave the way for the forming of a neutral cabinet that would oversee the 2013 elections.

As the bickering rumbled across the country's political landscape, Suleiman chaired a cabinet session in Baabda to discuss the signing of the electoral decree.

Following the session, Information Minister Walid Daouq said that "the premier and president offered assurances that the 1960 law is clinically dead, but will remain in effect until it is buried."

Constitutional experts told NOW contributor Matt Nash on Tuesday that the move to sign the decree does not necessarily force the elections to be held on June 9 or for the 1960 law to govern to govern the vote.

"All decrees have to refer to legislation in place, this is purely procedural," explained Marwan Saqr, a lawyer specializing in election and constitutional law. "If the [election] law changes, they can amend the decree to refer to the new law."

Lebanon is set to elect new parliamentary representatives in the summer of 2013, but the country's different political parties remain divided over the best electoral draft to replace the current 1960 law, despite the joint parliamentary commissions' approval in February of the Orthodox law which calls for voting along sectarian lines.

This proposal was endorsed by the FPM along with its March 8 allies and the opposition Lebanese Forces and Kataeb Party. However, this draft was met with severe criticism from the Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Part, March 14 independent Christian MPs and Suleiman and Miqati, who have been trying to elaborate another electoral proposal that would get the majority of the MPs' approval.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/march-8-fumes-over-electoral-decree>

- **FSA: Tensions with Hezbollah spread to include all Lebanon**

The Free Syrian Army said that the conflict they have with Hezbollah, which is allegedly fighting against them in Syria,

has now grown into hostility against all of Lebanon.

“[Our problem] today has become with Lebanon as a state, it is no longer solely with Hezbollah. It has... turned into an Arab, regional and international issue,” the Anadolu Turkish news agency quoted the FSA as saying in a statement released on Tuesday evening.

The statement also warned that the “future” of the Lebanese-Syrian border “is at risk... in case the attacks on Syrian territory and civilians do not stop.”

The FSA fired further accusations against Hezbollah, claiming that the Lebanese Shiite party is to send “between four and five thousand fighters” to Syrian territory near Homs during the upcoming days.

The rebels also claimed that on Sunday, Hezbollah trained several of its members near the Lebanese town of Mashghara in West Beqaa “in order to send new [militants] to fight on Syrian soil.”

The statement added that the Shiite party established monitoring sites near Syrian border towns in an attempt to “control

the international Damascus-Homs Highway.”

Moreover, the statement accused Hezbollah of carrying out “displacements and sectarian cleansing in a number of border towns... and burning many houses.”

The Rebel FSA started an accusation campaign against Hezbollah in February, when it claimed that the Lebanese Shiite party was providing the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad with military support.

The rebels’ accusations prompted a number of Lebanese opposition parties to condemn Hezbollah’s alleged involvement in the Syrian conflict, especially after the FSA threatened it would “retaliate” in Lebanon.

However, Hezbollah’s chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah refuted these allegations in a speech he made last week and labeled them as “unfounded rumors.”

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/fsa-tensions-with-hezbollah-spread-to-include-all-lebanon>

- **Aoun accuses Lebanon president, premier of “blackmail”**

Change and Reform bloc leader MP Michel Aoun denounced President Michel Suleiman’s and Prime Minister Najib Miqati’s refusal to adopt the Orthodox law.

“[Suleiman and Miqati] expressed judgments about the Orthodox electoral law that they are not entitled to express... Their rejection of this law is blackmail,” Aoun said on Tuesday following his bloc’s weekly meeting.

The Free Patriotic Movement chief went on to state that the “parliament approved the Orthodox law, and all that is left is [for us] to take it to the next stage.”

Aoun’s remarks came as a response to Miqati’s statements earlier on Tuesday that “the cabinet will not discuss the Orthodox law” and that “it will not be adopted because it is unconstitutional.”

Meanwhile, the president and the premier signed an electoral decree that calls on the voting bodies to participate in the parliamentary elections on June 9

regardless of whether a new electoral law is reached or not.

In the event that the parties fail to agree on one electoral proposal, the elections will take place according to the 1960 law currently on the books.

However, many political figures have expressed their objection to returning to the current electoral law, notably Aoun, who said that the 1960 law was “buried, and the elections will not be held based on it.”

The FPM chief later talked about the Christians’ representation in the parliament, saying that the “constitution stipulates that [Christians] are entitled to 64 MPs, and the [new] electoral law must provide us with [as many MPs] in the parliament.”

Meanwhile, Aoun accused the Future Movement and the March 14 coalition of “depriving them of their rights” and “wanting to sabotage the elections.”

Lebanon is set to elect new parliamentary representatives in the summer of 2013, but the country’s different political parties

remain divided over the best electoral draft to replace the current 1960 law, despite the joint parliamentary commissions' approval in February of the Orthodox law which calls for voting along sectarian lines.

This proposal was endorsed by the FPM along with its ally the Marada Movement and the opposition Lebanese Forces and Kataeb Party. However, this draft was met with severe criticism from the Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party and other March 14 independent Christian MPs who have been trying to elaborate another electoral proposal that would get the majority of the MPs' approval.

Suleiman and Miqati expressed judgments about the Orthodox electoral law that they are not entitled to express.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/aoun-accuses-lebanon-president-premier-of-blackmail>

6. SYRIA

- **Syrian refugees top 1 million, UN says**

Number of displaced civilians from Syrian civil war swells, straining economies of host countries

BERLIN (AP) — The United Nations refugee agency says the number of Syrians who have fled their war-ravaged country and are seeking assistance has now reached the one million mark.

In a statement released Wednesday in Geneva, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, says the figure is based on reports from his agency's field offices in neighboring countries that have provided refuge for Syrians escaping the civil war. With millions more displaced but still inside Syria, Guterres warns the country is "spiraling towards full-scale disaster."

He says the number of refugees has swelled dramatically since the first of the year, with most Syrians pouring into Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. Their presence is severely straining the resources of host countries and the entire international donor community.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/syrian-refugees-top-1-million-un-says/>

- **Kerry: Weapons from US allies are reaching Syrian moderates**

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Secretary of State John Kerry said Tuesday the Obama administration is confident that the vast majority of weapons being supplied to Syrian rebels by U.S. allies are going to moderates and not finding their way to extremists.

Speaking in Qatar, one of several Arab nations providing weapons to the rebels, Kerry told reporters he had spoken to Qatari leaders about the matter and said there are now “greater guarantees” that nearly all the arms and ammunition going to the opposition inside Syria are getting into the hands of moderates.



“We did discuss the question of the ability to try to guarantee that it is going to the right people and the moderate Syrian Opposition Coalition and I think it’s really in the last months that that has developed

as a capacity that we have greater confidence in,” he said at a joint news conference with Qatar’s Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim.

“You can’t guarantee that one weapon or another may not fall in that kind of a situation into the hands that you don’t want it to,” he said. “But, in terms of fundamental balance of battlefield tactics and of effort, I think it is pretty clear that the prime minister shares a belief in trying to do what we need to do rapidly and to try to effect this through the SNC.”

“There are greater guarantees now that the weapons are being transferred directly into the moderate Syrian opposition,” he said.

Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis, the top officer at U.S. Central Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he backed the administration’s policy not to arm the rebels because of concerns that weapons still could wind up in extremists’ hands.

Kerry last week announced that the United States would be providing the Syrian Free Army with direct non-lethal

military assistance like rations and medical supplies, but would continue to hold off on arms.

He said U.S. officials were aware of the weapons flows to the rebels and that that knowledge informed President Barack Obama's decisions on what to give to the opposition.

"Obviously, we are aware and it is that awareness that informs the president's decision about what is needed and what the United States is prepared to do at this point in time," Kerry said.

He added that should Syrian President Bashar Assad not change his calculation on clinging to power, the U.S. remained ready to consider "other options" in the future.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/kerry-confident-weapons-from-us-allies-reaching-moderate-syrian-opposition/>

- **Struggling to hang on in Syria's devastated Deir Ezzor**

Once a thriving hub of Syria's oil industry, Deir Ezzor is now a ghost town of only a few thousand people struggling

tenaciously to hang on against the odds after most of its people fled.

Capital of a province with the same name, it is about 80 percent controlled by rebels fighting to oust President Bashar al-Assad, whose forces have relentlessly pummeled it with air strikes and shelling for nine months.

Not only are the city's buildings and streets in ruins, so is its economy.

"Most of us in Deir Ezzor have lost our jobs and we have no source of income," said Abu Hussein. "When my savings run out, I'll have to leave the city and become another refugee."

The bazaar in Bin Al-Walid Street has been closed for the past two months, almost completely devastated by air strikes and shelling.

"People are afraid to come out and buy for fear of the bombs, so there's no point in opening our shops, speaking, of course, of the ones that haven't been destroyed," said Abu Mohammed, as he collected the last few remaining items in his food shop.

Ahmed al-Kafed, who used to have a kebab stall in the bazaar, said "nobody wants to risk opening their business just to be killed by a bomb the following day."

And in Al-Mokhtar Street, Ricky Shemali lays out a few clothes and shoes on the sidewalk.

"I've reopened my 'shop' today after nine months," he said. "I need money to feed my family, and I've had to do it."

But the street is virtually deserted, except for a few rebel fighters.

"There's hardly been anyone all morning. They come, they look and they leave, saying everything is too expensive and that they don't have money to buy," said Shemali, who used to buy his goods in Aleppo and Hama.

"But the factories in Aleppo have shut down because of the war, and I now have to buy from Turkey, where everything is more expensive. If the situation doesn't improve in a few weeks, I'll have to shut up my shop for good and take my family to Turkey or Iraq to start from zero."

Mohammed al-Islam said "we try to help each other out however we can, since nobody cares about what is happening to us.

"Those who don't have any money are resorting to barter. Me, for example, I'm an auto mechanic. So I go to the shop on the corner and fix the owner's car in exchange for a kilo of tomatoes. That's the only way we can survive."

Despite all the hardship, it at least appears as if no one is starving.

Yawafed, a local charity, has set up a soup kitchen, and there is also a bakery run by volunteers, both of them serving people free of charge.

In the basement of one of Deir Ezzor's tower blocks, Yawafed has set up two huge cauldrons for cooking -- one for rice and one for a vegetable soup.

"Every day around 500 families come for food," said Mustapha al-Haji, who runs the charity.

"We don't have enough food," he said, while stressing that no one is ever sent away empty handed.

Abu Salem, who once worked in the oil fields and now walks with a limp from a shrapnel wound, expresses bitterness as he and his son arrive with two containers to collect their ration.

"The international community has abandoned us," he said. "We are paying for their indifference with our blood. That means Syrians are becoming radicalized and Al-Qaeda is getting a foothold in this country. When they finally catch on, it will be too late to regret."

Meanwhile, other volunteers are running a huge bakery that provides bread free to residents.

But in order to avoid disasters such as occurred in two other Syrian cities, where dozens of people were killed by regime shelling as they queued up to buy bread, this one is not open to the public. Instead, its daily rations are distributed around town.

"Once the bread is baked, we take it to different distribution points in the city," where each family must produce an ID card and receive the bread for free, said Abu Ahmed, who runs the bakery.

Every two days, it takes 3,000 tonnes of flour brought in from Turkey to make enough bread to feed 8,000 people, he said.

Abdul Razzak al-Haj Hazaa, who is collecting his ration, said "life is hard in these conditions, but it's much better here than in areas controlled by the regime, where people are kidnapped and murdered every day.

"The cost of living has risen sharply, which is normal, and things are becoming scarce. But if we ever need anything we can ask the soldiers of the Free Syrian Army who are always happy to help us."

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/struggling-to-hang-on-in-syrias-devastated-deir-ezzor>

- **Syria military pounds Homs for fourth day**

Syrian warplanes and helicopters struck rebel enclaves in Homs on Wednesday, on the fourth day of a major offensive aimed at crushing the insurgency in the country's third-largest city, a watchdog said.

"The army used helicopters to strafe the Old City district of Homs... and warplanes and rocket fire to strike the district of Khaldiye," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Although the government of President Bashar al-Assad now controls some 80 percent of Homs, several districts remain under rebel control despite a suffocating eight-month siege by the army.

Several hundred civilians are trapped in rebel-held districts of the city, which activists dub "the capital of the revolution".

"We don't know how they can get out, or where they would even go, should the army seize control of the rebel districts -- Homs is surrounded," Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Activists said there had also been fierce early morning ground clashes between

troops and rebels defending positions on the outskirts of the neighborhoods still under their control.

In the northeast, fighter jets struck the city of Raqa, two days after rebels overran most of the strategic provincial capital in their biggest victory since the revolt against Assad's rule erupted in March 2011, the Observatory said.

Holed up in Raqa's military intelligence headquarters, their last bastion inside the city, troops fought rebels trying to seize the complex, the Britain-based watchdog added.

The new fighting came after at least 159 people were killed in violence nationwide on Tuesday, according to the Observatory's figures.

The United Nations says in all at least 70,000 people have been killed since the start of the uprising.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/several-bombs-heard-in-homs-old-neighborhoods-activists-say>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Yemen president rejects bid to broker Qaeda truce**

Truce efforts between Yemeni Abdrabuh Mansur and Al-Qaeda fail as president insists they must renounce violence

"The president wants members of Al-Qaeda to surrender their arms, announce their repentance and renounce their extremist ideas," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), considered the jihadist network's most dangerous franchise, announced on several Islamist websites that the truce efforts had failed.

The mediators, who launched the initiative in January, had already revealed in a statement on 5 February that their efforts had run into trouble.

They said Hadi had refused to sign up to a truce proposal which had been accepted by AQAP chief Nasser al-Wahishi.

The collapse of the mediation bid came as a suspected Al-Qaeda suicide bomber

rammed an explosives-laden car into a building in the southern Yemeni city of Loder, killing 12 pro-government militiamen.

Al-Qaeda militants were driven out of most cities in Abyan province, including Loder, in June last year in an offensive by troops backed by militia.

Yemeni forces continue to hunt Qaeda militants in the rugged south and east, aided by US drone attacks.

The militants took advantage of a decline in central government control during a 2011 uprising that forced veteran president Ali Abdullah Saleh from power to seize large swathes of territory across the south, including most of Abyan province, which they controlled for a year.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/66157/World/Region/Yemen-president-rejects-bid-to-broker-Qaeda-truce.aspx>

- **Saleh-era officials agree to appear at Yemen bombing trial**

Assets freeze lifted on two former Yemeni security chiefs in return for their

agreement to appear in trial over bombing in Sanaa last year

A Yemeni court lifted a freeze on the assets of two former security chiefs on Tuesday after they finally agreed to appear in court over a deadly 2012 suicide bombing in Sanaa, the judge told AFP.

It was not immediately clear whether the two men, both appointees of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, would face charges over the bombing, which rocked the capital shortly after the veteran strongman was forced from power, or would merely be required to testify.

"We have cancelled the asset freeze after the two men ended their defiance of the court," judge Hilal Mahfal told AFP.

A travel ban ordered against the duo—former central security services commander General Abdulmalik al-Taieb and his deputy General Yehya Mohammed Abdullah Saleh, a nephew of the former president—was also lifted, Mahfal said.

Taieb appeared in court in person. Yehya was represented by lawyers.

The court imposed the assets freeze and travel ban last month, branding the two men "fugitives from justice" after they failed to appear at the trial of nine suspected Al-Qaeda members accused of involvement in the May 21 bombing.

Taieb had been sacked on the day of the bombing which killed 86 soldiers taking part in a rehearsal for a military parade. Yehya was dismissed in December.

When the trial opened on January 14, one of the nine defendants—Hisham Sharaabi, 24—shouted from the dock that the bombing was "political" and "involves high-ranking officials."

Al-Qaeda, which claimed the attack, said it targeted Defence Minister Mohammed Nasser Ahmed and his aides. The minister escaped unharmed.

The bombing came three months after President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi took power when Saleh was forced to step down following a year-long uprising against his 33-year rule.

Hadi has since sacked many Saleh appointees from top security and military

posts, using his powers to restructure the security forces under a UN-backed transition deal.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/66170/World/Region/Salehera-officials-agree-to-appear-at-Yemen-bombin.aspx>

- **Iran rejects Gulf claims of "interference"**

Iran rejected Tuesday claims by the Gulf Cooperation Council that it is interfering in the grouping's internal affairs, insisting that Tehran stays away from domestic issues of other countries.

"Iran's intervention in Bahrain's affairs is a claim contrary to reality and it is made in order to escape from the real problems and will bear no results," Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said at his weekly press conference.

"We have not, are not, will not interfere in the domestic issues of any country."

Bahrain, one of the six Arab monarchies making up the GCC, at the weekend urged

the council to stand united against Iran's "interference".

The GCC "looks forward towards better relations with Iran, but unfortunately the latter continues to interfere in their internal affairs," said Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled al-Khalifa.

"It is important for our countries to stand united against such interference" from the Shiite Islamic republic across the Gulf, Sunni-ruled Bahrain's top diplomat said.

Bahrain in February accused Iran of having formed a "terrorist cell" to foster violence in the kingdom.

The claim was the latest in a series of accusations against Iran that it backs activists demanding a greater say for the Shiite majority in Bahrain's politics.

Mehmanparast said Bahrain should listen to its own people.

He urged Bahrain "to seek correct solutions for its problems -- which is listening to the legitimate demands of their own people instead of taking military and security action."

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.

Aside from Bahrain, the GCC comprises Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Oman.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/iran-rejects-gulf-claims-of-interference>

- **HRW, Amnesty urge Saudis to halt execution of 7 men**

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International urged Saudi authorities to halt Tuesday's scheduled executions of seven young men condemned for crimes committed when they were minors.

The two rights groups said in separate statements that the seven Saudi men were convicted of armed robbery, a crime punishable by death in the kingdom which applies a strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law.

"All seven men were between 16 and 20 when authorities arrested them in 2006 for allegedly committing a robbery in 2005," Human Rights Watch said.

"There is strong evidence suggesting that the trials of all seven men violated basic principles of the right to a fair trial."

HRW's Deputy Middle East Director Eric Goldstein said in a statement that "it will be outrageous if the Saudi authorities go ahead with these executions."

"It is high time for the Saudis to stop executing child offenders and start observing their obligations under international human rights law."

Amnesty International said the seven men were "tortured to make them confess" and sentenced to death following a "summary trial that was grossly unfair."

So far this year the Saudi authorities have executed 17 people. In 2012, the kingdom executed 76 people, according to an AFP tally based on official figures. Human Rights Watch put the number at 69.

Rape, murder, apostasy, armed robbery and drug trafficking are all punishable by death under Saudi Arabia law.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/hrw-amnesty-urge-saudis-to-halt-execution-of-7-men>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• General Says 20,000 Troops Should Stay in Afghanistan

By THOM SHANKER

WASHINGTON — The American commander in the Middle East said on Tuesday that he had recommended that 13,600 United States troops remain in Afghanistan after the combat mission ends in 2014, a number slightly higher than the one being considered by NATO and Pentagon officials.

The officer, Gen. James N. Mattis of the Central Command, revealed his recommendation during a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, where he also said that a NATO contribution to an enduring mission in Afghanistan could equal half of the American deployment, for a total alliance troop presence of 20,000 under his proposal.

President Obama has not decided on the size of any troop deployment after 2014, which would also require agreement with the government in Kabul.

During a session of NATO defense ministers last month, alliance officials discussed a proposal for training, support and counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan after 2014 that envisioned a force of up to 9,500 American troops and up to 6,000 more from other coalition nations.

George Little, the Pentagon press secretary, said those talks focused on a smaller range of 8,000 to 12,000 troops over all, including American and allied contributions. There are about 66,000 American troops in Afghanistan today, with that number to drop to 32,000 by early next year.

Discussing Syria, General Mattis told the Senate that providing weapons and other lethal aid to rebels fighting to oust President Bashar al-Assad was complicated, and potentially self-defeating, since the situation was so chaotic that the arms could end up in the

possession of militants linked to terrorist organizations.

His assessment of Iran's nuclear program is that Tehran is enriching uranium at a pace far beyond any peaceful purpose, but that he fully supports economic sanctions. General Mattis warned Iran not to view reductions in American deployments in the region as a sign of weakness; they were brought on by budget cuts under the sequester.

In particular, he noted that he had other combat assets to make up for the decision to deploy just one aircraft carrier in the region, rather than two. "I have what it takes to make it the enemy's longest day and their worst day," General Mattis said. "And we'll get the other carrier out there quickly to reinforce."

General Mattis testified alongside Adm. William H. McRaven, commander of the Special Operations Command, who also was questioned on the impact of the sequester on his ability to carry out training and missions.

Admiral McRaven said the sequester cut of \$900 million per year for the Special

Operations Command would be made even worse by reductions in money to the various armed services that support his organization and its personnel.

"So the service cuts that they take compound the problem of Special Operations support," he said. "I get a tremendous amount of my support from the various services, and that will absolutely affect the Special Operations capability of this nation."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/06/world/middleeast/us-general-says-20000-troops-should-stay-in-afghanistan.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&r=0>

- **Kabul Bank Heads Sentenced for Corruption**

VOA News
March 5, 2013

An Afghan judge has sentenced the two former heads of what was once Afghanistan's largest bank to five years in prison for involvement in the massive fraud scandal that brought the bank down in 2010.

Judge Shamsul Rahman Shams on Tuesday sentenced former Kabul Bank chairman Sherkhan Farnood and the bank's former chief executive officer, Khalilullah Ferozi. The two men are also required to pay back the money stolen -- some \$531 million by Ferozi and \$279 million by Farnood.

Some 20 other defendants were also convicted in Tuesday's ruling. They have the right to appeal.

These are the first convictions for the Kabul Bank collapse, which saw hundreds of millions of dollars disappear in fraudulent loans.

The bank was bailed out by the government and relaunched as New Kabul Bank.

Tuesday's proceedings were expected to be seen as a measure of the government's commitment to fighting corruption, something international aid donors are demanding.

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

- **4 insurgents killed, 8 detained in Afghanistan: ISAF**

KABUL, March 5 (Xinhua) -- Up to four insurgents have been killed and eight others detained in different operations carried out by Afghan forces and the NATO-led coalition troops, in the latest raids against insurgency in the war-hit country, the coalition forces said on Tuesday.

"An Afghan and coalition force killed four insurgents and wounded three others during a security operation in Ghaziabad district, Kunar province, yesterday," the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a press release.

Earlier Tuesday, a Taliban facilitator along with two other insurgents were captured in Kandahar city, the capital of southern Kandahar province 450 km south of Kabul, the release said.

"The insurgent is believed responsible for directing multiple suicide attacks against Afghan and coalition forces throughout Kandahar province. He has also been involved in the death of Afghan civilians," the release added.

In addition, the joint forces arrested a Taliban facilitator and detained four other

insurgents during an operation in Kandahar 's Panjwai district on Monday, it said.

The Taliban, which has been waging an insurgency of more than one decade, has yet to make comments.

The Afghan and ISAF troops have intensified operations against Taliban and other militant groups recently. But the insurgent groups responded by bombings.

On Monday, four Afghan border policemen and a civilian were injured when an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) went off in Khost city, capital of eastern Khost province 150 km southeast of Kabul.

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

- **NATO concerned about public reaction to 2014 Afghan presidential election**

Press TV

March 5, 2013

NATO has expressed concerns over public reaction to the upcoming 2014 presidential election in Afghanistan.

At a joint press conference held in Kabul on Monday, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen called on the Afghan government to ensure a free election in Afghanistan.

"It will be vital that these elections are inclusive, and that the process and the outcome are acceptable to the Afghan people," Rasmussen said.

On October 18, 2012, Afghan President Hamid Karzai warned against interference in Afghanistan's upcoming presidential election, stressing that the presence of foreigners in the country's election watchdog is against the country's sovereignty.

"Foreign observers can still come to monitor the transparency or non-transparency of the election, but their interference in the election process is against Afghanistan's sovereignty," Karzai said.

Afghanistan will hold its next presidential election in April 2014.

Karzai will not be eligible to run for the election due to term limits.

ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.

The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of fighting terrorism. The invasion removed the Taliban from power, but the country remains insecure despite the presence of tens of thousands of US-led forces there.

<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.*

Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcısı Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge*