



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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## 1. IRAQ

- **All INA components reject amendments to Debaathification Law, says Naji (alliraqnews)**

09 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The spokesperson of the parliament Ahrar bloc, Mushriq Naji, said on Tuesday "The recent statement of Ibrahim al-Jaafary, head of the Iraqi National Alliance, does not represent the INA's general viewpoint, but it expresses the State of Law Coalition's perspective.

Naji added in a statement to AIN "The INA had refused the Baathists' re-assumption for the governmental offices, and the amendment on the Accountability & Justice Law during the previous meetings of the INA Political Bureau."

"Ahrar bloc pointed out its stance towards these amendments in presence of Jaafary," he added noting "what was reported by Jaafary when he said that these amendments are approved by all the INA components is incorrect."

The Council of Ministers amended the Debaathification law on last Sunday.

- **Ahrar bloc to mobilize all efforts to abort amendment on A J Law (alliraqnews)**

09 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) -The parliament Ahrar bloc announced its intention to abort the amendment conducted on the Accountability & Justice Law (Debaathification).

The head of the bloc, Baha al-Araji, said on Tuesday "Ahrar bloc was not a part of the commission formed by the Iraqi National Alliance to consider the demonstrators' demands despite our uphold for these demonstrations and the legitimate demands."

"But, we also rejected some of illegitimate demands most notably the demands of amending the A & J Law because we do not want the tyranny to be back again to the political process," he added

The Council of Ministers amended the Debaathification law on last Sunday.

- **Nechirvan Barzani affirms the Region's desire for sincere partnership with the Federal Government (NINA)**

09 April 2013

Erbil (NINA) – Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, affirmed that the Region desires true partnership in governing, rights and responsibilities with Iraq's Federal Government.

A statement on Tuesday, Apr. 9, by the Region's Government said that Nechirvan Barzani discussed in his meeting with Austria's Ambassador to Jordan and Iraq, Astrid Harz, the political situation in Iraq and relations between Erbil and Baghdad, as well as means to consolidate relations between Kurdistan Region and Austria.

The statement quoted Barazani saying that it is for Baghdad to deal with Erbil on the base of real partnership, according to the country's Constitution.

He added that regardless of everything, the Region is always seeking for dialogue to treat problems within the Constitution's frame, and the Region has never turned down any opportunity for dialogue and talks.

As for the relations between Kurdistan Region and Austria, both sides expressed desire to consolidate bilateral relations

and expand cooperation, especially in the fields of economic and trade.

- **Rasool: the Kurdish people did not and will never accept the dictatorship (NINA)**

09 April 2013

Arbil / NINA /--First Deputy for General Secretary of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Kusrat Rasool said : " The Kurdish people have not and will never accept the dictatorship", stressing the need to "abide by the constitution and governance based on consensus and power-sharing.

He added in a statement today on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the fall of the former regime: "The Iraqis were able to topple the mightiest dictatorship to achieve freedom and democracy," So they hope to achieve real co-existence and democratization in all parts of Iraq. "

- **Iraqi Cabinet approves contracts with retired officers to serve at OCs (alliraqnews)**

09 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) The Iraqi Council of Ministers approved, during it regular

session of Tuesday, on contracting with retired officers to serve as advisors for the Operation Commands.

A statement by the CoM cited on Tuesday "The Iraqi Cabinet approved to conclude contracts with 45 retired officers to serve as advisors within the operation commands, five officers for each."

- **Motahidoon slate says that occupation of Iraq was big crime, unforgivable sin (NINA)**

09 April 2013

Baghdad (NINA) – Motahidoon slate, headed by Usama al-Nijaifi, said that the occupation of Iraq was a big crime and unforgivable crime, it was a dark era of Iraq's history.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, Apr. 9, Motahidoon stressed that the occupier and those who helped it are demanded today to rectify the mistakes, treat weaknesses, it is legal and international responsibility that could not be disclaimed.

It added that what is worst is what the occupation has left behind of problems that have not been solved yet, continued

fight, destroying the state and its institutions encouraging sectarianism, seeding hate among the one people, the occupation has opened the doors of Iraq's before foreign intervention.

It went on saying that the government is demanded to built a safe, stable and prosperous Iraq instead of keep doing what the occupation was doing. The Iraqis also are to overcome their suffering and unite to restore the country's healthy life.

- **Protestors in Anbar organize gathering remembering Baghdad occupation (NINA)**

09 April 2013

Ramadi (NINA) – Thousands of people gathered on the Anbar protest field remembering Iraq's occupation and the resulted deterioration in security, economics and general situation.

Spokesman for protestors in Anbar, Sheikh Sa'eed al-Lafi, told NINA on Tuesday, Apr.9, that a large gathering organized at the protest field in northern Ramadi remembering the 9th of April when American armies occupied Iraq.

Lafi added the people gathered from all of Anbar cities and towns to gather in memory of the occupation of Iraq by American forces, destroying services projects, infra structure and killing innocent people.

He added that poems gave poets and scholars, as well as tribal chiefs gave remembering this sad occasion of Iraq's history. / End.

- **Najafi instructs his representatives to urge for active participation in the election (NINA)**

09 April 2013

Najaf (NINA) – Religious Authority Basheer al-Najafi instructed his representatives urge the people to participate actively in the election to choose their qualified and honest persons to represent them in Provincial Councils.

He pointed out that not participating in the election is a signals for the return of dictatorship; he also called for opposing those who attempt to buy votes, which allows unqualified and dishonest ones to become members of Provincial Councils.

- **Religious Authority warns against lack of participation in next PCs elections (alliraqnews)**

09 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) \_The office of the Religious Authority warned from lack participation in the next Provincial Councils elections.

Ai al-Najafi, the head of al-Sheikh, Basheer al-Najafi was quoted as saying while meeting a number of the Religious Authority's representatives in the Iraq provinces "The lack of participation will restore dictatorship in the country and will consolidate the corrupted officials."

"The Religious Authority stress elections to enable Iraqis to choose their representatives in the legislative councils," he added.

He emphasized "The adherence to the instructions of the religious authority to urge people to elect their representatives through active participation in the elections."

"Under the instructions of the religious authority and the high awareness of the Iraqis, the process of nominating the best candidate is clarified," he concluded.

- **38000 security elements to participate in special ballot in Salah il-Din (alliraqnews)**

09 April 2013

Salah il-Din (AIN) -More than 38000 security elements will participate in the special ballot in Salah il-Din province for the next local elections.

Media official at the Independent High Electoral Commission said on Tuesday "The number of the voters from the security elements amounted to 83551 according to the voter registers at 26 polling centers in Salah il-Din province across the security departments within the province."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=31825](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31825)

- **More than 25000 security elements to participate in elections of provincial councils in Wasit (alliraqnews)**

09 April 2013

Wasit (AIN) –More than (25,000) security elements participate in the elections of the provincial councils in Wasit province.

A source of the Independent High Electoral Commission IHEC in Wasit reported to the correspondent of AIN on Monday "About (25,529) voters of the elements of police and army forces registered in the electoral commission to participate in the private elections for provincial councils in Wasit province."

"The electoral commission has allocated 12 centers and 62 stations for the elections, " pointing out that "The completion of all logistical preparations to conduct the private elections for the security elements," the source added.

The Independent High Electoral Commission IHEC identified 13/ April as the date for the private elections for the security elements and on 20/ April as the date to conduct the public elections of provincial councils

- **Najaf IHEC: More than 27.000 voters to participate in special voting of security forces (alliraqnews)**

09 April 2013

Najaf (AIN) –The head of the Independent High Electoral Commission in Najaf province, Saad al-Abdel, confirmed that more than 27.000 voters to participate in

the special vote devoted to the security forces.

He stated to AIN "The voter's number for the special vote is 27966 voters where 72 stations were equipped well and a security plan was prepared well." /End/

- **Election station for journalists established in Karbala (alliraqnews)**

09 April 2013

Karbala (AIN) –The office of the Independent High Electoral Commission IHEC in Karbala province announced establishing election private station for journalists and media cadres in Karbala.

The Director of the Media Office, Hussein al-Ameri, reported in statement to AIN "Any one of the journalists or who works in media field can vote at this station in addition to the voters who have the authorization from the Independent High Electoral Commission IHEC."

"The election station will be opened during the public elections," the statement added, noting that "The media election station is situated in Jameah area of central Karbala."

- **Amnesty: Global progress in ending death penalty, despite setbacks in Iraq, India, Pakistan (AP)**

By Associated Press, Updated:  
Wednesday, April 10, 3:35 AM

LONDON — Iraq executed almost twice as many people last year compared to the year before, while India and Pakistan resumed executions after abandoning the practice for years, global human rights group Amnesty International said Tuesday.

China still led the top five countries carrying out executions, the organization said, followed by Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/amnesty-global-progress-in-ending-death-penalty-despite-setbacks-in-iraq-india-pakistan/2013/04/09/50b79e02-a172-11e2-bd52-614156372695\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/amnesty-global-progress-in-ending-death-penalty-despite-setbacks-in-iraq-india-pakistan/2013/04/09/50b79e02-a172-11e2-bd52-614156372695_story.html)

- **Saudi, Iraqi chief lawmakers urge Arab support of Syrians (KUNA)**

Quotes from a report by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA)

KUWAIT, April 9 (KUNA) -- Speaker of the Consultative Council Dr. Abdullah Bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh said on Tuesday, in his speech to the 19th AIPU Conference hosted by Kuwait, said that the tragic humanitarian situation faced by the Syrian people can not be justified and immediate actions should be taken to curb violence, calling on Arab countries to support the Syrian people in all means.

[...]

On the other hand, Iraqi Speaker of the Council of Representatives Osama Al-Nujaifi, meanwhile, said in order to achieve stability and peace in the Arab region, its parliaments should form a joint framework of policies capable of positively influencing international decision-making that serves the best interests of their people.

This goal, Al-Nujaifi noted, depends mostly on "clearing the air" and coordinating joint work among all Arab countries. He also called on a taking serious Arab moves to solve the Palestinian crisis and to grant Palestine independent statehood.

He also called on a unified parliamentary stance aimed at putting a stop to the violence taking place in Syria.

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2303457&language=en>

- **Iran criticizes Iraq for inspecting Iranian plane (Trend News Agency)**

10 April 2013,

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast has criticized Iraq for inspecting an Iranian plane taking humanitarian aid to Syria, Press TV reported.

Mehmanparast made the remarks on Tuesday, saying that the move is a violation of international law.

However, he noted that the inspection of Iranian planes has disproved the claim that Iran is sending arms to Syria.

Mehmanparast said Iran will continue relief operations in Syria despite the inspections.

Since mid-March 2011, Syria has been experiencing a deadly unrest, which has killed many people including large numbers of security personnel.

- **Iraq signs ‘strategic’ pipeline deal with Jordan (Jordan Times)**

\$18b-project to be fully operational by 2017

by Mohammad Ghazal | Apr 08, 2013

AMMAN — The Iraqi ministry of oil said on Monday that Jordan and Iraq have signed an agreement to build a double pipeline that will supply the Kingdom with crude oil and natural gas.

“The Iraqi oil minister has signed the agreement in Baghdad and the deal was sent to and signed by the Jordanian energy minister on Sunday,” Nihad Mossa, director general of State Company for Oil Projects at the ministry of oil of Iraq, told The Jordan Times Monday.

“We will immediately undertake all procedures to begin the implementation of this strategic project,” Mossa added, emphasising that the Iraqi government is keen to proceed with the plan.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour on Monday met with Iraqi oil ministry officials, including Mossa, to discuss with her preparations to start the

implementation of the project, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Thamer Ghadban, chief adviser to Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki and former oil minister, said that Jordan is the “nearest” country to Iraq, which is looking forward to enhance its relationship with neighbouring countries, he said.

Ghadban added that Iraq has now a new vision to separate the political situation in the region from its economic plans, under which Baghdad is seeking to promote its oil, especially as Iraq is considered OPEC’s second exporting member.

Ensour highlighted investment opportunities in the Kingdom, noting that Jordan enjoys stability, security and human resources, but lacks the needed capital due to its scarce natural resources.

The 1,680-kilometre double pipeline will pump one-million barrels of oil a day from Basra on the Arabian Gulf to Jordan’s Aqaba Port, and around 258 million cubic feet of gas.

Some 150,000 barrels of the oil from Iraq is needed to meet Jordan’s needs. The

rest will be exported through Aqaba, generating an estimated \$3 billion a year in revenues to the Kingdom.

<http://jordantimes.com/iraq-signs-strategic-pipeline-deal-with-jordan>

- **Commander of Sahwa forces of Haweejah survives an assassination attempt (NINA)**

09 April 2013

Kirkuk / NINA /-- Commander of Sahwa forces of Haweejah district west of Kirkuk province survived from an assassination attempt survived Hawija when an improvised explosive device went off in the center of the district today.

A security source said to NINA : " Brigadier Khalaf al-Jubouri survived fro attempt of detonating a bomb targeted him in the center of the district west of Kirkuk

He pointed out that the incident injured two civilians without giving further details

- **Government approves forming committee to receive ration card tenders (alliraqnews)**

09 April 2013

Baghdad (AIN) –The Council of Ministers approved to increase the prices of wheat and barley sold to the Ministry of Trade and to form a committee to receive tenders of ration card.

The official Iraqiya satellite channel reported on Tuesday "The Council of Ministers approved to increase the prices of wheat, barley, dates and yellow maize, which are bought from farmers by the Ministry of Trade, with 10%."

"The Cabinet approved to form a committee to receive the tenders of the companies regarding the equipping of ration card items," the channel added.

## 2. IRAN

- **Iran, Burundi Keen to Expand Economic Ties**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Deputy Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade Massoud Movahedi and Burundian Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism Victoire Ndikumana in a meeting underlined the need for further expansion of economic ties between the two countries.

During the meeting in Tehran on Tuesday, Movahedi and Ndikumana explored avenues for bolstering and reinvigorating mutual cooperation in the economic field.

The Iranian deputy minister pointed to the importance that Iran attaches to broadening of ties with the African states, and said, "Iran has many potentials and capabilities in production of cement, copper and decorative stones which paves the grounds for economic cooperation between the two countries."

The Burundian minister of commerce, industry and tourism, for her part, said that her country is keen to expand economic ties with Iran.

"Iranian investors can participate in Burundi's development projects," she said.

Burundi is a country located in central Africa. Its capital is Bujumbura and it is bordered by Uganda, Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's administration has striven hard to maximize relations with the African continent during the last decade.

Iran is now an observing member of the AU and has shown an active presence in previous AU summit meetings.

The country is considered as one of the AU's strategic partners along with India, Japan, China, several South American states and Turkey, while Tehran is also believed to be prioritizing promotion of its economic and political ties with the African states.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107159510>

- **Iran's Steel Output to Hit 42mln Tons by 2015**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran is slated to boost its annual steel output capacity to 42 million tons in the near future, a senior industry official announced.

"By the end of the Fifth Five-Year Economic Development Plan (2011-2015), the country's steel production output will stand at 42 million tons," Managing-Director of Mobarakeh Steel Company Mohammad Massoud Sameenejad said on Tuesday.

"Within next 12 years, Iran's steel output will amount to 55 million tons," he added.

He noted that 40 countries in Asia, Europe, America and Africa are importers of steel from Iran.

Earlier this year, the World Steel Association (WSA) announced that "Iran is the largest steel producer in the Middle-East and North Africa.

According to WSA's report, Iran produced 14.463 million tons of crude steel in 2012, and was named the first largest producer of crude steel in the Middle-East and North Africa.

The country's main steel mills are located in Isfahan and Khuzestan provinces.



Iran has risen its steel production output by more than 9 percent, the WSA announced in January, adding that the

country is now the world's 15th steel producer.

Among 62 world major steel producers, Iran jumped two steps higher and became the world's 15th steel producer in 2012, the report said. Iran ranked above UK, Spain and Canada.

In December, Sameenejad announced too that Iran "is the biggest steel producer in the Middle East and North Africa".

"The WSA has named Iran as the biggest producer of steel in the Middle-East and North Africa in the same period," Sameenejad said at the time.

Elaborating on his company's share in Iran's steel production, he said that Mobarakeh Steel Company produced 46 percent of Iran's steel output in the first 10 months of 2012.

With a production of 1.09mln tons, Iran was the world's 16th steel producer in September.

Last year, an Iranian official announced that the production of steel in Iran has grown 5 million tons in the past two years

despite the harsh sanctions imposed by the West against the country.

"Despite the intensified sanctions during the last two years, the capacity of Iran's steel production has increased 5mln tons and we will be completely self-sufficient in the steel industry in the next three years," Vice-President of Iran's Steel Association Hamidreza Taherizadeh told FNA in July.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107159524>

- **China calls Iran nuclear talks 'constructive'**

TEHRAN, Apr 10 (MNA) – The head of the Chinese delegation present in the talks over Iran's nuclear program in Almaty, Kazakhstan, has described the talks as "constructive" and "significant."

In a statement published on China's Foreign Ministry website on Tuesday, Assistant Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu said that for the first time the two parties conducted sincere, in-depth and substantive discussions to achieve a solution on Iran's nuclear issue.

He also said that the two sides have common concerns while differences still exist.

Ma pointed out that China hopes that all relevant parties will make efforts to pave the ground for reaching to a comprehensive and long-term solution to the issue by narrowing the gaps and gradually developing a consensus.

China is committed to diplomatic talks and is ready to work with all sides to make continued and constructive efforts toward that end, he added.

During the Almaty meeting, Ma also met with representatives of the United States, Russia, Iran, and France.

Over two days of talks in Almaty on April 5 and 6, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany – known as the P5+1 – offered to ease some sanctions in return for Iranian concessions on its 20 percent uranium enrichment program, which lies at the heart of the controversy.

Iran says its nuclear activities are entirely peaceful and insists that its right to

uranium enrichment, as enumerated in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, must be recognized.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1819790>

- **6.3 magnitude quake strikes near Bushehr nuke facility in Iran**

TEHRAN, Apr 9 (MNA) – A 6.3 magnitude earthquake has struck near Bushehr in Iran, according to the US Geological Survey. The area is home to the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, which is located just 11 miles southeast of the city.

The earthquake's epicenter was 89 kilometers (55 miles) away from the plant. The depth of the quake was 10 km (6.2miles).

The Bushehr power plant is the country's only nuclear power station; it is capable to withstand quakes stronger than 6.3 magnitude, a design engineer told RIA Novosti.

People on social media reported feeling the quake in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. There were no immediate reports of damages.

Bushehr, which is home to around 160,000 people, is located on Iran's southwestern coastal region.

The US and its allies have repeatedly accused Iran of developing nuclear weapons. Tehran insists its work at Bushehr is for civilian purposes only.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1819764>

- **Accelerate the nuclear activities: Ahmadinejad**

TEHRAN, Apr 9 (MNA) – Iran President noting that some people have been seeking to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear technology said: “the nation stood and gained this technology, can anyone take it from Iran?”

Islamic Republic of Iran President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the national day of Nuclear Technology which was held at the Atomic Energy Organization this morning referring to various aspects of the use of nuclear technology and said:” today, nuclear energy and its various aspects with the efforts of doctor Abbasi and his colleagues, more than ever, have been

moving forward quickly with his planning and making it [nuclear technology] available to Iranian nation.

He pointed to the use of nuclear energy in electricity production and commissioning of the Bushehr nuclear power plant and said: “Today the applications of nuclear science are very broad, and one of the most important areas is radioisotope treatments.

The President referring to the operation of five new radioisotopes for use in the pharmaceutical said: “today radiopharmaceutical drugs in the treatment and diagnosis have very broad applications, many incurable diseases, using the radiopharmaceutical is quickly diagnosed and treated.

The US and the Western powers have been accusing Iran of seeking nuclear weapons in its nuclear program.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1819761>

- **Iran carrying out \$3.2b worth of water and power projects overseas**

TEHRAN, Apr 9 (MNA) – Iran is currently implementing 59 water and power contracts, valued at \$3.198 billion, overseas, Iranian deputy energy minister Esmail Mahsouli announced on Monday. Iran has also invested \$1.453 billion to complete 213 projects in these fields in other countries, IRNA quoted him as saying.

Some 45 Iranian companies have launched water and power projects in 40 countries, mainly in Central Asia, Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, he explained.

Iran has reached self-sufficiency in producing equipments for the domestic power electricity industry, according to officials.

The country has signed a couple of technical and engineering projects in recent years in the fields of energy in several Asian and African countries.

Iran aims to export \$4.5 billion worth of technical and engineering services in the current calendar year.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1819759>

- **Iran earns USD 12b from petrochemical exports: Official**

Iran has reaped USD 12 billion through exporting petrochemicals in the last Iranian calendar year which ended on March 20, a deputy oil minister says.

“During the last [Iranian calendar] year, despite certain problems, Iran’s petrochemical exports amounted to 16 million tons worth USD 12 billion, winning a significant share in [Iran’s] non-oil exports,” Abdolhossein Bayat said on Tuesday.



Bayat, who is also the managing director of National Petrochemical Company (NPC), added that extensive plans are under way for the country to facilitate petrochemical exports in the current calendar year.

“Last year, foreign countries increased their demand for a variety of [Iranian]

petrochemical products. This is indicative of the significance of Iran’s petrochemical industry at the international level,” the official stated.

Bayat said nearly 60 countries, mainly from South and Southeast Asia, took delivery of Iran’s petrochemical products in the last Iranian calendar year.

Iran plans to establish three new petrochemical hubs in the near future, Bayat said, adding that the projects will turn Iran into the biggest petrochemical producer in the Middle East.

Iran has significantly expanded the range and volume of its petrochemical production over the past few years, and the NPC has become the second largest producer and exporter of petrochemicals in the Middle East after Saudi Arabia.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/09/297357/petchem-products-earn-iran-12b/>

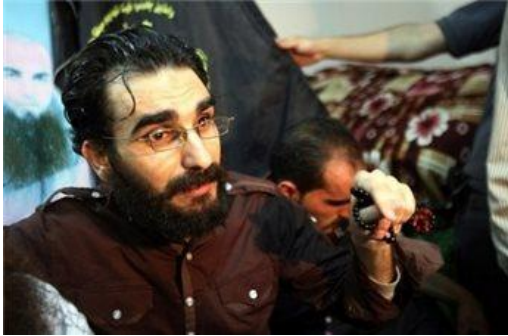
### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel re-arrests hunger striker released last year**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- Israeli forces re-arrested former hunger striker Thaer Halahla in Ramallah early Wednesday, locals said.

Israeli soldiers raided Halahla's home and a neighboring residence in Ramallah, damaging the contents of his home and confiscating his mobile phone, witnesses told Ma'an.

His wife Shirin Halahla passed out during the arrest and was taken to hospital for treatment.



Halahla, from the Hebron-district town of Kharas, held a 77-day hunger strike last year to protest his detention without charge by Israel.

He was released in June 2012 after reaching a deal with Israeli prison authorities and greeted by crowds of supporters.

Halahla's strike was part of a mass protest action by Palestinians in Israeli jails last year, which saw over 2,000 prisoners refuse food.

He relocated to Ramallah some three months ago, and was reportedly involved with activities to support Palestinian prisoners.

Thaer Halahla, 33, has been arrested eight times by Israel and has spent 6 and a half years in administrative detention, without ever being charged with a crime, Addameer says.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=584184>

- **Israel will keep sending home African migrants, Sa'ar says**

During interior minister's first tour of south Tel Aviv, residents complain of government inaction, and one calls the neighborhood a 'ghetto'

Touring South Tel Aviv Tuesday, Interior Minister Gideon Sa'ar said that the issue of African migrants is one of the most vexing problems facing Israel, and that the

government would keep working to deport illegal migrants to their nations of origin or to third countries.

Billed as his first working tour in his new post, Sa'ar walked around Neve Sha'anana, a low-income and middle-class neighborhood in south Tel Aviv that's become an epicenter for many of the tens of thousands of African migrants in Israel, to get a firsthand glimpse of the area.

"This is one of the most difficult, sensitive and charged issues Israel has had to deal with," Sa'ar noted.

One of the main controversies surrounding the migrants is that the government permitted them entry but doesn't grant them work visas, creating a situation that fosters crime and illegal activity. Residents have become increasingly vocal about their frustration with what they say is the government's inaction on the issue.

"There's no life here anymore. Everyone here lives in fear," one resident said, while others complained that their businesses have greatly suffered in recent years.

"If they are refugees, give them what they deserve. If they're infiltrators, then deport them," a resident said as the minister toured.

Orit Marom, head of advocacy at the refugee aid organization ASSAF, told Haaretz that she hopes Sa'ar understands that the government's policy "affects not only the asylum-seekers but also the marginalized populations in Israeli society, who are carrying the burden on their backs."

Mai Golan, a far right-wing activist who lives in the neighborhood, stopped Sa'ar and broke into a sob. "Yesterday was Holocaust Remembrance Day, but you must understand that we, the people who live here, live in a ghetto here," he said, according to Ynet.

"No one should live under these conditions," Sa'ar conceded at the end of his tour. He said he intends to change the situation, but that it wouldn't happen overnight.

"The government's policy is to return the infiltrators to where they came from or to other countries.... This should be done

according to the law and the values of the state,” Sa’ar said. “These are human beings.”

Human rights groups contend Israel isn’t doing enough for the asylum-seekers, including not giving them the right to work, and that it lags behind much of the West in handling cases of migrants seeking asylum. The government, however, claims that many of the migrants aren’t actually refugees but individuals seeking better economic opportunities.

One migrant from Sudan claimed that wasn’t the case. “We come from a place we can’t go back to,” he said, citing genocide and persecution in his home country, and the danger he’d face if he returned. “We seek protection.”

“We are refugees, not infiltrators!” advocacy groups chanted together with the asylum-seekers as Sa’ar walked by.

The stream of migrants into Israel, which saw tens of thousands enter the country, has slowed to a near-halt since Israel accelerated construction of a much-

upgraded fence along the Egyptian border last year.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-will-work-to-send-the-infiltrators-back-saar-says/>

- **Kerry wraps up 'very constructive' Mideast trip**

TEL AVIV, Israel (AFP) -- Top US diplomat John Kerry on Tuesday wrapped up three days of "very constructive" talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, pledging new efforts to help the West Bank economy as he sought to bring the sides back to the table.

Speaking to reporters shortly before leaving for London, a cautious Kerry said it was more important to find ways of resuming the long-frozen negotiations correctly rather than "quickly."

On another key Middle East conflict, he said he would meet members of Syria's opposition in London where he was to attend a summit of G8 foreign ministers.

His Jerusalem and Ramallah stopover was the second leg of a 10-day trip which will

also take him on his first visit to Asia since taking over as Washington's top diplomat.

During the visit, Kerry met President Mahmoud Abbas and then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in pursuit of what he called a "quiet strategy" for ending decades of mistrust between the two sides, who have not held direct talks since September 2010.

"Each of them made very serious and well-constructed suggestions with respect to what the road forward might look like," he told reporters at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport just before leaving.

But "doing it right is more important than doing it quickly," he said.

On Monday night, Kerry held "very productive" dinner talks with Netanyahu and the two met for a second time early Tuesday.

"We made progress ... and each of us agreed to do some homework" with the aim of "seeing how we can really pull all of the pieces together," he said as Netanyahu reaffirmed his commitment to return to talks.

"I'm determined not only to resume the peace process with the Palestinians, but to make a serious effort to end this conflict once and for all," the Israeli leader said, noting the key issues of security and of Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state.

Kerry also said the two had discussed "specific steps we could take to break the red tape" hampering Palestinian economic growth in a move he said would ultimately improve Israel's security.

Earlier this week, Kerry said moves to bolster the teetering Palestinian economy "could be critical to changing perceptions and realities on the ground" although he did not elaborate.

"We are going to engage in new efforts, very specific efforts, to promote economic development and remove ... bottlenecks and barriers that exist with respect to commerce in the West Bank," he said Tuesday.

It would involve "increased business expansion and private sector investment in the West Bank," he added.

During the Ramallah meeting, Abbas lobbied hard on the issue of freeing Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, saying it was a "top priority" for resuming talks.

"President Abbas made a passionate argument to me about the prisoners and I think the government of Israel has a full understanding of the potency of that issue," Kerry said.

The fate of prisoners is a flashpoint issue closely watched by the Palestinian street which often sparks mass protests that tend to turn into clashes with the Israeli army.

In parallel to Kerry's efforts, Arab states are also seeking ways of reviving peace moves.

Abbas attended a meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative committee in Doha on Monday.

First proposed in 2002 by Saudi King Abdullah, the API offers Arab diplomatic recognition of Israel in return for its complete withdrawal from all occupied

territories and a resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue.

Kerry admitted the API might not suit as a basis for negotiations "in its current format."

But "any document where you have a proposal for peace and you have a dozen Arab countries willing to make peace ... (is) an important contribution to the dialogue," he said.

Kerry's shuttle diplomacy, however, is likely to face an uphill struggle with Israel's army radio indicating Netanyahu's rightwing coalition would reject a Palestinian request for a map of the future borders and refuse any "significant goodwill gestures."

And Yediot Aharonot newspaper said Abbas flatly rejected a proposal by Kerry for a four-way meeting in Amman with the US and Jordan "unless Israel first took some sort of meaningful action."

It also looked unlikely there would be any Israeli flexibility on the flashpoint issue of settlement building, with Housing Minister Uri Ariel ruling out any construction freeze

in annexed east Jerusalem or the West Bank.

Abbas has ruled out any return to negotiations while Israel continues to build on land they want for a future state.

Meanwhile, Kerry said he would talk with Syrian opposition in London, although rebel leader Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib was not expected to attend. He refused to spell out whether Washington was mulling military aid to the rebels.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=584062>

- **Gaza salaries to be released Thursday**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) – Finance minister in the Gaza Strip government Ziad Al-Thatha announced on Tuesday that public sector employees would be paid salaries on Thursday.

Al-Thatha said in a statement that the salaries would be distributed at the post offices in the sector and Islamic Bank branches.

The payments will go to about 50,000 employees, he added.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=583930>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **UN panel: Libyan weapons spread at alarming rate**

Arms and munitions are fueling conflicts and aiding militias across Africa and the Mediterranean, including Gaza Strip and Syria

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Libyan weapons are spreading at “an alarming rate” to new territory in west Africa and the eastern Mediterranean including Syria and the Gaza Strip where they are fueling conflicts and increasing the arsenals of armed groups and terrorists, a UN panel said.

In a report to the UN Security Council circulated Tuesday, the panel said cases of illicit transfers from Libya in violation of a UN arms embargo that have been proven and are still under investigation involve more than 12 countries and include heavy and light weapons such as portable air

defense systems, explosives, mines, and small arms and ammunition.

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Since the uprising that ousted dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011, the panel said, “Libya has over the past two years become a significant and attractive source of weaponry in the region.”

It said civilians and militias remain in control of most weapons in Libya, adding that “the lack of an effective security system remains one of the primary obstacles to securing military materiel and controlling the borders.”

“In the past 12 months, the proliferation of weapons from Libya has continued at a worrying rate and has spread into new territory: West Africa, the Levant and, potentially, even the Horn of Africa,” the panel said. “Illicit flows from the country are fueling existing conflicts in Africa and the Levant and enriching the arsenals of a range of non-state actors, including terrorist groups.”

The five-member expert panel made 28 visits to 15 countries in Africa, Europe and the Middle East including 10 visits to Libya. The 94-page report details arms trafficking cases that violate the embargo imposed after the 2011 uprising began as well as efforts to track down the financial assets of individuals and companies linked to Gadhafi and his regime that are on the UN blacklist.

The panel said it also examined evidence of the delivery of weapons and ammunition from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to support the anti-Gadhafi revolutionaries during the uprising and considers that both countries violated the UN arms embargo, despite Qatar’s denial that it transferred any military materiel.

It cited a case of the transfer of ammunition to Libya involving the United Arab Emirates, Armenia, Albania and Ukraine, a separate case involving Sudan, and the reported transfer of a drone to the Libyan opposition by a Canadian company which Canadian authorities say is under investigation.

Last month, the Security Council eased sanctions on non-lethal military equipment for the Libyan government but warned that the country is awash with illegal weapons.

The panel said the increased availability of Libyan weapons has empowered a variety of “non-state actors” engaged in conflicts against national authorities, and it expressed concern that extremist armed groups, who are the best financed, are strengthening their position.

“The lack of political and security stability, the continuing absence of control over stockpiles by the national authorities and delays in disarmament and weapons collections encourage illicit trading and have generated considerable money-making opportunities for traffickers,” the panel said.

It said the post-Gadhafi outpouring of arms has helped fuel the conflict in Mali where secular Tuareg rebels took half of the north as a new homeland in 2012 only to be ousted months later by Islamist Jihadists, many linked to al-Qaida. When they suddenly headed south, France launched a military operation in January

that routed them, though remnants remain.

The most regular transfers of significant quantities of arms are going to Egypt and the Sahel, the panel said, with less regular transfers to Chad and Syria.

The panel said it received confidential information that 30 portable air defense systems from Libya were bought from traffickers in Chad, and some were transported to the capital Ndjamená.

In a new trend, it said, illicit arms are being transferred by both land and sea toward the Levant in the eastern Mediterranean.

Egypt is facing an influx of arms from Libya, which present “a threat to its internal security” because some arms are likely to remain in Sinai for use against the government by insurgents, the panel said.

But it said the destination for the majority of arms from Egypt is the Gaza Strip, which is ruled by the militant Islamic group Hamas.

Syria, where a conflict that has killed more than 70,000 people is now in its third year, is also “a prominent destination for some Libyan fighters and Libyan military materiel,” the panel said.

It said weapons transfers have been organized by a range of actors in Libya, Syria, and in countries neighboring Syria.

In the Horn of Africa, the panel said it had received evidence that various types of ammunition originating in Libya have been found in Somalia, where the Islamic extremist rebels of al-Shabab are still fighting the government.

Libya’s Prime Minister Ali Zidan told the Security Council last month that the government has controlled its borders with Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan and Egypt and is training police, the military and a national guard that will take security responsibility outside urban areas.

But despite efforts by the government to improve security, the panel said, “the proliferation of weapons from Libya continues at an alarming rate.”

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/un-panel-libyan-weapons-spread-at-alarming-rate/>

- **Sahel ulema urge release of hostages**

By Walid Ramzi in Algiers for Magharebia – 09/04/13

The League of Ulemas of the Sahel on Monday (April 8th) sent an appeal to al-Qaeda and other armed groups to release the Algerian and Western hostages held in northern Mali.

At the close of their two-day conference in Algiers, imams and clerics from Algeria, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Nigeria also called for launching serious initiatives to counter extremism.

"Extremism is a new phenomenon to Islam and it has disfigured its true image," participants in the meeting said. "Islam in its principles calls for fraternity and peace rather than violence and hegemony."

They also stressed the need to "protect diligent scholars and clerics against killing or accusations of kufr and heresy".

In the conference's closing statement, scholars sent a plea to the "deceived militants who have taken up arms... to return to the right path, lay down arms, repent and release all kidnapped hostages".

"Hostages, whether Muslims, parties to covenants, non-Muslim seekers of protection, may not be kidnapped, held, or killed and that no ransom may be demanded for their release," the statement said.

Armed groups that controlled northern Mali before the French-African intervention were holding a number of foreign hostages, including three Algerian diplomats.

The diplomats were part of seven employees kidnapped from Algeria's consulate in Gao and held by the Movement for Tawhid and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).

Three were released and then the group announced the execution of one hostage, Taher Touati.

In a statement last week, Algerian Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci said that the hostages were in a "difficult" situation based on information available to the Algerian authorities.

He added that the kidnapped individuals were dealing with the situation "with bravery and a spirit of responsibility".

"We're also dealing with the same spirit of responsibility with the issue of those hostages and we're carrying a message of friendliness and respect for all brothers in Mali," he added.

Medelci also said that this goal would "be realised by the efforts of Malians themselves" and noted that responsibility for the kidnapped Algerians "whose only concern was to serve and help Mali", was on the shoulders of Malians.

The foreign minister added that he would like to see the ulema's message reach every party that could help resolve the crisis in Mali as well as help the kidnapped Algerians.

The imams and preachers discussed the role of scholars and imams in each Sahel

country in spreading the values of peace and national unity. They also reviewed ways to activate the role of imams in countering the growth of terrorism.

League head Abdou Daouda Boureima called on Algerian youth to preserve national unity and defend Algeria's interests against dangers.

"It's the duty of scholars to call for peace and unity and renounce extremism," he said. "Experience has shown that no state can make progress in chaos."

"Weapons and military solutions are not always the answer. There are intellectual weapons related to sensitising people about religion in a civilised way in Mali and to showing them how to abide by unity," the league's head added.

The league also announced that a delegation would be sent to Mali to deliver lectures, organise preaching events in Malian universities and meet with young people to urge them to engage in peace, development and national unity efforts and to renounce terrorism and extremism.

For his part, Sheikh Alpha Taha Conté, head of the Malian delegation, lauded the "worthy" topic of this conference in view of the current situation in his country.

Conté also expressed his gratitude to Algeria for its support for Mali on all levels, especially humanitarian and logistical levels, at difficult times of his country's history.

[http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/04/09/feature-01](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/04/09/feature-01)

- **Al-Zawahiri calls Maghreb youth to jihad**

By Jemal Oumar in Nouakchott for Magharebia – 09/04/13

The international military coalition in Mali is decimating al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its affiliates in northern Mali. The organisation has incurred huge losses, both human and logistical.

The latest attempt to motivate the beleaguered Mali terrorists came late Saturday (April 6th) from the head of al-Qaeda central. In his first online message since last fall, Ayman al-Zawahiri delivered

what he described as a call to support the umma.

He added that France would be defeated in its war against terrorists in the Ifoghas Mountains at the hands of "Maghreb youth".

"I call upon our Muslim nation in Mali to hold and be patient, and hopefully, inflict a new defeat to the global crusade," al-Zawahiri said in the audio message released by As-Sahab Foundation for Islamic Media Publication.

The online message is designed to "encourage al-Qaeda leaders and the elements who are still with them in the mountains, as well as those who have been dispersed in the desert and are hiding as silent cells", analyst Abdelhamid al-Ansari said.

"The appearance of al-Zawahiri at this particular time is like the tranquiliser administered to the patient at a critical stage of illness; it may tranquilise but will never cure," he added.

Al-Qaeda is starting to realise "the difficult situation of the Maghreb branch", al-Ansari noted.

"This is the only available option for the parent organisation, which almost collapsed following the death of bin Laden and the liquidation of its top leaders."

According to security analyst Abdallah Ould Omar, al-Zawahiri is exploiting the deteriorating security situation in Tunisia and Libya. He is also exploiting the unemployment issue in Maghreb countries, Ould Omar said.

"I don't think that this call will resonate with Maghreb youth, who are moving now towards employment opportunities," he added.

"This is for a simple reason: the young people who are demonstrating today are looking forward to developing their countries economically, contrary to what Ayman al-Zawahiri, other proponents of radical ideology and even radical youths, such as Tunisia's salafists, wish," the analyst stated.

Unemployment and the failure of the current political experience "are behind much of their radical beliefs", Ould Omar said. Such beliefs may disappear, however, when the circumstances that created them are gone, he said.

The conflict in northern Mali is unlikely to turn North Africa into another Arabian peninsula, he said, despite the fact that this may be a goal for al-Qaeda central.

Sid Ahmed Ould Tfeil, an analyst and expert in Salafist groups' ideology, said that that al-Zawahiri's audio recording "would encourage the mujahideen to travel to Mali through Somalia, Nigeria and Niger to open a new front there".

"But this front is unlikely to realise any success," he said. "It will instead be a grave for the mujahideen."

[http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/04/09/feature-03](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/04/09/feature-03)

- **Zidan vows security improvements**

By Essam Mohamed in Tripoli for Magharebia – 09/04/13

Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan on Monday (April 8th) discussed the precarious security situation in the country.

The Tripoli press event came the same day that his chief of staff, Ali Ghatus, was freed after a week in the hands of kidnapers.

"There are many cases of kidnappings; some have been freed while others are still unresolved. The construction of the security agencies requires time and organisation, and we must be patient," Zidan said.

The premier told reporters that joint security forces had made progress on the ground but "the state does not have the sufficient number of official individuals to fill the void".

He said that the state was currently weak and this was not a defect, but a reality. "Yet we are moving from weakness to strength and from chaos to order," Zidan added.

"The readiness of our troops is still at an early stage and we are trying to build at

least a small amount of power so the military can exercise its functions with a certain degree of efficiency," the prime minister explained.

"We are not in full control of the security scene, and this is not a defect, but we are moving from chaos to order," Zidan said.

As for illegal prisons operated by individual militias, Zidan said that revolutionaries were "holding prisoners due to an extraordinary phase. However the revolution is over and we should mitigate its complications."

"We are doing our duty as a government by annexing prisons, as this benefits the national safety of Libya," he added. "If we do not do this, we will be remiss, and I fear the homeland will crumble as a result."

The attacks on mausoleums and Sufi shrines were also addressed by the head of government.

"This is the culture of the people and the act is an aggression, even if their removal is necessary," he said. "The state and concerned parties should deal with them

without inconveniencing any person or causing collateral damage."

"A wise man does not do that, whether right or not. These acts are one of the functions of the state," he added.

He explained that the interior ministry does not give militias or groups orders to arrest people.

"This task belongs to the attorney general, and we inform the public prosecutor and the interior ministry but we don't give orders to the militia. It happens that militias commit crimes and then try to hide them," the premier said. "This is happening all the time but we will develop security services in order to eliminate this phenomenon."

As for the pipeline blast in Ajdabiya, Zidan said that oil was flowing again and investigations were under way.

Regarding the halting of Libya's official channel as well as the stopping of live broadcasts by the second national channel, Zidan said, "Groups took control of the channels (official and national) but

this is due to the proliferation of weapons."

"Many are talking about issues of weapons and the fragility of the security situation, and we are trying to build a state and its institutions," he added.

[http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/04/09/feature-04](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/04/09/feature-04)

- **Ahmed Shafiq 'not welcome' in Egypt opposition bloc: NSF leaders**

Leaders of opposition National Salvation Front (NSF) dismiss notion of joining forces with Mubarak-era PM Ahmed Shafiq upon latter's anticipated return to Egypt's chaotic political scene

Hussein Abdel-Ghani, spokesman for Egypt's National Salvation Front (NSF) opposition umbrella group, denied recent speculation that the NSF planned to merge with Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak-era minister and presidential runner-up, and the latter's as-yet-unlicensed Egyptian Patriotic Movement Party.

"We will not join forces with a Mubarak-appointed prime minister," Abdel-Ghani said in statements to the ONA news

agency. "Besides, we haven't received any offers from anyone to join the NSF anytime soon."

He added that the NSF stood opposed to both remnants of the Mubarak regime and what he describes as "the fascism and dictatorship of the Muslim Brotherhood."

On Monday, Shafiq told Turkish news agency Anadolu that he planned to "soon" return to Egypt, where he intended to throw in his lot with the NSF.

Shafiq has been based in the UAE since he lost to Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi in Egypt's first post-Mubarak presidential poll last summer.

George Ishak, leading NSF member and liberal Constitution Party co-founder, told independent Egyptian daily Al-Watan on Monday that Shafiq was "not welcome" in the NSF.

"I don't expect Shafiq to join the NSF because he's seen as a remnant of the Mubarak regime, and the NSF represents the revolution," Ishak said.

On Tuesday, the supreme committee of Shafiq's Egyptian Patriotic Movement Party issued a statement denouncing the comments by NSF figures, including Ishak and Abdel-Ghani.

'With all due respect to NSF leaders, the refusal of Ahmed Shafiq's offer to unite opposition forces against the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrates enormous political naiveté, and is actually an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood's strategy of excluding large swathes of honourable citizens – just like what happened in Egypt's last parliamentary elections," the Patriotic Movement statement asserted.

The party went on to point out that "many of the NSF's current member-parties already include remnants of the former Mubarak regime."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/68866/Egypt/Politics-/Ahmed-Shafiq-not-welcome-in-Egypt-opposition-bloc.aspx>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

### • Bahrain cabinet blacklists Hezbollah as terror group

Move endorses parliamentary measure last month, now needs Foreign Ministry approval

Bahrain's cabinet on Tuesday approved a measure passed by parliament last month declaring Lebanese-based Hezbollah a terrorist organization and called on the country's Foreign Ministry to follow suit, Al Arabiya reported.

Whereas Bahrain's government and royal family are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims, the Bahraini population is majority Shi'ite, like Iran and its proxy Hezbollah.

A Sunni member of the Independent party in Bahrain's 40-member lower house of parliament told CNN Arabic that the resolution was sectarian, "because Hezbollah is a Shi'ite party that represents the opposition against Israel and it represents all of the facets of opposition in Beirut."

A former MP said the resolution came as a result of the 18-seat Shi'ite Wafaq party's

resignation from parliament last year, adding that the Bahraini government suspects Hezbollah of spurring political unrest that has wracked the country for the past two years, according to CNN Arabic.

The Wafaq party resigned from parliament following the deaths of two anti-government protesters in February 2012.

US and Israeli officials for months have been pressing the European Union to list Hezbollah as a terrorist group. Israel and Bulgaria accused Hezbollah of carrying out a terrorist attack against a busload of Israeli tourists at the Black Sea resort town of Burgas last summer, killing five Israelis and their local driver, and injuring dozens. US President Barack Obama repeated the call last week during an address to Israeli students during his visit last week.

“When I think about Israel’s security, I think about five Israelis who boarded a bus in Bulgaria, who were blown up because of where they came from; robbed of the ability to live and love and raise families,” Obama told a convention center in Jerusalem packed with university

students. “That’s why every country that values justice should call Hezbollah what it truly is: a terrorist organization.”

Hezbollah receives military training, financial support and weapons from Iran. According to the Middle East Forum, a conservative American think tank, the US estimates that Iran provides the Shi’ite terror organization with \$60-100 million annually. Hezbollah is also a key ally to embattled Syrian President Bashar Assad, and its fighters have joined in the Syrian civil war on Damascus’s behalf in the past two years.

The group has been accused of several major terror attacks in the past 20 years, including the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, that killed 85 people.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/bahrain-cabinet-blacklists-hezbollah-as-terror-group/>

- **Miqati willing to assist formation of new cabinet**

Former Prime Minister Najib Miqati, whose cabinet resigned in March, said that he vowed during his meeting with

PM-designate Tammam Salam that he would do anything to facilitate his mission to form a new cabinet.

However, during an interview with Al-Joumhouria newspaper, Miqati also voiced doubt over Salam's capability to form an unbiased cabinet.

"How will he be able to form an unbiased cabinet when the initial agreement was to form a cabinet that reflects national consensus?" Miqati asked.

On Saturday, Tammam Salam became Lebanon's premier-designate after receiving 124 votes in the two-day parliamentary consultations as Lebanon's parties started looking ahead to government formation.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/miqati-willing-to-assist-formation-of-new-cabinet>

- **Lebanese MPs remarks focus on electoral deadlines controversy**

The approaching deadline for candidature applications for the upcoming parliamentary elections was the focus of several Lebanese lawmakers' remarks.

March 14 MP Boutros Harb, who on Tuesday drafted a proposal for the suspension of the applications' deadlines, said in remarks published by An-Nahar newspaper on Wednesday that the intention behind the proposal was to cancel the applications' deadline "without abolishing the current law and in consequence [cancelling] the elections."

"We agree on extending the term of the parliament for technical reasons for not more than two to three months. However, if there is an intention for removing the law and cancelling the elections, we will not accept it."

Another March 14 MP, Marwan Hamadeh, commented on Harb's proposal, saying that it "did not tackle the period after May 19 [when the suspension period ends] if no agreement was reached on a new electoral law."

Hamadeh's remarks that were published by Al-Liwaa newspaper were echoed by Future bloc MP Khaled al-Daher who lashed out at the March 8 forces in an interview with Free Lebanon radio station, accusing them of "wanting to suspend the

work based on the current 1960 law without implementing an alternative law.”

‘Running the elections according to the 1960 law is far better than the extension [of the parliament’s term], political vacuum and heading toward the unknown.”

A general session is scheduled to take place in parliament on Wednesday as the proposed extension to the deadline for candidate filing for the upcoming elections under the auspices of the 1960 law came into question Tuesday in discussions held by the Parliament Bureau Committee.

Lebanon’s president and premier in March signed a decree to hold the elections on June 9, which would see the vote held under the auspices of the 1960 law if no new law is adopted.

Politicians have until April 10 to register their candidacy for the elections, but Interior Minister Marwan Charbel wants to move the election from June 9 to June 16, which would delay the candidate filing date to April 17.

Only 25 candidates have registered for the elections thus far.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonne/ws/lebanese-mps-remarks-focus-on-electoral-deadlines-controversy>

- **Parties divided over new government**

While PM-designate Tammam Salam has publicly called for a “national interest cabinet,” rival politicians spoke out for different types of governments

PM-designate Tammam Salam is set Wednesday to wrap up his round of consultations with the country’s parties on a new government amid political differences over the shape and nature of the cabinet.

While Salam has publicly called for a “national interest cabinet,” rival politicians spoke out for different types of governments as well as differing over the distribution of portfolios and the cabinet’s new ministerial statement.

Sources told NOW on Tuesday that PM-designate Tammam Salam has agreed to

form a neutral government where there will be a rotation of ministerial portfolios.

The source said that one of the major politicians that met with Salam on the first day of consultations expressed his wish to see a neutral cabinet formed, one that would be made up of non-candidates for the parliamentary elections. Salam purportedly gave his approval.

Following his meeting with Salam, Hezbollah's Loyalty to the Resistance bloc leader MP Mohammad Raad called for a political cabinet that represents all parties proportionally to their size in the parliament.

March 8's Christian Marada Movement, meanwhile, advocated for a government that represents all parties and maintains the formula of the unity of the Lebanese people, army and Resistance in its ministerial statement, which would maintain the status of Hezbollah's arms.

However, LF MP Elie Keyrouz said after consultations with Salam that allowing Hezbollah to maintain its arsenal "is not [present] in the constitution."

"The decision to make both war and peace must be placed in the hands of the Lebanese state."

Instead the LF deputy called for the cabinet's new ministerial statement to adhere to the Baabda Declaration, which calls for Lebanon's dissociation from the conflict in Syria.

Keyrouz also reiterated his party's demand for the new cabinet to be a technocratic one, a request fellow Christian March 14 party the Kataeb voiced some support to.

"If the government is technocratic, the Kataeb Party has many non-political specialists," Kataeb MP Elie Marouni said on Tuesday after a party delegation met with Salam.

However, the Kataeb repeated its call for a political cabinet.

Meanwhile, Future bloc leader MP Fouad Siniora called on Salam to change the distribution of ministerial portfolios in the new cabinet.

"The rotation of portfolios is [necessary] based on the principle of democracy,"

Siniora said following his meeting with Salam on Tuesday.

The Future official's comment was made more specific when he requested that the "rotation start from the Finance Ministry."

Siniora went on to express his wish that a government be formed "as soon as possible" in order to hold the parliamentary elections on time.

Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun fired back at Siniora's demand for the Finance Ministry, saying, "We must put some capital in the [ministry] so it will not be broke when they get it back."

He continued retorting to the Future official's comments by claiming it was "enough" for his bloc to be in charge of the Telecommunications Ministry.

"We also took [charge of] the Ministry of Energy and Water which was a mess, but has become the best ministry," Aoun added.

The FPM chief requested that the new government be a national reconciliation

one, but added that his party "refuses to put obstacles in Salam's way."

Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumblatt also told Salam that he "had no preconditions" to set for the government formation process and would do everything to facilitate the premier-designate's "tasks in all fields."

Salam on Tuesday started his two-day consultations on a new government with Lebanon's political blocs in Downtown Beirut.

The Sunni politician was nominated as PM-designate on April 6 with a nearly unanimous count of 124 votes.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/parties-divided-over-new-government>

## 6. SYRIA

### • Iraq's Branch of Al Qaeda Merges With Syria Jihadists

By HANIA MOURTADA and RICK GLADSTONE

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Iraq's branch of Al Qaeda said Tuesday that it had merged

with the Nusra Front, a group of jihadists fighting to topple President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, in a marriage that appeared to strengthen the role of Islamic militants in the Syrian insurgency and further complicate Western assistance efforts.

The United States has already blacklisted the Nusra Front over evidence of its links with the Islamic State of Iraq, the Qaeda branch. But the news of the merger, made by the branch's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in an audio statement posted on jihadist Web sites, was the first time he had announced that they were a single organization.

"The time has come for us to announce to the people of the Levant and to the whole world that Al Nusra Front is merely an extension of the Islamic State of Iraq and a part of it," Mr. Baghdadi said. He also said the combined group would be called the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and would dedicate half its budget to the Syrian insurgency.

In a warning to other Syrian fighters who want Mr. Assad to go but do not share Mr. Baghdadi's views, he said, "Don't make

democracy a price for those thousands among you who have been killed."

The warning was quickly rejected by the Free Syrian Army, the rebels' main fighting organization, which has sought to distance itself from the jihadist groups. "No one has the right to impose any form of state on Syrians," said Louay Mekdad, a spokesman for the Free Syrian Army. "Syrians will go to the polls to choose their leaders and form their own state."

Mr. Baghdadi's announcement came as a backlash appeared to be spreading in Syria over the indiscriminate civilian killings believed to be carried out by jihadist groups, including the Nusra Front, aimed at further weakening Mr. Assad's power in the two-year-old conflict. These groups have fearsome fighters but do not take orders from the Free Syrian Army, which has criticized attacks on civilians including a recent spree of deadly car bombings.

The jihadist merger also comes as Secretary of State John Kerry hinted during a trip to the Middle East and Europe that the United States was preparing to step up its assistance to the Syrian rebel cause.

While the United States and other Western nations have backed the Free Syrian Army and contributed nonlethal aid to its combatants, American officials have been reluctant to supply weapons, particularly because of concerns that they could fall into the hands of the Nusra Front or affiliates loyal to Al Qaeda. Differences in the degree of Western commitment to the insurgency have been a source of frustration to the Syrian political opposition.

The opposition movement also has struggled with its own divisions over rebel behavior. On Tuesday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an anti-Assad group based in Britain, accused a rogue insurgent battalion operating in Aleppo of arresting, torturing and extorting dozens of residents, mostly between the ages of 18 and 20.

“The Syrian Observatory demands that this battalion stop engaging in these practices immediately, as such behavior does not represent the values of the revolution,” said the group, whose information network inside Syria has emerged as a major source of insurgency

news. “On the contrary, they are an extension of the oppressive and brutal methods practiced by the Syrian security apparatus.”

In Geneva, the United Nations refugee agency said Tuesday that the pace at which families are fleeing the destruction in Syria threatens to double or even triple the number of total refugees seeking shelter in neighboring countries by the end of the year. The agency also renewed an urgent appeal for money to deal with the crisis.

“The numbers look horrendous,” Panos Moutzsis, the refugee agency’s regional coordinator for Syrian refugees, told reporters.

A year ago, the number of Syrian refugees stood at 30,000, and the figure now exceeds 1.3 million, he said. With 200,000 people fleeing across Syria’s borders every month and no political solution in sight, humanitarian agencies fear that they will be trying to support up to three million refugees by the end of the year, Mr. Moutzsis said.

*\*Hania Mourtada reported from Beirut, and Rick Gladstone from New York. Nick Cumming-Bruce contributed reporting from Geneva.*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/10/world/middleeast/Iraq-and-Syria-jihadists-combine.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>

- **Syria crisis: G8 foreign ministers seek 'breakthrough' at London meeting - live updates**

Live• UK and France to push for lifting of arms embargo

- Kerry says US considering 'stepped-up' support for rebels
- UN running out of funds to help Syrian refugees

• The UK foreign secretary, William Hague, says he will be pressing "the urgent need for a political and diplomatic breakthrough on Syria" at today's meeting of G8 foreign ministers in London. He told BBC One's Breakfast programme "top of the agenda will be dealing with Syria". France and Britain are expected once again to press the case for amending or lifting an arms embargo on Syria to support the rebels. But other G8 countries such as Russia and Germany have opposed

the move, fearing it could lead to weapons falling into the hands of Islamist militants and fuel a regional conflict. The US secretary of state John Kerry said yesterday that the Obama administration was weighing "stepped-up" efforts to support the rebel fighters, and that such proposals had been "front and centre" in administration discussions over the past week. Leaders of the Syrian National Coalition will be present on the sidelines of the G8 and hold talks with those foreign ministers willing to meet them.

- The Syrian stock market is "paralysed" and poultry and meat prices have reached "insane" levels, blogger Juan Cole writes, citing news reports within Syria. Al-Iqtisadi reported that the Damascus Chamber of Commerce called for the intervention of the Central Bank of Syria to "restore citizens' faith in the [stock] market".

- The United Nations is only days away from cutting back basic aid programs to over 400,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon because of a lack of funding, the Daily Star Lebanon reports. It said officials from the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, are planning for the first measures of a scaled-back aid plan to go into effect in the next 10 days.

• A video currently circulating on the internet, purporting to show the explosion on 21 March that killed Sheikh Muhammad al-Bouti in a Damascus mosque "raises many questions", the BBC's Jim Muir writes. Muir says it is difficult to see how the bomb could have killed around 50 other people, as claimed by state media, and that Bouti appears to be only dazed after the explosion but then a man approaches him "does something to him, lays him to the side, and moves away... What is clear is that as that man moves away, the sheikh is dead or dying." You can watch the video (WARNING: graphic) here.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/10/syria-crisis-g8-foreign-ministers-see-breakthrough-london-meeting>

• **Before Meeting Syrian Opposition, Kerry Says U.S. Is Considering More Support**

By MICHAEL R. GORDON and ISABEL KERSHNER

LONDON — On the eve of a meeting with the Syrian opposition, Secretary of State John Kerry said Tuesday that the Obama

administration was weighing “stepped-up” efforts to support the rebel fighters, and that such proposals had been “front and center” in administration discussions over the past week.

Mr. Kerry said that the Obama administration still favored a diplomatic solution in which President Bashar al-Assad would hand over power to a transitional government, but that additional pressure on the Syrian leader was needed.

“The problem is you can’t get there if President Assad is unwilling to decide that he should transfer that authority, and that’s the current situation,” Mr. Kerry said. “So we are left with no choice but to try to find ways to get him to think differently about what lies in the future.”

Mr. Kerry made the remarks at a news conference at Ben-Gurion International Airport in Israel as he completed three days of meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials.

Britain, the third stop on Mr. Kerry’s six-nation trip, is hosting a meeting of foreign ministers from the Group of 8 advanced

industrial nations, who are expected to discuss the Syrian war and Iran's nuclear program, among other issues.

William Hague, the British foreign secretary, is holding a lunch meeting Wednesday with representatives of the Syrian opposition, including Ghassan Hitto, a Syrian-born naturalized American citizen who was recently picked by the opposition coalition to serve as prime minister of an interim government.

Moaz al-Khatib, the president of the opposition coalition, who recently tendered his resignation only to have it rejected, is not expected to attend, a senior State Department official said.

Britain has been among the most forceful advocates of increased support to the armed Syrian opposition and has already committed to providing nonlethal support like body armor and communications equipment.

The Obama administration has not provided such extensive support to the rebels. At a conference in Rome in late February, Mr. Kerry said the United States would be providing food rations and

medical supplies to the Free Syrian Army, as the armed Syrian opposition is known. That assistance has yet to be delivered, but is expected to be provided soon.

Mr. Kerry's remarks on Tuesday suggested that the United States was actively discussing the expansion of nonlethal support.

A senior American official in Washington, who asked not to be identified because he was discussing internal deliberations, confirmed that the Obama administration was moving to increase the nonlethal support. But the official said the details of what might be provided had yet to be decided.

Touching on another regional issue of concern, Mr. Kerry said the administration had been hoping for a more responsive proposal from Iran on its nuclear program in the last round of talks between Iran and six world powers in Almaty, Kazakhstan, last week.

He said that an announcement by Iran on Tuesday that it was starting production at two uranium mines and at a plant that makes yellowcake, a semirefined form of

uranium, was provocative and raised questions, and that the negotiations could not be open-ended.

The focus of Mr. Kerry's trip to Israel and the West Bank was on finding a way to revive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. To improve the atmosphere for peace talks, Mr. Kerry said he had proposed an initiative to promote economic development in the West Bank, which would "begin to take hold immediately."

While details of the plan are to be made public next week, he said it would combine investment by American corporations with efforts by American government agencies like the Export-Import Bank, the Agency for International Development and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation.

Mr. Kerry emphasized that business expansion in the West Bank was not a substitute for the political track, but was meant to enhance it.

He said his meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders had been productive. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel said on Tuesday that he was

"determined to not only resume the peace process with the Palestinians, but to make a serious effort to end this conflict once and for all."

But these were talks about how to resume talks after a hiatus of years, and a breakthrough did not appear to be imminent.

"I think we are at the pre-breakthrough stage," a senior Israeli official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the issue publicly.

Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, left on Monday for Doha, Qatar, to attend a meeting of the Arab League's Middle East peace follow-up committee. The league is sending a delegation of Arab foreign ministers to Washington this month to discuss the peace process with American officials.

There has been talk of an effort to revive the Arab Peace Initiative, a plan the Arab League first adopted in 2002. It called for "full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967," including the Golan Heights, captured

from Syria, and for Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in return for establishment of normal relations between Israel and the Arab countries.

It also called for a "just solution" to the Palestinian refugee problem in accordance with Resolution 194 of the United Nations General Assembly, on which the Palestinians base their demand for a right of return, a demand rejected by Israel.

There have been suggestions that some clauses of the plan should be modified to make it more palatable to Israel.

The Israeli official said of the Arab Peace Initiative: "It is a step forward in the right direction. If it is presented as 'take it or leave it,' like a diktat, then obviously Israel has problems with that. But if it is used as a vehicle for strengthening the peace process, that could be very positive."

Mr. Kerry said that as a free-standing plan, the Arab Peace Initiative constituted an "important contribution to the overall dialogue."

*\*Michael R. Gordon reported from London, and Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem.*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/10/world/middleeast/kerry-talks-up-palestinian-economic-development.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&r=0>

- **UN official raises alarm over Syrian refugees in Lebanon**

United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon Derek Plumbly raised the alarm over the high number of Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon.

"The Syrian refugees who have reached more than 408,000 according to the registers of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, are a real big burden on Lebanon," Plumbly was quoted as saying by the National News Agency on Wednesday during the inauguration of a UNHCR office in South Lebanon.

"The number of refugees is increasing by the day while resources are limited and this is a fact."

“But we are helping as much as possible,” he added.

Lebanon is facing difficulties dealing with the increasingly high number of refugees fleeing Syria’s violent uprising against President Bashar al-Assad’s regime, which has killed more than 70,000 people since its outbreak in March 2011.

The official figures put the number of refugees living in makeshift camps in Lebanon at around 400,000 while other unofficial reports claim that about 1 million have already sought refuge in Lebanon.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/un-official-raises-alarm-over-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon>

- **Qaeda in Iraq Syria role boast could backfire, analysts say**

Al-Qaeda in Iraq's public boasting of its role in spawning and supervising Syria's Al-Nusra Front could backfire on the jihadist rebel group's support on the ground, analysts say.

The announcement, in an audio message posted on jihadist forums, confirmed

widespread suspicions of links between the two organizations, both of which are blacklisted as terror groups by Washington.

But the move could undermine support for Al-Nusra Front, or Jabhat al-Nusra in Arabic, which has been credited with playing a major role in rebel gains against forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, analysts told AFP.

"This could potentially hurt Jabhat al-Nusra within the country, which would then affect the insurgency on some level," Aaron Zelin of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy told AFP.

"Jabhat al-Nusra has got a really good reputation in the country, and the name Al-Qaeda is discredited throughout most of the Muslim world at this point."

"Do people not remember what the guys in Iraq did five years ago?" he asked, referring to the group's reputation for brutality to civilians during the height of Iraq's bloody sectarian conflict.

Both groups have achieved notoriety for their use of suicide attacks and car bombs,

as opposed to the more conventional warfare of other insurgent factions in Iraq and Syria.

But Al-Nusra had appeared to have learned from mistakes made by Al-Qaeda in Iraq, in particular by insisting that its targets were military or part of the regime apparatus, even though they have often caused civilian casualties.

Islamism specialist Cole Bunzel said that the open admission that Al-Nusra was not a Syrian-born organization but a creation of Al-Qaeda in Iraq appeared to be a strategic blunder.

"It emphasizes the fact that Jabhat al-Nusra is a foreign entity, and it is Al-Qaeda," said Bunzel, a PhD candidate at Princeton University.

"No longer can Jabhat al-Nusra, or what it's now called, gloss that over, or deny that connection.

"Strategically, it doesn't seem to make a lot of sense, but at the end of the day, Jabhat al-Nusra is what it is," said Bunzel, who wrote a detailed post analyzing the announcement for the Jihadica blog.

"What it is, is Al-Qaeda."

According to Donald Holbrook of St. Andrews University's Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, Al-Qaeda believes it has "gone into a quagmire in Iraq, largely of their own creation."

And so, with the latest announcement, "they're trying to seem relevant, they're trying to seem in control, they're trying to engage in a jihad which is seen as legitimate, which has at least a semblance of some sort of popular support."

While the announcement has largely been met with support on jihadist Internet forums, there has been some criticism of the decision to openly link the two groups.

In a Facebook post shortly after the announcement, Abu Baseer al-Tartusi, a well-respected adviser to the Syrian Islamic Front, a militant group that, though not as radical as Al-Nusra is still regarded as hardline, said it could lead to infighting among rebel groups and give pro-Assad forces a rallying cry.

"The biggest losers from this announcement are the oppressed and violated Syrian people, and their blessed, orphaned revolution," he wrote.

The linking of Al-Qaeda in Iraq to Al-Nusra could also give backing to repeated warnings by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of the dangers of a spillover of violence across the two countries' 375-mile border.

Iraqi political analyst Ihsan al-Shammari said that while Maliki was unlikely to change policy towards Syria, the announcement would help him "convince international and domestic opinion, to understand there will be repercussions within Iraq."

"It will strengthen his argument about the fears he has described," Shammari said.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala/testnews/qaeda-in-iraq-syria-role-boast-could-backfire-analysts-say>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

### • Bahrain assailants hurl petrol bombs at ministry

Witnesses said police stormed areas of Manama at dawn and made some arrests

Dubai: Unknown assailants have hurled petrol bombs at Bahrain's foreign ministry in the first attack on a government building in more than two years of unrest, the interior ministry said on Tuesday.

"A group of terrorists attempted to attack the Dar Al Hukumah compound with petrol bombs," the ministry said on its Twitter account, adding that guards repelled them and that there was no damage caused in the late Monday attack.

The compound is the old headquarters of the government but it is now used by the foreign ministry and as administrative offices.

Pictures posted on Twitter microblogging site show masked men throwing petrol bombs at the complex in the centre of the capital of the Gulf kingdom.

Witnesses said police stormed areas of Manama at dawn and made some arrests.

According to the International Federation for Human Rights, a total of 80 people have been killed in Bahrain since violence erupted on February 14, 2011, when Shiite-led demonstrations were held demanding democratic changes.

Protests have continued in villages despite a crackdown in March 2011. Demonstrating youths frequently use petrol bombs against security forces.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-assailants-hurl-petrol-bombs-at-ministry-1.1168392>

- **US, allies plan big Gulf Naval drill next month**

It is likely to be seen as counter to any Iran threat

Dubai: The United States and its allies will stage a naval exercise in the Gulf in May to practise minesweeping and escorting ships, the US Navy said on Monday, a manoeuvre likely to be seen in the region as guarding against a potential threat from Iran.

Representatives from more than 30 nations will gather in Bahrain for the International Mine Countermeasures Exercise (IMCMEX) 13 from May 6-30, eight months after they staged a previous edition of the exercises at a time when Israel and Iran were trading threats of war.

In early 2012 Iran repeatedly threatened to block the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow exit route through which most of the Gulf's oil and gas is exported, amid heightened tension with the West over Tehran's disputed nuclear development programme.

But such threats have faded over the last few months, as world powers have tried to resolve their differences with Tehran through negotiations.

Piracy remains a threat to shipping in the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea, but successful attacks also have fallen thanks to an international naval protection force and armed security guards now commonly employed on at-risk voyages.

“This multidisciplinary defence exercise is focused on maritime security for commerce and trade from the port of origin to the port of arrival,” Commodore Simon Ancona, deputy commander of the Combined Maritime Forces, said in a statement.

In addition to minesweeping and flying drones, this year’s event will include escorting ships and protecting offshore terminals that oil and gas exporters in the Gulf rely on.

US Commander Jason Salata told Reuters the exercises in May would be limited to the Gulf and Gulf of Oman and focus on protecting critical infrastructure such as offshore oil assets.

There were no exercises planned in the Strait of Hormuz itself because it could be disruptive to normal shipping through the narrow shipping lanes. “It will be simulating convoy type situations but not in the Strait itself,” Salata said.

Last September’s exercises included Britain and France, some unnamed Middle Eastern states, and countries from as far apart as Estonia and New Zealand. The

names of the countries taking part in the exercises this May have not been announced.

In a separate development, a US fighter jet crashed into the North Arabian Sea after an engine failure on Monday but both crew were recovered unharmed, the US Navy said.

The F/A-18F Super Hornet was flying near the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier when a mechanical failure forced the crew to eject. The exact location of the crash was not given but the Northern Arabian Sea bordered by Pakistan to the north and Oman to the west.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/us-allies-plan-big-gulf-naval-drill-next-month-1.1168219>

- **US plans new laser weapon for Gulf**

Experimental cannon will be placed on naval boats targeted at Iranian attack boats

Washington: The US Navy is preparing to deploy an experimental laser weapon to the Gulf, where it could be used to deter

Iran from using small boats to attack American warships.

Admiral Jonathan Greenert, the US chief of naval operations, on Monday unveiled plans to place the laser cannon aboard a US ship in the Gulf, where swarms of Iranian attack boats have posed a worrisome challenge for the American military.

The \$40 million (Dh146.88 million) system will be installed aboard the USS Ponce, an amphibious assault ship used in the Gulf for mine clearance and humanitarian operations.

While still in development, the laser system has succeeded in destroying all 12 of its drone and small boat targets in testing, officials said. To bolster its capabilities, the Navy released a video of the laser weapon setting an aerial drone aflame and forcing it to crash into the water.

“It’s kind of amazing,” Adm. Greenert said in announcing the deployment plans at a convention outside Washington, D.C.

The Laser Weapon System uses directed energy to disable sensors or burn holes through a plane or ship. Because of its limited range, the weapon won’t be able to target incoming missiles or jets, but it could be effective in combating Iranian fast boats and any drones it is developing, officials said.

Military officials said the Gulf was also an important testing ground because of its harsh physical environment.

“If it can stand up to the weather and rugged nature it can do it anywhere,” said one Navy official.

The US military is wary of the threat posed by small attack boats. In 2000, a small boat filled with explosives hit the USS Cole in Yemen, killing 17 sailors.

Last year, a US Navy supply ship opened fire on what was described as a fast-approaching boat off the United Arab Emirates coast. That craft turned out to be an Indian fishing boat, and the shooting killed an Indian fisherman. On Monday, the US Navy cleared the sailors of any wrongdoing in the incident and said that

they had acted properly when they opened fire.

<http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/us-plans-new-laser-weapon-for-gulf-1.1168391>

- **Saudi proposes plan to dig Strait of Hormuz bypass**

Proposed "Arab canal" would put an end to threats to seal off the strategic waterway

Manama: A Saudi national has proposed digging a canal that would allow ships and tankers to bypass the Strait of Hormuz.

The canal, with a length of between 60 and 100 kilometres, would link the Arabian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and would end reliance on the Strait of Hormuz, said Sami Al Muhaidab.

According to reports, an average of 14 tankers per day passed out of the Arabian Gulf through the Strait in 2011, carrying 17 million barrels of crude oil, representing 35 per cent of the world's seaborne oil shipments and 20 per cent of oil traded worldwide.

However, tension, mainly between Iran and the US, has often caused Tehran to threaten that it would seal off the Strait of Hormuz.

Article continues below

“As a Gulf national, I am keen on the interests and stability of the Arabian Gulf countries,” Sami said. “I consider this proposal to have a purely Arab canal as a solution to the long-standing issue resulting from the Iranian threats to shut down the Strait of Hormuz and stifle maritime activities whenever there is tension between Tehran and world military powers,” he said, quoted by Saudi daily Al Riyadh.

All Arab Gulf countries should be involved in the mega-project that would allow them to bypass the Strait of Hormuz, the only existing sea passage from the Arabian Gulf to the open ocean, Sami said.

“The length of the canal could vary between 60 and 100 kilometres according to the location to be decided by experts,” he said.

“The project can become a reality, especially that the Arab Gulf countries have much greater and better possibilities than the people who built the Suez canal in 1859 and completed it in 1869. While it took ten years to complete the 193-kilometre Suez Canal, digging in the 21st century a much shorter canal to bypass the Strait of Hormuz should take a limited period of time,” he said.

The Suez Canal, the artificial sea-level waterway running north to south across the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt to connect the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, is 193km long, 24 metres deep and 205 metres wide.

The canal, one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes, consists of the northern access channel (22 kilometres), the canal itself (162.250 kilometres) and the southern access channel (nine kilometres).

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/general/saudi-proposes-plan-to-dig-strait-of-hormuz-bypass-1.1168315>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

### • NATO Helicopter Crashes In Eastern Afghan Province

By RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan

April 9, 2013

KABUL -- A NATO helicopter has crashed in eastern Afghanistan, killing the two crew members onboard.

U.S. Colonel Thomas Collins, a spokesman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), told RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan that the aircraft went down on April 9.

In a telephone interview, Collins said "We do not have any indication that there were enemy [fighters] or enemy activity in the area where the aircraft crashed."

An ISAF statement said the cause of the crash is under investigation.

Taliban militants released an Internet statement claiming responsibility for bringing down the chopper.

Afghan officials said the crash occurred in the Pashir Wagam district of Nangarhar Province.

District chief Mir Baz Khan said the helicopter went down in a field.

With reporting by AP and dpa

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

- **Taliban ambush main security check post in Nuristan province**

By SADAF SHINWARI - 09 Apr 2013, 8:54 am

Khaama Press

According to reports, a group of Taliban militants attacked a security check post used by Afghan security forces in central Paron district of eastern Nuristan province.

A local security official speaking on the condition of anonymity said the incident took place around 12:00 am local time on Tuesday and continued until dawn time.

At least 2 Afghan police officers have reportedly been killed following the clashes.

Jangal military check post located in Paron district is considered to be one of the main security check posts located around 10kms away from the center of Paron in Nuristan province.

According to the security officials provincial governor Mohammad Tamim Nuristan and head of the national directorate of security (NDS) have travelled to the area.

Reports also suggest that several Taliban militants have created sanctuaries in the area and are planning to carry out a fresh attack on the security check posts.

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

- **30 soldiers, 97 militants killed in Tirah valley clashes**

By MIRWAIS ADEEL - 09 Apr 2013, 10:21 am

Khaama Press

According to Pakistani military officials, at least 30 Pakistani security forces and 97 militants have been killed as the battle for key heights in

Tirah valley intensified on Monday with Jet fighters and gunship helicopters pounded militant positions.

The officials further added that ground troops backed by artillery and mortar fire started advancing on militant hideouts, killing of scores of militants.

Reports also suggest that death toll on both sides is very high although the exact number of casualties in the clashes are unknown. The exact death toll could not be verified from independent sources. The media have had to rely mostly on local sources, military and claims made by the militants.

Pakistani security forces are taking on Lashkar-i-Islam (LI) militants in Akakhel area with fierce battle going on in Maidan, Akakhel and Bagh areas since Friday.

Security sources quoted by Pakistan's Dawn News said, "The militants have been putting up a stiff resistance in the last two

days, ever since the offensive was launched on Friday."

In the meantime Pakistani Taliban spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan confirmed the ongoing clashes between Pakistani security forces and Lashkar-i-Islam (LI) militants however he said Taliban militants are not involved at the moment. However he did say that the TTP would support the LI when needed.

Mr. Ehsan also added that five LI activists, including a key commander, had reportedly been killed.

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

- **Civilian casualties rise in Afghanistan in Q1 of 2013: UN**

Press TV

April 8, 2013

The United Nations says the number of civilians killed or injured in Afghanistan has dramatically increased in the first three months of 2013 compared to the same period last year.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) spokesperson Nilab

Mobarez raised the alarm on the civilian casualties on Monday.

She did not reveal the exact numbers of those killed or injured, but called on all parties involved in the war to stop harming civilians.

Mobarez made the remarks after the latest US airstrike killed eleven children and two women in Afghanistan's volatile Kunar province late on Saturday.

Last week, four Afghan policemen and two civilians lost their lives in another airstrike launched by US-led forces in eastern Ghazni province.

Many civilians have lost their lives in US-led operations in various parts of Afghanistan over the past decade, with Afghans becoming increasingly outraged at the seemingly endless number of the deadly assaults.

Washington claims that its airstrikes target militants, but local sources say civilians have been the main victims of the attacks.

The United States and its allies entered the war in Afghanistan in October 2001 as

part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but after more than 11 years, the foreign troops have not been able to establish security in the country.

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

- **US not in Afghanistan to fight terror: Analyst**

Interview with Caleb Maupin

Press TV

April 9, 2013

An analyst tells Press TV that the US is still engaged in the deadly and costly presence in Afghanistan not to fight terrorism but to gain imperialist domination of the world.

More than a dozen civilians, including 11 children, were killed in the latest US-led air strike in Afghanistan's eastern province of Kunar on Sunday April, 7. Their deaths came just one day after six Americans, including one young female diplomat and three soldiers lost their lives in the war-torn country.

Many civilians have lost their lives in US-led operations in various parts of

Afghanistan over the past decade, with Afghans becoming increasingly outraged at the seemingly endless number of the deadly assaults. The United States and its allies entered the war in Afghanistan in October 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but after more than 11 years, the foreign troops have not been able to establish security in the country.

Press TV has conducted an interview in its "the debate" program with Caleb Maupin, with international action center, from New York to further discuss the issue of endless war in Afghanistan. Maupin is joined by Richard Weitz, senior fellow and director of the center of political military analysis with Hudson institute, from Washington. The following is an approximate transcription of the interview.

Press TV : Why do you think, Mr. Maupin, that the victory has become so elusive for the US forces in Afghanistan?

Maupin: Well, it is pretty clear the United States is not in Afghanistan to fight against the al-Qaeda. In fact the people who lay

the basis for al-Qaeda were US allies in Afghanistan during 1980s. In 1979 the people of Afghanistan had a revolution and began constructing what they call the people's democracy.

Democratic youth leagues were formed and began construction all throughout the country and the US met with forces, the Mujahedin, people like Osama bin Laden and used them to destabilize and eventually overthrow the people's democratic government in Afghanistan. And the people who lay the basis for al-Qaeda were US allies.

It is pretty clear that the US is in Afghanistan because there are many countries around the world that are rejecting the rule of Wall Street in the United States; countries like Russia, Iran, the democratic people's republic of Korea and having a base, having troops in central Asia as they do, is a way to assert their power and force. That is what it is really about.

The fact that the US is allying with so-called al-Qaeda forces, you know in Syria, use them in Libya, it is pretty clear. Let's be clear on another thing; often there is a

lot of rhetoric coming from Washington DC about fighting so-called radical Islam, but you will notice about a lot of the governments that the US has overthrown have actually been secular governments. Gaddafi's Libya was a highly secular regime. Saddam Hussein's was also highly secular.

So it is pretty clear the US is fighting its own economic interest; not the interest of the 99% of the United States, not the interest of working class people in the United States, but the interest of a small group, very wealthy people in the United States and the interest of Israel.

Press TV : They are not willing to stay there forever. Is that the impression you are getting as well on this, Mr. Moupin?

Maupin: Well, I think the US has long term plans of imperialist domination of the world and going into Afghanistan and setting up bases is part of their long term strategy.

The US has been sowing instability and chaos all throughout the Middle East, whether in Syria, you know all throughout, in supporting the government of Israel as

it continues to murder and commit aggression against its neighbors.

So it is very clear that any talk from the United States of liberating people, they are coming to their aid, it is Israeli fault. I think the fact that the talk of al-Qaeda can only be used that is an emotional thing; they can say, "Oh, remember 9/11? That is why we have to go to someone else's country and murder people".

The US troops in Afghanistan are occupiers. They are occupiers, they have done horrific things, you know, defaming corpses, awful things in Afghanistan. Whenever someone goes to someone else's country and is occupying them, awful things happen, whether it is the occupation of the Northern Ireland that continues, wherever it goes on, colonizers are brutal and the things they do are brutal against the people they are occupying.

So the people of Afghanistan have the absolute right to resist the US troops being in their country and US troops need to leave, so people of Afghanistan can have their country back.

Press TV : We are seeing the United States battling the insurgents, the Taliban militants in Afghanistan, at the same time speaking about political engagements with them, speaking about political way out of this and even holding dialogue with them, they are opening an office for instance in Qatar; so how can this contradiction be explained?

Maupin: Well, it is obviously a lot of hot air coming from the United states, because when people are being shot down in the streets, when US air strikes and drones are murdering people in Afghanistan; people of Afghanistan do not want dialogue with these occupiers; they want to resist; they want to resist this foreign domination of their country.

When the Mujahedin were sent into Afghanistan and the Soviet troops went in to defend the people's democratic government in Afghanistan; that was nothing like what the US is doing now.

The Soviet Union sent troops at the request of the popular government of Afghanistan and well they were there not only to defend them against the Mujahedin forces sent in by the United

States, they also engaged in agricultural aid and they did all kinds of tremendous things for the people of Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan largely supported the Soviet intervention against the forces of Mujahedin and the forces they were sent in by the United States.

I also want to make clear, you know, the other guest talked about how the government of Turkey is ideal. The government of Turkey is a member of NATO and the government of Turkey has committed horrific crimes against the people of Kurdistan. It is a crime in Turkey to even speak the Kurdish language, people are in jail.

So the government of Turkey that exists now is the puppet of the United States, has brutalized and murdered people and it is funding these forces in Syria which are not some popular democratic forces. These forces in Syria are very extreme terrorists that go around cutting people's heads off, murdering civilians, murdering Christians, murdering Muslims, murdering all kinds of people, left and right. These are terrorists the US is funneling money through the Turkish government in Syria.

So I do not think the government of Turkey is ideal. I do not think that is the case at all. All over the world the US is funding al-Qaeda like forces to commit crimes. It is pretty clear the US is trying to export its economic exploitation around the world and the people whether in Afghanistan, Iraq would resist it.

Press TV : Our guest there in Washington is suggesting that as long as you can force or persuade some of them to lay down their arms, this is itself some kind of an achievement, but we have people who are saying that unless all foreign forces leave Afghanistan, peace and security is not going to come in to the country. What is your idea?

Maupin: I think the people of Afghanistan have the absolute right to fight against the foreign domination of their country and I think they will never be content with US troops or US puppets occupying their country and exploiting them.

The other guest raised the example of Vietnam. Well, since the National Liberation Front of Vietnam was victorious, the life expectancy in Vietnam has actually gone up by 17 years, 17 years

longer; the average Vietnamese person lives 17 years longer than before the people were victorious and drove the US troops out.

There is not a single place in this world where the US has brought peace or prosperity. Every time it occupies a country, every time it overthrows a popular government the results are...you know, the people living in misery, whether it is Eastern Europe, whether it is Africa; wherever the US goes in and destabilizes and destroys the results are always negative for the people.

So it is very clear and Vietnam is an example of that. The people of Afghanistan have the absolute right to resist the US, to resist the people that are terrorizing them and murdering them on a daily basis ...

Press TV : If the several thousand are going to stay in Afghanistan and we are hearing indications of general Dempsey saying that "We are not in hurry, we would want these troops to stay and train," what would be there and why would they be in Afghanistan? A lot of

people are suggesting the US is after permanent bases, what do you think?

Maupin: Well, if the US troops continue to stay in Afghanistan, they will not be there to aid the people of Afghanistan and they will not be there to help the people of the United States either. They will be there to further the aims of Wall Street and Israel and to further protect the interest of US economic banking institutions and wealthy one percent of the United States.

Right now all across this country post offices are closing, schools are being closed down, hospitals are being shut down; this money should be spent on human needs. This money should be spent here at home in the United States to aid the people of the US in this time of economic crisis with large unemployment; it should not be spent on murdering innocent people in Afghanistan and further occupying Afghanistan.

The US troops need to leave and they need to come home, to be with their families and the US needs to stop acting as an exploiting imperialist force around the world. We need to strive for the kind of things that the revolutionary government

of Afghanistan strive for; people's democracy, equality, full employment; things like that and it is a shame that US sent there Mujahedin to tear down people's democratic government of Afghanistan.

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

- **Afghanistan to start work on 6 major mines in next two months**

By MEENA HASEEB - 09 Apr 2013, 9:25 am

Khaama Press

According to officials in the ministry of mines of Afghanistan, several companies across the globe are interested to invest on the natural resources of Afghanistan.

Wahidullah Shahrani, Afghan mines minister told reporters in Kabul, a number of large international companies have shown their interest and are prepared to invest in mines sector in the country.

Mr. Shahrani further added that agreements will be signed after tendering and assessment process within the next two months.

“We are expecting that the contracts will be signed within the next two months. Work on two blocks in Afghan-Tajik zone in northern Balkh province of Afghanistan, gold and copper mine of Zaragshan in Moqor district of Ghazni province, gold mine in Raghistan district of Badakhshan province, Balkhab copper mine in Sar-e-Pul province and Shaida copper mine located partly in Pashtun Zarghoon and partly in Adraskan districts of Herat province”

Shahrani said adding that the first phase of the contracts will mainly focus on exploration works.

Shahrani also added that international companies from Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States and countries from African region are interested to invest who are well experienced in these sectors.

According to Wahidullah Shahrani, a joint team comprised of specialists from mines ministry, finance ministry, economy ministry, ministry of trade and commerce, environmental protection department and security council are working to finalize the contracts.

In the meantime ministry of mines officials warned that a number regional spy agencies are looking to create barriers towards the exploration work of natural resources in Afghanistan.

According to reports Aynak copper mine which was awarded to a Chinese firm is facing security threats.

However Afghan mines minister says that the ministry is working on plans which boosts exploration work on major Afghan natural resources that will feed billions of dollars into Afghanistan in a bid to improve the economy of the country.

He said, “The share of the mines ministry including fuel and gas will reach to \$4 billion by 2024 and the contribution of natural resources towards the economy of country will reach to 20-22 percent by 2024, which will form 45-50 percent of the economy of the country.”

This comes as the international community during Tokyo conference emphasized on the self-sufficiency of Afghanistan by 2024. It was also agreed in the conference that Afghanistan must

become self-sufficient economic wise by  
2024.

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

*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanrıverdi O Yaşar**. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

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