



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dış Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

24 APRIL 2013

NO: 1588

1. IRAQ.....	3
• Kirkuk MP holds the government responsible for the killing and wounding of dozens of protests in Hawija.....	3
• Anbar provincial council examines the effects of disobedience, Lafi says the government has lost its legitimacy.....	4
• Civil disobedience starts in Anbar.	5
• İraqiya MP: We'll demand to replace Kobler if continues his / Non-neutral / approach.....	5
• Kirkuk governor calls to release journalist Saba'awi.....	6
• AIN report over İraq's elections shows decrease in participation ratio in 10 provinces	6
• Al-İraqiya al- Arabiya bloc determine its official position	7
• Breaking News ... 4th of next July, new date for Nineveh and Anbar elections	8
• Breaking News ...National Alliance boycotts Parliament session	9
• Islamic Army talks about a war	10
• UK businessman found guilty of selling fake bomb detectors to İraq	11
2. İRAN.....	14
• Iranian Presidential Hopeful: Syria Paying Price for Resistance against US, İsrail	14
• Ahmadinejad Urges Stronger Unity, Solidarity among Muslims.....	15
• Survey: Only 5% of Iranian Americans Support MKO.....	16
• Leader's Aide: Boston Blasts Rooted in Internal Problems, Not Related to Muslims	18
• US stirs İranophobia in ME to sell arms: İran parliament official.....	20
• Bans on İran media violate international laws: İran UN envoy.....	21
• İran, Guinea Conakry can help solve Syria, Mali crises: İran's Salehi	22
• İran sanctions are no substitute for real diplomacy.....	23
• İran calls on littoral states to honor Caspian Sea legal regime	25
• İran calls claims of al-Qaeda link farcical.....	26
• Sanctions will not 'impede İran's nuclear progress'.....	28
• IAEA in talks with İran to set a date for negotiations.....	30
3. İSRAEL - PALESTINE	31
• PA halts condemnation of İsrail at UNESCO.....	31
• There's no Palestinian 'Plan B,' just an unrealistic 'Study	32
• House resolution warns US aid would end if Hamas takes over West	37
• Jordan: İsrail to allow UN into Jerusalem Old City	39
• Hamas slams PLO accusations of 'Talibanization'	41
• EU Report for Palestine: Steady Progress in Cooperation despite Challenges	42
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	43
• Maghreb states discuss judicial co-operation.....	43
• Security problems persist in Tripoli.....	45
• Egypt's April 6: Still a political force to be reckoned with?	47
• Islamist party accuses top judge of endorsing foreign interference	52
• U.S. Report Criticizes State of Human Rights in Tunisia	54



ORSAM

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION

5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	56
• Al-Nusra Front warns Suleiman that “Beirut will be burned”	56
• EU provides Lebanon with additional funding for Syrian refugees.....	57
• Jordanian-Palestinian lobbying at UNESCO ‘pushes Israel to accept Jerusalem expert mission’58	
6. SYRIA.....	60
• Kerry: NATO needs plan for Syrian chemical weapons	60
• 'Children killed' in Syria air raids	64
• US urges NATO to consider role in Syria	66
• Syria opposition names interim leader	68
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	70
• Bahrain slams US rights report.....	70
• No place for non-Muslim places of worship in Saudi Arabia	72
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	72
• Bomb attacks wound 17 in Pakistan	72
• Despite Gains Against Taliban, Helmand Residents Feel Insecure.....	73

1. IRAQ

- **Kirkuk MP holds the government responsible for the killing and wounding of dozens of protests in Hawija.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the province of Kirkuk, Yassin al-Obeidi held the government the responsible for the killing and wounding dozens of protests in Hawija, west of Kirkuk.



He said in a press statement: "We, the MPs of Kirkuk and parliamentary delegation who came to Hawija yesterday, had asked the security forces to give us more time to talk with the demonstrators before storming the Hawija sit-in Square".

Obeidi said: "During our meetings with the demonstrators, they have assured us there are no weapons or wanted within the Square and they were ready for the inspection of the tents."

He appealed: "All the political blocs to say its word to avoid sectarian strife that might have hit the country due to these acts."

It is mentioned that General Coordinator of the sit-in Square in Hawija in the west of Kirkuk, Abdul-Malik al-Jubouri declared that more than 100 killed and wounded in a storming process by the army troops at dawn today 23, April

Jubouri told the reporter of the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that a large force of army began at 4:30 am to fire at unarmed demonstrators and stormed the Square amid heavy gunfire.

Jubouri pointed out that hundreds of protesters, including the wounded, had been arrested and the security forces prevented ambulances from entering the area and transport the injured to hospitals.

He pointed out that mosques in Hawija began to asked to donate blood as a result of the large number of injured in the Square of the sit-in.

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

- **Anbar provincial council examines the effects of disobedience, Lafi says the government has lost its legitimacy.**

Ramadi / NINA / Deputy Chairman of Anbar's provincial council, Sadoun Obaid al-Shaalan said: "The Council will hold a meeting today to study the effects of the civil disobedience and the closure of government institutions, shops and markets in the cities of the province."

Al-Shaalan told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "Such decisions should not be hasty, and all aspects should be studied, especially the impact on the economy in the province and the movement of labor across the cities of Anbar and its impact on the working day," at the same time, he demanded the protesters and the government to sit for dialogue and discussion.

In Samarra, the People's Committees Coordinating of the demonstrators announced a general strike and fasting on Monday 22, April, for one day in protest against the failure of the government to

implement the demands of the protesters and against the statements of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki when he described protesters as rebels.

In Nineveh, most of the shops in the province closed their doors in response to civil disobedience called by the coordinating committees for the demonstrations.

It is mentioned that spokesman of the protesters in Al-Anbar, Sheikh Saeed Lafi said: "Maliki's government is still continuing to ignore the demands of the people in restoring the rights of its people and correct the path of the political process in the country, and to stop the bleeding of Iraqi blood."

Lafi called the international community to intervene to restore the rights to people: "Because the government started to lose its legitimacy by ignoring the demands of protesters and hit and killed a number of them and imposed siege on other cities "

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

- **Civil disobedience starts in Anbar.**

Ramadi / NINA / The civil disobedience called by the Organizing Committee for the sit-in of Anbar began since the dawn today 22, April.

The reporter of the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / cited that "most of the government institutions closed their doors in the cities of Anbar province, with the exception of hospitals and the security services."

He added that "most of the shops and public markets shut their doors in response to the demands of the protesters to declare the civil disobedience today, where movements of people and wheels seemed very weak."

It is mentioned that Sheikh Mustafa al-Karbouli, Imam of the Square sit-in Ramadi called for civil disobedience for one day because of the government's lack of response to the demands of the protesters. "

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

- **Iraqiya MP: We'll demand to replace Kobler if continues his / Non-neutral / approach.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Ibrahim al-Mutlaq the head of the UN mission in Iraq, Martin Kobler to demand to replace him if he continues what he described as "being not neutral with the Iraqi people."

He said in a press statement: "This person was not neutral in most cases, he is biased to the government in a manner far from humanitarian and human rights in order to achieve personal interests."

Mutlaq added: "We already drawn attention to this subject, and if Kobler continued in his approach in handling with the Iraqi people, it would be certain that we will demand to replace him."

He continued: "We have indications, not limited to the issue of residents of Liberty, but belong to other things, after appeals and statements from the people of Anbar, Kobler began to boredom, and if he unable to change his approach, we will demand to replace him with another person."

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

- **Kirkuk governor calls to release journalist Saba'awi**



Baghdad (AIN) –Kirkuk governor, Najim al-Din Karim, called the security forces to release the journalist, Abdul Razzaq al-Saba'awi, who was arrested by the 12th Division of the Iraqi Army on last Friday.

Karim expressed his concern over the situation in Hawija district, stating that "Due to our support to the press in Iraq, we call the 12th Division to ensure Saba'awi's safety who was arrested without any judicial warrant which is a constitutional breach."

"We always support the press that convey the real message and respect the others'

opinions as an aspect of the democracy," he concluded.

It is worth mentioning that Saba'awi is the reporter of Kirkuk Now website and was arrested while reporting the demonstrations in Hawaija on last Friday.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=32670:kirkuk-governor-calls-to-release-journalist-sabaawi-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **AIN report over Iraq's elections shows decrease in participation ratio in 10 provinces**

Baghdad (AIN) -A new statistical report prepared by All Iraq News Agency (AIN) over the participation ratio in the provincial elections compared with 2009 provincial elections showed that "The ratio decreased in ten provinces while two other provinces preserved this ratio where none of the provinces witnessed an increase in the participation percentage."

AIN has mentioned in a previous report that "The ratio of the participation in the local elections conducted in 12 provinces

is 50% which is the same percentage of 2009 elections in 14 provinces."

The new report refers that the highest decrease of the participation was in Baghdad which is up to 7% where it diminished from 40% to 33%.

While three other provinces registered decrease by 6% in Basra, from 48% to 42%, and Diyala from 57% to 51%, and Karbala from 60% to 54%.

The decrease of participation in Salah il-Din province was 4% from being 65% to 61%.

Four provinces registered decrease up to 2% which are: Babel from 56% to 54%_ Najaf from 55% to 53%_ Wasit from 54% to 52%_ Maysan from 46% to 44%

Only one province registered decline up to 1% in Muthanna from being 60% to 59%.

However, two provinces kept on the rate of participation if compared to the rate of 2009 that are Diwaniya province 58% and Dhi Qar 50%.

Nineveh and Anbar's local elections scheduled in next Sept are expected to witness participation higher than that of 2009 where Nineveh's ratio was 60% while Anbar's was 40%

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=32626:ain-report-over-iraqs-elections-show-decrease-in-participation-ratio-in-10-provinces-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Al-Iraqiya al- Arabiya bloc determine its official position**



Shafaq News / Al- Iraqiya al- Arabiya bloc, led by Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq revealed on Wednesday, that it will hold a meeting today to determine its position towards the political process, which it has described as "foolish".

A member of Al- İraqiya al- Arabiya bloc, Haider al-Mulla revealed yesterday that MPs of Al- İraqiya al- Arabiya coalition submitted their resignations to the Parliament Speaker in protest against the Prime Minister's order of engaging the military and political conflict that occurred in Haweeja.

"We do not want to be false witnesses to the dirty political process run by regional and international parties," The leader in the bloc, Hamza Al-Kartani told "Shafaq News".

"Nuri al-Maliki sparked the crisis and is trying to drag the country to disorder".

"Maliki seeks to divide Iraq," he added.

The İraqi army stormed yesterday the Sit-in square of Haweeja, in the northern province of Kirkuk, after government forces said that the protesters refused to hand over wanted men who killed İraqi soldiers last Friday.

Violent clashes took place between İraqi forces and the protesters led to the death and injury of many gunmen, protestors and elements of the İraqi forces.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/588-9-al-iraqiya-al-arabiya-bloc-determine-its-official-position-.html>

- **Breaking News ... 4th of next July, new date for Nineveh and Anbar elections**



Shafaq News / İraqi government decided, on Tuesday to hold local elections in Nineveh and Anbar provinces on the 4th of next July.

This is the second date determined by the government to hold elections in the two provinces where elections have been already delayed for six months due to his lack of appropriate security atmosphere.

The decision faced the refusal of the majority of political forces in the country, while the Independent Higher Electoral Commission (IHEC) announced this month that the elections will be held one month

after conducting them in the rest of the provinces, the government has not commented on it.

“The cabinet identified in its regular session, the 4th of next July as a date for the provincial elections in Nineveh (north of Iraq) and Anbar (west of Iraq),” source in the cabinet told “Shafaq News”.

The first general polling provincial elections process was concluded on 20th of April in 12 Iraqi provinces, as 50% of those eligible to vote participated in those provinces, according to IHEC , were distributed on 5190 electoral centers and 32 102 polling stations.

139 thousand political entities and coalitions competed in the elections with the participation of 8275 candidates and was monitored by about 66 thousand local and international observers.

The provincial elections are the first to be held in Iraq since parliamentary elections in 2010 as well as the first one since American troop’s withdrawal December 2011.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/588-0-breaking-news--4th-of-next-july-new-date-for-nineveh-and-anbar-elections.html>

- **Breaking News ...National Alliance boycotts Parliament session**

Shafaq News / National Alliance (NA) announced on Tuesday, boycotting the formal sessions of the Parliament to protest the non-inclusion of criminalizing Baath law in the parliament’s agenda.

“The alliance decided to boycott the parliament sessions, until including criminalizing Baath law on the parliament’s agenda after reading it twice,” leader in NA, Ali al-Allaq, who chaired the National Alliance Conference within the Parliament’s Dome, attended by “Shafaq News” said.

“However we see the Presidency of the parliament delay the inclusion of this law to vote on it”.

“NA took unanimous decision to boycott the parliament sessions,” he said.

“Shafaq News” reporter in the parliament said that NA was engaged in a debate with the Parliament Speaker, Osama al-Nujaifi because of this law before boycotting the session “.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/587-7-breaking-news-national-alliance-boycotts-parliament-session.html>

Amendments approved by the Five-members Committee and the Cabinet raised the anger of many political blocs and religious parties, which accused the government of trying to return the dissolved Baath Party.

Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki receded during his election campaign last week from supporting the justice and accountability committee’s amendments, and stressed that it will not pass without approving criminalizing Baath Party’s law.

The Justice and Accountability Commission ,which is responsible for excluding former Baathists from government positions, and was formed in May 2012 with seven members who make consensual de-Baathification decisions, is actually dominated by five members affiliated with the anti-government blocs .

• **Islamic Army talks about a war**

Shafaq News / The Islamic Army, a military wing of US forces resistance in Iraq predicated on Wednesday, the occurrence of an internal war in the country on the background of the events that took place yesterday in the protesting provinces .

While considered the protesters’ response on “government sectarian assault “ as guaranteed by “all legitimate means and called countries of the world and the region to boycott the government of Iraqi Prime Minister ,Nuri al-Maliki”.

“We appeal to the Arab and Islamic countries especially Iraq's neighbors, the Arab League, United Nations and the entire international community to condemn this terrorist act ,” A member of the Political Bureau of the Islamic Army and coordinator of the popular movement in Iraq, Ahmed Dabash said at a news conference in Erbil, attended by “Shafaq News”.

He called “resistance factions that fought the US occupation over the last nine years to unify and face these plots “.

“If the government continued its policy to eliminate the demonstrations by the military force, there will be inevitably war and the government should take that in consideration,” Dabbash said.

Dozens of people have been killed and other wounded on Tuesday, after a military force stormed the Sit-in Square of Haweeja, and officials said the incident occurred after the army was fired.

It is worth mentioning that two ministers resigned as well as Deputy Prime Minister, Saleh al-Mutlaq and 34 MPs to protest on the events.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/588-7-islamic-army-talks-about-a-war-.html>

- **UK businessman found guilty of selling fake bomb detectors to Iraq**

A businessman has been found guilty of a multimillion-pound fraud involving the

sale of fake bomb detectors to Iraq and around the world.

A jury at the Old Bailey found Jim McCormick, 57, from near Taunton, Somerset, guilty on three counts of fraud over a scam that included the sale of £55m of devices based on a novelty golfball finder to Iraq. They were installed at checkpoints in Baghdad through which car bombs and suicide bombers passed, killing hundreds of civilians. Last month they remained in use at checkpoints across the Iraqi capital.

McCormick, who faces up to eight years in jail when he is sentenced next month, also sold the detectors to Niger, Syria, Mexico and other countries including Lebanon where a United Nations agency was a client.

He claimed they could detect explosives at long range, deep underground, through lead-lined rooms and multiple buildings. In fact, the handheld devices were useless. Their antennae, which purported to detect explosives, and in other cases narcotics, were not connected to anything, they had no power source and one of the devices

was simply the golfball finder with a different sticker on it.

"Both civilians and armed forces personnel were put at significant risk in relying upon this equipment," said Detective Inspector Ed Heath, who led Avon and Somerset police's three-year investigation. "McCormick showed a complete disregard for the safety of those that used and relied upon the device for their own security and protection. He amassed many millions of pounds through his greed and criminal enterprise."

The court heard the devices had been marketed at international trade fairs that were backed by UK government departments. They were only banned from export to Iraq and Afghanistan a year after whistleblowers had alerted the Department for Business and the House of Commons defence select committee.

It is now alleged by an Iraqi whistleblower that McCormick paid millions of pounds in bribes to senior Iraqis to secure the deals. Inspector general Aqil al-Turehi of the Iraqi interior ministry told a BBC Newsnight investigation: "This gang of Jim

McCormick and the Iraqis working with him killed my people in cold blood."

A former colleague of McCormick told the BBC he saw him set up accounts in false names for 15 Iraqi officials. He said they "don't care if people live or die"; the only thing they care about is "how much am I going to get back – cashback".

General Jihad al-Jabiri, who ran the Baghdad bomb squad, is in jail on corruption charges relating to the contracts. Some Iraqis still believe the detectors work while others are angry they have cost lives.

"We know that a few of them are defective," an official at the ministry of the interior told the Guardian last month. "The other problem is how they are used. It requires the operator to be in the right frame of mind."

"We know that the detectors are useless," another security officer said. "They're fakes. We've seen it on the news."

McCormick's home and business premises in Somerset were raided by police in December 2009, by which time British

army officers operating in Baghdad and Basra had reported serious concerns about the effectiveness of the devices.

He had sold about 6,000 detectors to Iraq for as much as £10,000 each while the production cost for the device was as low as £15. McCormick grew rich on the enormous mark-up. He owns a mansion in Bath that was previously owned by the Hollywood actor Nicholas Cage, a holiday home in Cyprus and a Sunseeker yacht as part of assets worth £7m identified by police.

One of McCormick's devices, the ADE 101, was essentially a golfball finder described by its maker as "a great novelty item that you should have fun with". The antenna was "no more a radio antenna than a nine-inch nail", according to one scientist who analysed the device.

McCormick also sold three models of his detector to customers in countries including Libya, Iran, Kenya and Jordan. They were used to protect hotels in Lebanon and Bahrain.

The handheld devices came equipped with an antenna that McCormick claimed

pointed to explosives or narcotics depending on how it was "programmed". A card reader device could be loaded with a laminated card – orange to look for explosives, blue for narcotics. Expert witnesses described the kit as "completely ineffectual" and an "affront" to science.

During a two-and-a-half-year police investigation, a University of Cambridge professor had conducted a "full double blind trial" of the devices and found the results were no better than random chance. The device was right three out of 25 times.

"His conclusion was that the operating principles of the ADE 651 [another of McCormick's devices] lack any grounding in science and he could see no way in which the device could work according to the presently known laws of physics," the judge told the jury before they retired to consider their verdict.

The court had heard that McCormick continued to believe the devices worked and that none of his customers had returned the devices as faulty or asked for a refund.

Consignments of the devices were once stopped at the UK border before being exported and officials queried whether export documents were required. The reason none were needed was they could find no functioning electronics inside.

http://www.pukmedia.com/EN/EN_Direje.aspx?Jimare=4322

2. IRAN

- **Iranian Presidential Hopeful: Syria Paying Price for Resistance against US, Israel**



TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Presidential hopeful Gholam-Ali Haddad Adel rapped the western states' double-standard approach towards the recent revolutions and uprisings in the region, and said they have taken a hostile stance against Syria because the Muslim nation has stood against the bullying of the US and Israel.

Former parliament speaker and member of the current legislature, Haddad Adel, said when the Islamic Awakening (also known as the Arab Spring) started in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, the western powers stimulated a simulated move in Syria suddenly and started their hostile moves against this nation as if it were just Syria which didn't have desirable level of democracy and everything was OK in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

He referred to the reason for the world powers' inimical behavior towards Syria, and said, "The issue is rooted in the fact that from among all the Arab countries, this has been Syria which has turned into a resistance front against Israel since the very beginning and has not raised its hands as a sign of surrender, and that's why they want Syria to be punished."

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011 with organized attacks by well-armed gangs against Syrian police forces and border guards being reported across the country.

The US and its western and regional allies have long sought to topple Assad and his

ruling system. Media reports said that the Syrian rebels and terrorist groups have received significantly more and better weapons in recent weeks, a crime paid for by the Persian Gulf Arab states and coordinated by the United States.

The US daily, Washington Post, reported in May that the Syrian rebels and terrorist groups battling the President Bashar al-Assad's government have received significantly more and better weapons in recent weeks, a crime paid for by the Persian Gulf Arab states and coordinated by the United States.

The newspaper, quoting opposition activists and US and foreign officials, reported that Obama administration officials emphasized the administration has expanded contacts with opposition military forces to provide the Persian Gulf nations with assessments of rebel credibility and command-and-control infrastructure.

Opposition activists who several months ago said the rebels were running out of ammunition said in May that the flow of weapons - most bought on the black market in neighboring countries or from

elements of the Syrian military in the past - has significantly increased after a decision by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf states to provide millions of dollars in funding each month.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107163888>

- **Ahmadinejad Urges Stronger Unity, Solidarity among Muslims**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for forging unity and solidarity among Muslim nations in a bid to confront those countries which seek to sow discord among them.



"The imperialist powers have always tried to create differences and rift among the Muslims," the Iranian president said, addressing a large crowd of people in Southwestern province of Khuzestan on Sunday.

President Ahmadinejad underlined that "the world of Islam needs unity more than ever".

In relevant remarks earlier this year, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei warned Muslim nations about the plots hatched by enemies to sow discord in the Islamic community.

The Leader pointed to the wave of the Islamic awakening in the Muslim World, and reiterated that the world arrogance targeted the Islamic Awakening movements and aims to divide the Muslims pitting them against each other.

"Therefore, the main duty of the elites in the Muslim world is to help expose the enemies' plots and take serious efforts to materialize the motto of Islamic unity," Ayatollah Khamenei underlined.

In October, Commander of Iran's Basij (volunteer) force Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqdi had also underlined the necessity of solidarity in the Muslim world, saying unity among Islamic sects foils enemies' plots and helps

to growth and expansion of Islamic awakening.

"Today, Shiites and Sunnis have together defused the inauspicious plots of the enemies of the Revolution through unity and brotherhood and expanded the Islamic awakening through unity, vigilance and awareness..." Naqdi said at the time.

Pointing to the growing tides of Islamic awakening in the region, he noted, "In Muslim states, the Islamic awakening is also the result of the unity between the Shiites and Sunnis."

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107163348>

- **Survey: Only 5% of Iranian Americans Support MKO**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A recent survey of Iranian Americans found that only 5 percent support the terrorists Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO, also known as the MEK, PMOI and NCRI).



ORSAM

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION



According to Habilian Association, the survey released late last week by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA), revealed a total 15 percent of Iranian Americans support opposition groups or figures in Iran, of whom only 5 percent support the MKO.

Analysts believe that the results of the survey truly represent the lack of support for the terrorist MKO group among Iranian patriots who are aware of the MKO's treasonable acts against the Iranian people and the government of the Islamic Republic, including the group's siding with the invader of Iran, Saddam Hussein, during the 1980s which led to the killing and injuring of thousands of innocent Iranian civilians.

As Paul Sheldon Foote, Professor at California state university, put it in an interview with Habilian Association, the terrorist group and its assassins are a useful tool for the Israelis "by promoting

hatred of Iran, by telling lies about Iran, and by conducting terrorist operations in Iran".

The MKO, founded in the 1960s, blended elements of Islamism and Stalinism and participated in the overthrow of the US-backed Shah of Iran in 1979. Ahead of the revolution, the MKO conducted attacks and assassinations against both Iranian and Western targets.

The group started assassination of the citizens and officials after the revolution in a bid to take control of the newly-established Islamic Republic. It killed several of Iran's new leaders in the early years after the revolution, including the then President, Mohammad Ali Rajayee, Prime Minister, Mohammad Javad Bahonar and the Judiciary Chief, Mohammad Hossein Beheshti who were killed in bomb attacks by MKO members in 1981.

The group fled to Iraq in 1986, where it was protected by Saddam Hussein and where it helped the Iraqi dictator suppress Shiite and Kurd uprisings in the country.

The terrorist group joined Saddam's army during the Iraqi imposed war on Iran (1980-1988) and helped Saddam and killed thousands of Iranian civilians and soldiers during the US-backed Iraqi imposed war on Iran.

Since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the group, which now adheres to a pro-free-market philosophy, has been strongly backed by neo-conservatives in the United States, who argued for the MKO to be taken off the US terror list.

In September 2012, the last groups of the MKO terrorists left Camp Ashraf, their main training center in Iraq's Diyala province. They have been transferred to Camp Liberty transient facility near Baghdad.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107163846>

- **Leader's Aide: Boston Blasts Rooted in Internal Problems, Not Related to Muslims**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Supreme Leader's Advisor for International Affairs and presidential hopeful Ali Akbar Velayati took the US

officials responsible for the deadly Boston Marathon bombings earlier this month, and said that the blasts showed an internal crisis in the American society and should not at all be linked to the Muslim world.

"Those who are the enemies of Islam blame Muslims for any bad event which happens in the world while what is going on in the US is the result of decadence of the US society which is the outcome of the US officials' misbehavior," Velayati said on Tuesday when asked about the relation between the Boston blasts and the new wave of Islamophobia.

"Such events indicate an internal crisis in the American society," he added.

Two explosions rocked the Boston Marathon last Monday killing three people and injuring more than 138 others.

Later, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast condemned the bomb explosions and said, "The Islamic Republic strongly condemns any measure that endangers the lives of innocent people," Mehman-Parast said last Tuesday.

Mehman-Parast described the deadly incident as a "source of sorrow", calling for greater global efforts to eradicate terrorism.

In similar remarks last week, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei condemned the bomb blasts in Boston, but meantime slammed Washington for its selective and illogical attitude towards terrorism, saying the US keeps mum about the massacre of innocent Muslim nations, but it wants to set fire to the world when a bomb blasts on its soil.

"In compliance with the logic of Islam, the Islamic Republic of Iran opposes and condemns any kind of explosion and killing of innocent people no matter it takes place in the United States' Boston or in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria," Ayatollah Khamenei said in Tehran on Wednesday, addressing a meeting with Iranian Army and Basij (volunteer forces) commanders and personnel on the threshold of the National Army Day.

"But", he said, "the attitude of America and others who allege to be supporters of

human rights towards the killing of innocent people is contradictory and we, thus, believe that the United States and the front standing against the Islamic Republic of Iran are irrational."

Elaborating on the United States' selfish and irrational approach to terrorism, Ayatollah Khamenei said despite the Americans' claim about their opposition to the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), "the United States' drones massacre innocent people, children and women in Afghanistan and Pakistan, while the terrorists who are overtly or covertly supported by the US are killing people in Iraq and Syria".

"What kind of logic is this that if children and women in Afghanistan and Pakistan are killed by Americans and if the terrorists supported by the US, the West and the Zionists cause catastrophes in Iraq and Syria, it wouldn't matter, but if a blast takes place in the US or a western country, then the whole world should pay the price for it," he asked.

The Leader warned that "the paradoxical, irrational and bullying" behavior of the US and the West and their disrespect for

human principles have pushed the western civilization towards demise.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107163868>

- **US stirs Iranophobia in ME to sell arms: Iran parliament official**

Oscar for Argo: A crime against humanity
A senior Iran parliament official says the United States incites Iranophobia in an attempt to promote its weapons sales in the Middle East.

Substitute to Iran Majlis Deputy Speaker for Supervision Reza Talaei-Nik said on Tuesday that purchasing and stockpiling arms by some Arab countries will not benefit the region.

“The Western countries’ arms game with the Arabs will pave the way for the presence of transregional countries in the Middle East in order to increase tensions in this region,” Talaei-Nik said.

On April 19, The New York Times reported that US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel was to finalize weapons deals worth USD 10 billion with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the

United Arab Emirates (UAE) during his visit to the Middle East.

The paper also cited “one senior official” as saying that the new sale of the unidentified missiles to Saudi Arabia and the UAE is to address what he described as “the threat posed by Iran.”

Talaei-Nik further said, “With a simple historical survey, it can be understood that Iran has never been the initiator of war against any country, and certainly, no harm will be done to the region by our country.”

The official also called on the Arab sheikhdoms to establish regional security within the framework of regional pacts and prevent the presence of transregional countries in the Mideast.

He added that Arab states in the region are the biggest importers of arms from the West, while some of them are not even capable of using the purchased weapons.

The US, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the Israeli regime are all partners in supporting anti-Syria militants, including al-Qaeda-linked terrorists, to destabilize

and overthrow the government of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/23/299876/us-incites-iranophobia-to-sell-arms/>

- **Bans on Iran media violate international laws: Iran UN envoy**

A senior Iranian official has lashed out at the restrictions imposed by certain European satellite providers on Iranian channels, saying the move is a blatant violation of international laws and the principle of freedom of speech.

Iran's Deputy Ambassador to the UN Gholam-Hossein Dehqani said on Tuesday that taking Iranian satellite channels off the air is a contravention of international regulations.

"Over 20 Iranian satellite TV and radio channels have been banned, a move which runs counter to the claim of supporting freedom of expression, human rights standards and the free flow of information," said the Iranian envoy at the

35th meeting of the UN Committee on Information.

He called on the countries imposing such restrictions against Iran to "reconsider their decision" and respect the basic principles of democracy and freedom.

Dehqani further urged the UN Department of Public Information (UNDPI) to demonstrate a proper reaction to the restrictions, saying the UN body should provide the public with "timely, unbiased and transparent" information.

Stating that many developing nations are suffering from media monopoly, he said certain countries are taking advantage of "this monopoly to distort realities."

In recent months, European satellite providers have launched a concerted campaign to silence Iran's international media outlets.

Eutelsat's Israeli-French CEO Michel De Rosen has stepped up his restrictive campaign by appealing to major satellite providers in Europe and Asia to take Iranian media off the air.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/24/299958/bans-on-iran-media-violate-intl-laws/>

- **Iran, Guinea Conakry can help solve Syria, Mali crises: Iran's Salehi**

Iran, as the president of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Guinea Conakry, as a member of this movement and also a member of the African Union, can do their parts to decrease [the level of] these crises and assist to solve them by holding consultations.”

Iran Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi

Iran Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi says the Islamic Republic and Guinea Conakry can work to decrease the scale of crisis plaguing countries like Syria and Mali.

“Iran, as the president of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Guinea Conakry, as a member of this movement and also a member of the African Union, can do their parts to decrease [the level of] these crises and assist to solve them by holding consultations,” said Salehi during a meeting with his Guinean counterpart

Francois Lonseny Fall in the Iranian capital, Tehran, on Tuesday.

Salehi also warned against the dangers of extremism in different regions of the world.

Iran's foreign minister also hailed political relations between the two Muslim countries, expressing hope for further enhancement of bilateral ties in different fields.

For his part, Lonseny Fall also highlighted common Islamic values between Iran and Guinea Conakry within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement.

The senior Guinean diplomat further praised Tehran and Conakry's bilateral decision to open embassies in the two countries.

Lonseny Fall also called for a political solution, along with a dialogue, to deal with the Syrian issue and warned against the continuation of crisis in Mali.

Guinea Conakry is located in West Africa, with a population of nearly 10 million

people. Muslims comprise some 98 percent of the country's population.

Over the past years, Iran has defined a special priority on its agenda to boost relations with African countries.

Earlier this month, President Mahmoud Ahmadi paid a three-day visit to Niger, Ghana and Benin to develop bilateral economic and political cooperation with the African countries.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/23/299856/iran-guinea-focus-on-syria-mali-crises/>

- **Iran sanctions are no substitute for real diplomacy**

TEHRAN, Apr. 24 (MNA) – The EU should adopt a new approach and step up its diplomatic efforts on Iran because its interests in Iran go way beyond the nuclear dossier, according to Tarja Cronberg, a Finnish member of the European Parliament.

The sanctions imposed on Iran “are multiplying, affecting broader sections of

Iranian society, hurting more and more the Iranian middle class, its political moderates, as well as vulnerable minorities,” Cronberg, who is in the Green group in the European Parliament and the chair of the parliamentary delegation to Iran, wrote in an article published on EUobserver.com on April 3.

Following are excerpts of the text of the article:

Looking beyond the next round of negotiations in April in Kazakhstan, the EU should formulate a strategic approach towards Iran.

In its approach towards Iran, the EU employs the so-called twin-track method.

On one hand, stringent financial sanctions are employed to bite hard into the Iranian economy.

On the other hand, the EU is leading negotiations in a collective diplomatic effort with five countries, the U.S., Russia, China, Germany, the UK, and France, the so-called E3+3.

But despite the EU's prominence at the negotiating table (the talks are chaired by EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton), its real relevance to the Iran problem is through its sanctions.

This approach is not adequate.

In order to develop its role as a relevant international actor, the EU should step up its diplomatic efforts on Iran.

Independently of its position as the chair of the E3+3, the EU needs its own strategic vision on Iran, a vision for a long term relationship with the country.

Why?

Firstly, because the sanctions are by their nature a transitory instrument - they are designed to be phased out if the talks go well.

As the April talks grow closer, there is increasing speculation that a deal could be reached.

Iran... is showing more flexibility and the U.S. administration is more open than

ever to a detente with its decades-old enemy.

The EU should make preparations now for a post-sanctions phase. If or when the sanctions go, they will leave a vacuum in EU-Iran relations.

If they stay, going into Iran's presidential elections, due in June, or longer, they will also pose new challenges.

There is no such thing as a sanctions status quo.

The effects are dynamic.

They are multiplying, affecting broader sections of Iranian society, hurting more and more the Iranian middle class, its political moderates, as well as vulnerable minorities.

The EU will come under increasing pressure to mitigate the humanitarian cost of its actions, to address criticisms that the measures are neither as "smart" nor as "targeted" as they were supposed to be.

Secondly, the EU needs a new approach because its interests in Iran go way beyond the nuclear dossier.

Iran is the EU's geographic neighbor.

Individual EU member states have much closer economic, cultural, and people-to-people links with Iran than the U.S. does.

If the EU aspires to play a meaningful role in the Middle East - on Syria, on the Arab-Israeli conflict, on the increasing tension between the (Persian) Gulf regimes and Iran - it must build relations with all the relevant actors, including Iran.

Its current modus operandi - of publishing diplomatic reproaches - does not work.

Recently, the administration of U.S. leader Barack Obama offered the prospect of bilateral talks with Iran.

While it remains uncertain whether this will ever come to be or produce results, it creates an opportunity for a new chapter on Iran geopolitics.

It is not a problem for the EU to let the U.S. take the lead - they sing from the

same hymn book on nuclear non-proliferation and on human rights.

It is also not a problem for EU-U.S. relations or for the E3+3 process if the EU develops an independent bilateral policy on Iran.

Deeper EU-Iran relations, including the option of opening an EU embassy in Tehran, would increase its relevance as a strategic partner for the U.S. and as the E3+3 chair.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820600>

- **Iran calls on littoral states to honor Caspian Sea legal regime**

The Iranian foreign minister has called on the littoral states of the Caspian Sea to honor the legal regime of the sea.

In his address to the 32th meeting of the working group on the Caspian Sea that opened in Tehran on Tuesday, Ali Akbar Salehi said that the littoral states have agreed to settle the issues surrounding the sea and expand regional cooperation.

The special envoys and deputy foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan have attended the 32th meeting of the working group in Tehran.

The Caspian neighbors intend to set up the principles of activities in the sea, determine the rights and duties, and regulate activities in various areas including issues concerning the seabed, the top diplomat noted.

Fortunately the littoral states have agreed upon the principles of the legal regime, though the implementation methods have not been formulated yet, Salehi added.

“I hope that the establishment of the legal regime of the Caspian Sea, which includes the general principles of activities and explains the rights and duties of the littoral states, be finalized sooner,” Salehi said, adding that the expansion of cooperation between the littoral states can help promote economic development.

He went on to say that the Islamic Republic of Iran believes in settling the Caspian Sea issues including its fragile

environment through dialogue, mutual respect and the expansion of ties.

The Iranian official also suggested that the exclusive areas of operation for each state be determined based on the internationally recognized legal standards so that each country can make use of energy resources under the seabed.

He also cautioned that the interference of extra-regional countries in the Caspian Sea issues can simply create new challenges and complicate the matters.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820603>

- **Iran calls claims of al-Qaeda link farcical**



TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has vehemently dismissed a

Canadian claim that an attack had been planned on the country's soil with support from al-Qaeda elements in Iran, calling it "ludicrous".

"This is the most ludicrous thing I have heard in my 64 years," Salehi told reporters in Tehran on Tuesday.

According to the New York Times, the Canadian police said on Monday that a planned terrorist attack to derail a passenger train was linked to al-Qaeda elements on its soil. It said that there was no indication of state sponsorship by Iran of the suspected conspiracy. But, announcing the arrest of two men, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Assistant Commissioner James Malizia said that the suspects had received "direction and guidance" from "al-Qaeda elements" located in Iran.

Speaking at his regular press briefing, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said that the Islamic Republic of Iran never approves of the political and religious mindset of extremist groups, particularly al-Qaeda.

"We are opposed to any kind of violent actions that put the lives of the people in danger," he said, adding that "the extremist Canadian government has put the Iranophobia project on its agenda over recent years and has pursued hostile measures" against Iran.

U.S. seeking its own interests in the region

At his press conference, Mehmanparast also commented on the fact that U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, according to Reuters, said on Sunday that a \$10 billion arms deal planned with Arab and Israeli allies sent a "very clear signal" to Iran that military options remain on the table over its nuclear program.

The Iranian spokesman said that U.S. officials are seeking to serve their interests in the region. "It is obvious that the presence of such countries that are seeking their interests in other regions, including the Middle East leads to insecurity. We are seeking the promotion of security in the region."

Bahrain should listen to the voice of the people

Mehmanparast was also asked to comment on the Bahraini government's decision to hold the Formula One Grand Prix race on Sunday, despite calls for the event to be cancelled.

"We advise Bahraini officials to listen to the demands of the people and allow them to participate in (determining) their destiny," he said.

Iran urges Myanmar to prevent violence against Rohingya Muslims

Commenting on the appalling conditions that Rohingya Muslims are experiencing in Myanmar, Mehmanparast said, "The government of Myanmar should prevent such acts of violence as it is an international demand, and extremist groups in Myanmar should not be allowed to take such actions."

He added that the Islamic Republic would make every effort to help improve the situation.

According to the Los Angeles Times, in a report released Monday, Human Rights Watch said Buddhist monks and local leaders have orchestrated a deadly

campaign to purge Rohingya Muslims from Rakhine state, a coastal area on the Bay of Bengal. The rampant and coordinated attacks amount to crimes against humanity, the rights group said.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107085-iran-calls-claims-of-al-qaeda-link-farcical>

- **Sanctions will not 'impede Iran's nuclear progress'**



Iran's economy is clawing its way back to health after nearly a year of harsh Western sanctions, the country's top financial official said in an interview in which he stated that no amount of outside pressure would force Tehran to change its nuclear policies.

Seyed Shamseddin Hosseini, the minister of economic affairs and finance, said the

Iranian government was finding new ways to soften the impact of tough sanctions imposed last summer, The Washington Post reported.

Hosseini said structural changes implemented by Tehran since last year would improve the country's ability to withstand Western pressure. He predicted that sanctions would strengthen the economy in the long run by forcing Iranians to diversify and become more self-reliant.

"At first we witnessed inflationary shocks, but then we saw that we could use our domestic capacity to increase our competitiveness," Hosseini told The Washington Post during a weekend visit to attend an international financial conference.

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

The sanctions came into force in early summer 2012.

The illegal U.S.-engineered sanctions were imposed based on the unfounded accusation that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

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

Hosseini said Western experts who predicted an economic disaster in Iran are "now obliged to reconsider" as the country marks its 10th month under unprecedented banking restrictions and an embargo on oil exports to Europe.

"They did not understand the power of our resistance," Hosseini said. "They thought that by a small change in the foreign exchange rate, Iran's economy would collapse. But as time goes on, they realize that Iran is adapting and we are changing threats into opportunities."

Although he acknowledged painful cuts in oil revenue, Hosseini asserted that other sectors of Iran's economy had benefitted from the drop in the value of the rial. Agricultural and mining exports have increased, he said, and more Iranians are buying domestic products -- including automobiles and electronics -- rather than spending money on expensive imports.

In any event, Hosseini said, Iran would not be dissuaded by outside pressure from seeking "modern technologies" that will enable the country to reach its economic potential.

"The Iranian people are determined to follow the nuclear route," he said.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107091-sanctions-will-not-impede-irans-nuclear-progress>

- **IAEA in talks with Iran to set a date for negotiations**

TEHRAN – The UN nuclear agency is talking with Iran to set a date for discussions on further investigation into the country's nuclear program, it said on Monday, Reuters reported.



The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued a brief statement after Iranian media reported that talks were set for May 21.

Asked about the Iranian media reports, IAEA spokeswoman Gill Tudor said in an email, "I can confirm we are discussing possible dates of a meeting with Iran."

Iran's Mehr and ISNA news agencies initially reported that the meeting would be held on May 21, but ISNA later quoted an unnamed official as saying this was only a "preliminary agreement" and that the date could be moved by one or two days.

The IAEA-Iran talks are separate from, but have an important bearing on, diplomatic negotiations between Tehran and six world powers aimed at a broad settlement to the decade-old dispute.

Western powers suspect Iran is trying to develop the capability to produce nuclear weapons under the guise of a declared civilian atomic energy program. Iran denies this, saying it seeks only electricity and medical applications from uranium enrichment.

If the Iran-IAEA meeting were to take place, it would be the 10th between the two sides since early 2012.

The last round of IAEA-Iran negotiations were held in February.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107083-iaea-in-talks-with-iran-to-set-a-date-for-negotiations>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **PA halts condemnation of Israel at UNESCO**



In US brokered deal, Israel will attend meetings to discuss Mugrabi bridge that leads to Temple Mount, allow UNESCO to survey sites.

Following US intervention, the Palestinian Authority has agreed to postpone five resolutions condemning Israel that they were to present to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) executive board in Paris, Israel Radio reported Wednesday.

The resolutions would have condemned Israel's activity in the West Bank as well as its endangerment of Jerusalem's "Arab character", the radio said.

As part of the agreement brokered by the US between the PA, Jordan and Israel, Israel has in return agreed to allow UNESCO experts to survey a number of sites in Jerusalem. Israel has also agreed to take part in UNESCO meetings about the Mugrabi Bridge, which runs from the Western Wall plaza to the Temple Mount and which has been a source of conflict between Israel and the Waqf Muslim religious trust.

Citing safety concerns of Jerusalem city engineer Shlomo Eshkol the municipality closed the Mugrabi Bridge in December, 2011. The closure elicited harsh reactions from both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, with Hamas warning that the closure was tantamount to a “declaration of war” on Muslim holy sites.

“The closure of the Mugrabi Bridge is in the context of [Israel’s] religious war against our holy sites,” Hamas said in a statement.

The Islamist organization also claimed that the decision was part of Israel’s effort to completely Judaize Jerusalem by deporting residents and revoking their ID cards, demolishing their houses and confiscating their lands.

The Palestinian Authority also condemned the closure of the Mugrabi Bridge and said that Israel does not have any jurisdiction over Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem.

<http://www.jpost.com/International/PA-to-postpone-condemnation-of-Israel-at-UNESCO-310890>

- **There’s no Palestinian ‘Plan B,’ just an unrealistic ‘Study**

13’Abbas has no clear strategy for ‘the day after’ Kerry’s effort to restart peace talks fails, just Saeb Erekat’s melodramatic series of ‘fateful decisions’



RAMALLAH — “Forget about plan B, there is no plan B,” a Palestinian official told me during a Sunday visit to Ramallah. “If you think they [Abbas and the Palestinian leadership] know what to do after Kerry’s attempt to renew the negotiations, you’re wrong.”

My talk with this Palestinian official took place barely two hours after yet another meeting between Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and US Secretary of State John Kerry had ended. This time, they met in Istanbul. According to the Palestinian ambassador to Turkey, this talk, too, did not result in anything significant. Kerry has already met with

Abbas in Riyadh, Amman, and Ramallah — and that last one was directly after President Obama’s visit to Jerusalem and Israel. None of these meetings yielded noteworthy results.

Israel continues to refuse the Palestinians’ preconditions for returning to the negotiating table: a declaration regarding terms of reference for Israel’s obligation to the two-state solution based on 1967 borders, and/or a construction freeze in West Bank settlements. Israel is willing to make a few economic gestures, and possibly release a few high-ranking prisoners, but nothing more.

The frustration in Ramallah is widespread, and senior PA officials, as well as the Palestinian public, are mired in a general state of melancholy, not only because of the lack of political headway with Israel. For the time being, it seems that the Palestinian leadership has no clear strategy or plan to turn to “the day after” American attempts to renew the negotiations fail. In addition, reconciliation talks with Hamas have been stagnant for a long period of time, the economic situation does not show signs of improving, and Prime Minister Salam

Fayyad, fed up with Fatah internal dirty politics, resigned last week — despite the drastic improvements in quality of life felt in the West Bank since he was appointed in the summer of 2007.

His position, for all those who might be interested, remains vacant as of this writing.

Study 13

The only kind of “Day After” plan is a paper that was written by the head of the PLO negotiation team, Saeb Erekat. In early April, Erekat presented the Palestinian leadership with a document he called “Dirasa 13,” or “Study 13.”

Erekat, who also oversees the Negotiation Support Unit, a foreign-funded NGO that advises Palestinian negotiators, laid out a series of steps that could be taken should negotiations remain at a dead end, now that Palestine has been granted non-member observer state status by the UN.

Erekat dramatically called his plan “the moment of truth — crossroads — decisions of fate,” despite the fact that the plan doesn’t contain a single decision that could have fateful ramifications for the

Palestinian people. Rather, Erekat and his staff recommend: drafting a Palestinian constitution, making progress on reconciliation with Hamas (this goal is unrealistic, said a Palestinian who recently met newly reelected Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal) and finally, that the “State of Palestine” join international organizations, and adopt international conventions/protocols.



Erekat wrote that Palestine must immediately adopt the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations (including conflict resolution), and 19 other international recognized protocols, some more well-known than others.

The specific “fateful decisions” that must be taken, according to Erekat, are as follows:

Adopting the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which would allow for membership in the International Criminal Court.

Joining the International Criminal Court. Erekat warns that joining the ICC can get tricky, and require consultation with experts on international law:

Joining the International Court of Justice. Here, Erekat takes a step back and explains that joining this court would require approval from the UN Security Council, on which the US has veto power.

Joining the Permanent Court of Arbitration — this would require willing cooperation from Holland.

It can be understood from Erekat’s presentation that the Palestinian Authority’s options on the legal front are quite limited.

From here, the PLO chief negotiator lists the various international organizations that Palestine could join, including UNESCO, the World Health Organization, and 18 other agencies. Israel, I suspect, would not be greatly fazed even if

Palestine joins every one of them as a full member. Joining most such organizations would be nothing more than a symbolic achievement, and would have very little influence, if any, on the situation on the ground.

We have a nuclear weapon

There are some serious doubts over whether “Study 13” will become the guide book for the Palestinian negotiators, the day after Kerry’s efforts fail.

Erekat’s plan is really a non-paper. It includes many ideas, and, as discussed, many of them are not realistic; others are facing opposition from inside PLO.

Over one thing, one might find a rare consensus in Ramallah: “The question is not if Kerry fails, but when,” a different Palestinian official told me, in his office. According to him, the secretary of state’s ruse to “tempt” Abbas back to the negotiating table with economic gestures from Israel is completely misguided.

“It’s not the economy, stupid,” this official said with a smile. “It’s the freedom. Come see the people in Ramallah. They’re enjoying themselves, sitting in coffee

shops, in restaurants. Some of them receive normal salaries. But Israel goes to the trouble to remind us nearly every day that there’s an occupation, and the people are fed up. Arrests within the PA territory, harassment from the settlers, construction on Palestinian land. And even if Israel transfers the tax money on time, or approves plans to build industrial zones in the Jordan River Valley, that doesn’t solve the problem, or satisfy the people’s desire for a state.”

A third Palestinian official with whom I spoke (and who, like his comrades, refused to reveal his name) tried to explain the nature of the threat to turn to the International Criminal Court, should negotiations fail. Essentially, he indicated, the threat was empty, insignificant. “We’ve realized that we have a nuclear weapon,” he said with deep sarcasm. “Historically, we’ve seen that the Israeli reaction to this court is a ‘nuclear bomb,’ just like the one Iran is trying to build, and we understand that it backs Israel into a corner.”

But when the cynicism subsides, the official reveals his despair. “We’ve tried everything, including direct meetings with

Netanyahu, but at the moment, there is no common ground at all. During a discussion with Abu Mazen, Netanyahu said that he is not ready to talk about Jerusalem, and Israel will stay in the Jordan River Valley for at least the next 40 years. So who is there to talk to?”

But what do you have to lose? I asked. Why did you agree to talk to the former prime ministerial Ehuds, Olmert and Barak, without preconditions? Are you afraid of the Palestinian public?

“Abu Mazen is not afraid of the Palestinian public. He has shown in the past that he is not fazed by pressure from the streets,” he replied. “Our demands are not ‘preconditions,’ I don’t like that word. But without them, what do we have to talk about? What’s the point? Do you know how many times I’ve been involved in talks with Israel? If there is no agreement that the framework of the talks is 1967 borders, including territory swaps, then there’s no point. The Israeli side is wasting time, Netanyahu is sitting in a government with (Jewish Home’s Naftali) Bennett, who is more extreme than he is, and they will never allow for a Palestinian state.

“Now let’s imagine that we’re starting talks tomorrow, without a framework, without a freeze, and three months later the talks stop because there’s no progress. You can imagine the disappointment in the streets; that could lead to events like those in September 2000 (when the Second Intifada began). We’ve already been in that disaster.”

But if there are no negotiations, you could reach that same scenario.

“Correct, but at this point we are trying to convince the American and Israeli side that it’s still possible to have serious talks.”

This official’s remarks reflect the common position of the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah, and this is what John Kerry is dealing with, and will have to deal with over the coming months: the Palestinian side — just like the Israeli side — has a complete lack of faith in its “partner.”

“In talks between Abbas and President Obama, the Palestinian president said to his American counterpart that he is 78 years old, and still hopes to see a peace deal with Israel in his lifetime. The

problem is that no one on our side sees anyone on Netanyahu's side as being serious, or having real intentions to advance the peace process," this official concluded." It's sad, but during the last elections in Israel, not only did the settlers become the consensus, but even more than that, no party took an interest in what was going on with the Palestinians. And what's even sadder is that on our side, yet again, we're hearing the opinion that only if Tel Aviv suffers, will something happen with the negotiations."

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/theres-no-palestinian-plan-b-just-an-unrealistic-study-13/>

- **House resolution warns US aid would end if Hamas takes over West**

BankCongressional proposal urges Abbas to take action to stymie Islamists, clarify a presidential succession plan, expand political freedom



NEW YORK – A resolution circulated Tuesday among House members calls on Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to expand political freedom in the West Bank, "clarify" a succession plan should he resign, and take measures to prevent a Hamas takeover in the West Bank, or risk losing American aid money.

Two Chicago-area congressmen, Republican Peter Roskam and Democrat Dan Lipinski, initiated the proposed legislation, which reflects growing concern in Washington over the succession crisis that may occur should Abbas step down or die while in office. The key concern: that the death or resignation of Abbas would lead to a Hamas takeover of the West Bank.

"President Abbas is 78 years old, a prostate cancer survivor, and a frequent traveler who was hospitalized 6 times in 2010," the draft resolution notes. With the resignation of PA Prime Minister

Salam Fayyad on April 13, “President Abbas does not have a responsible heir to succeed him in the event of his death.”

The resolution points to the Palestinian Basic Law, article 37, which states that in the event of the president’s death or resignation, “the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council shall temporarily assume the powers and duties of the Presidency of the National Authority for a period not to exceed sixty (60) days, during which free and direct elections to elect a new President shall take place.”

The current speaker of the PLC, the authors note, is Aziz Dweik, who is affiliated with Hamas, considered a terror organization by the EU, US, Japan, Canada and Israel.

As for the legal requirement to hold prompt elections, the proposed legislation notes that Abbas was last elected in 2005 for a term which officially expired in January 2009. Abbas has served over four years as president without an election.

In effect, the resolution warns of the consequences of a Hamas takeover should

the aging Abbas cede PA leadership to Hamas.

In explaining its rationale, it notes bluntly: “A Hamas-controlled Palestinian Authority would prevent any possibility of a two-state solution between the parties.”

It points out a 2012 law that prohibits US financial “assistance to Hamas or any entity effectively controlled by Hamas, any power-sharing government of which Hamas is a member, or that results from an agreement with Hamas and over which Hamas exercises undue influence.”

Therefore, the resolution warns that “a Hamas takeover of the Palestinian Authority would trigger the suspension of United States foreign aid to the Palestinian Authority,” amounting to some \$400 million annually for security assistance, infrastructure, humanitarian aid and more.

That American assistance makes up some 10 percent of the combined GDP of the West Bank and Gaza, according to the World Bank.

To prevent the loss of this support, the congressional resolution urges, Abbas must “preempt a succession crisis in the Palestinian Authority by addressing the current succession plan, and by identifying figures committed to the peace process with Israel,” and “take preventative measures to limit the possibility of a Hamas takeover in the West Bank.”

He is also urged to “enact reforms to open the political process through fair and responsible elections, ensuring the freedom of speech, the press, and political assembly and allowing a new generation of leadership to freely express their views.”

And finally, the resolution calls on the PA “to ensure that officials participating in any present or future Palestinian Government are committed to the (US, Russia, EU, UN) quartet principles, the recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence, and adherence to previous diplomatic agreements.”

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/house-resolution-would-stop-all-us-aid-if-hamas-takes-over-west-bank/>

- **Jordan: Israel to allow UN into Jerusalem Old City**



AMMAN (AFP) -- Jordan on Tuesday said Israel has agreed to allow a UN mission to "investigate and assess" heritage conservation in Jerusalem's Old City for the first time since 2004.

"Jordan and Palestine, supported by Arab states, succeeded in pressuring Israel, for the first time since 2004, to accept and facilitate a UNESCO experts' mission to investigate and assess the status of heritage and conservation of the Old City of Jerusalem and its walls," a palace statement said.

The mission will start its work on May 15 "and it has to present its report and recommendations before June 1st, 2013, just before the beginning of the World Heritage Committee 37th session," it added.

According to the palace, Israel confirmed its decision in a letter to UNESCO director general Irina Bokova and in a statement read out on Tuesday at a meeting in Paris of UNESCO's executive board.

Israel also agreed to take part in a technical meeting of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization "to discuss recent Israeli violations against the Mughrabi Gate," in Jerusalem, it added.

The Mughrabi ramp leads from the plaza by the Western Wall, the most sacred site at which Jews can pray, up to the adjoining the sacred compound, known to Muslims as Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which houses Al-Aqsa Mosque.

An Israeli foreign ministry spokesman confirmed to AFP that a UNESCO delegation would be arriving "in the near future" but stressed it would visit heritage sites "throughout Israel, not only in Jerusalem".

Yigal Palmor stressed "there was nothing new about this cooperation (between Israel and UNESCO), and any attempt to portray it otherwise is aimed at concealing

the fact some Arab elements have turned UNESCO from a professional agency to a vehicle for political attacks".

"The tendentious language of the statement, loaded with political bias of what is fundamentally a professional activity, is not conducive to finding rational solutions to problems raised by the unwarranted politicization of UNESCO's work, a regrettable phenomenon intensified since the admission of Palestine as a member state in that organization," he added.

Cultural heritage has become a major issue for the two sides since the Palestinians became a UNESCO member in 2011.

Tuesday's announcement comes after a deal was struck in March by which the Palestinian Authority confirmed a verbal agreement dating back to 1924 giving Jordan custodianship over Muslim and Christian sites in Jerusalem.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=588864>

- **Hamas slams PLO accusations of 'Talibanization'**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Hamas on Monday slammed the Palestine Liberation Organization over its use of "inappropriate inciting terminology" as the PLO called on Hamas to annul legislation it has passed in Gaza.



The PLO Executive Committee on Monday issued a statement accusing Hamas of "Muslim Brotherhoodization" and "Talibanization" over new laws it has passed in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas responded in a statement that the PLO's terminology was "taken from the lexicon of assaults against the Islamist movement."

The PLO Executive Committee on Monday called on the Hamas-run government to annul all legislation passed since "the

coup" in 2007, when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip after ousting Fatah from the enclave in a brief civil war. Hamas had won elections a year earlier.

The PLO committee said Hamas could not pass laws without the approval of a majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council. The Fatah-led Palestinian Authority has closed the PLC offices in Ramallah.

Hamas responded that holding Palestinian Legislative Council meetings in Gaza despite Israel's detention of PLC members was "legal and patriotic."

Hamas also denounced "the use of the so-called PLO Executive Committee to maintain Fatah domination over the representation of Palestine."

Hamas is not a member of the PLO.

The PLO committee said that since the state of Palestine is a part of international laws and conventions, all Palestinian legislation should abide by these conventions based on human rights. Palestine is a democratic, civilized and

pro-human rights state, the PLO statement added.

Meanwhile, Hamas noted that its government in Gaza "is the one elected by the Palestinian people, and not a Hamas government as the Executive Committee described it."

Unlike the Ramallah-based government, the Gaza government takes its decisions locally after deeply examining national interests, rather than taking instructions from outsiders, Hamas added.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=588378>

- **EU Report for Palestine: Steady Progress in Cooperation despite Challenges**

JERUSALEM, April 23, 2013 (Wafa) - European Representative John Gatt-Rutter and Minister of Foreign Affairs Riad Al Malki presented Tuesday the 2012 European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) progress report for Palestine, which said that the Palestinian Authority made reasonable progress in implementing the EU – PA Action Plan despite challenges

imposed by Israel and the increasing fiscal crisis, said a press release by EU Representative in Jerusalem.

'In 2012 the Palestinian Authority made reasonable progress in implementing the EU – PA Action Plan in the areas where it is able to exercise control. Yet the challenges imposed primarily by the occupation and the deepening fiscal crisis continued to have an impact on the PA, threatening its viability and undermining its ability to deliver essential services to the population. These realities, coupled with the on-going division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the inability to hold national elections and the continued suspension of the work of the legislature all risk seriously undermining the achievements in the state-building process,' said the release.

The report describes all reforms initiated, carried out successfully, or delayed during 2012 in the different areas of cooperation between the EU and Palestine. Some of the issues reported deserve special attention. In the political area, the democratic legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority continued to decrease in the absence of national elections. A positive

development was the holding of local elections. Serious concerns remain regarding freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, particularly in light of the arrests of journalists and bloggers. Regarding trade-related issues, the Agreement between the EU and the PA on the further liberalization of trade in agriculture, processed agricultural, fish and fisheries products, entered into force in 2012. An increasing number of Palestinian students and researchers benefited from different European programs in the education area.

The report provides a series of recommendations on the basis of the EU – PA Action Plan. In 2013 the PA is invited - inter alia – to: (i) work towards the holding of presidential and legislative elections in Palestine in line with international standards and (ii) reform and further develop the Palestinian security sector.

In its annual Progress Reports, the European Commission takes stock of the reform achievements made by countries within the ENP and identifies the areas where further efforts are needed. The European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign

Affairs and Security Policy first published the annual “neighborhood package” on March 2013 which includes progress reports on 16 of EU's closest neighbors.

Following is the link to the full report:

http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/westbank/documents/eu_westbank/2012_enp_progress_report_palestine_en.pdf

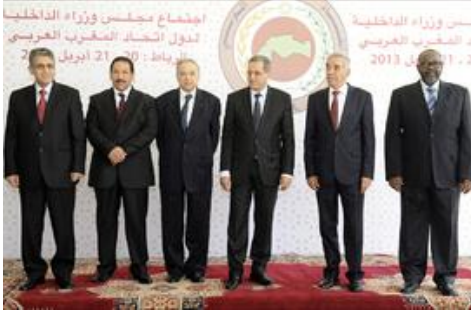
<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22208>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Maghreb states discuss judicial co-operation**

Judges from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania and Libya are advocating increased integration and legal reform throughout the Maghreb region.

Meeting in Nouakchott last week for the Maghreb Union (UMA) judiciary committee session, they discussed the economic and social advantages to greater co-operation.



"The support and development of the judicial and legal dimension between Maghreb countries would be good for the development of trade," UMA Secretary-General Habib Ben Yahia told the 10-member committee and other legal observers on April 15th.

Convergence "between components of the federal system, both at the judiciary and legal levels", he said, "will make them keep pace with the economic, social and cultural transformations witnessed by union states in light of globalisation".

He pointed out that a role was given to the judiciary in the drafting of the Maghreb arbitration system. The system will be in line with the provisions of the convention to promote investment between regional countries with regard to judicial guarantees and settling disputes.

"The establishment of a Maghreb system framed within developed principles and rules will help resolve issues... such as organised crime, terrorist activities and drug smuggling," Ben Yahia said.

"In addition, economic and trade relations between the countries of the union and the world are expanding at a fast pace and are suffering from many disagreements and disputes."

Judges and Maghreb legal experts participating in the meeting discussed several legal projects in order to make the necessary adjustments. They hope that they will be presented to the relevant ministerial councils and to the next session of the UMA Council of the Presidency.

According to legal analyst Bashir Ould Mohamed, the gathering was a step on the road to closer judicial co-operation between Maghreb countries, especially in the field of standardisation of laws governing cross-border crime.

"I think that the primary beneficiary will be peoples before governments, because they are the ones who usually pay the

price for the impunity of criminals who circumvent laws to carry out their crimes," he told Magharebia.

For Moulay Ould Sidi Mohamed, a graduate student in law, "emerging challenges require a unified vision and goals by Maghreb countries, not just laws".

Even "a slight difference in the laws of these countries", he said, can end up "halting or obstructing a case concerning a large group of people".

"This is no longer acceptable in today's world," he said.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/04/23/feature-01

- **Security problems persist in Tripoli**

Gunmen ambushed a Libyan police convoy transporting detainees to a jail in a Tripoli suburb on Thursday (April 18th), killing one prisoner, Justice Minister Salah al-Marghani told AFP.

Several other prisoners were seriously wounded and one kidnapped in the attack on the convoy on its way to a prison in Taji, east of the capital, al-Marghani said.

Colonel Abdul Majeed Raihan from the judicial police said that three policemen were also wounded. The assailants were in four cars without license plates carrying more than 15 people armed with light weapons.

The front of the police car was riddled with bullets and had splatters of blood on the back as well.

The police vehicle and an escort car carrying guards were transferring prisoners to the Reform and Rehabilitation Institution in Tajoura. A police source pointed out that there were no cars to protect and secure the transfer of prisoner vehicles.

In another security incident in the capital, troops operating under the national army and the Joint Security Operations Room were preparing to clear the area of Gharghour, a neighbourhood under the control of a rogue militia.

The militia allegedly attacked the headquarters of the anti-crime police, stole a number of cars and kidnapped three policemen that they later released. On Thursday, they abducted three members of the Immigration Police and stole two of their cars, according to the spokesperson of operation, Essam Naass. He explained that three people were still in the hands of the militias.

As for Leila Altarhuni, a mother of two rebels who joined the Supreme Security Committee Tripoli branch, she said that the government was "weak and does not have the ability to rein in the rebels".

"Prime Minister Ali Zidan, after threatening illegal militias after the abduction of his chief of staff, has changed his position and now is thanking the rebels. Where is the government's role in disarmament, the improvement of the lives of the rebels, and their integration into civilian life? The government only stops their salaries and claims that they are illegal," she added.

Zidan again raises the security issue

After expressing his condolences to the American people over the terrorist attack in Boston, Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan spoke at a press conference held Wednesday afternoon (April 17th) about the south of Libya.

He said that the Libyan Air Force would direct its firepower at any suspicious movement. He said that troops were now stationed in the south and added that reinforcements would be sent soon to achieve stability and start real development in the region. He noted that the south was a military zone and has a military governor.

As for the recent attack that took place against the south at the beginning last week, which was rumoured to be an attempt at a coup d'etat by agents of the former regime, Zidan said it was not of that magnitude.

"We must be vigilant and prepared in that area, but the elements of the former regime are unable to do such thing, and they will not be allowed to do something like that," he said.

Zidan, however, did not provide a definitive answer about who kidnapped his chief of staff Mohamed al-Ghattous. "The problem was not about al-Ghattous. The man has no differences or animosities with any party. It was directed at the prime minister because of a series of decisions he took," he said.

"We are not against anyone," he added. He justified not mentioning the party that kidnapped al-Ghattous, by saying that the issue had been settled.

He added, "The issue is over and the security services are aware of it, and I hope it will not be repeated. We will all sacrifice ourselves for Libya."

"Where is the power of the ministry of defence and the military, where are the military experts?" asked Ayman al-Youssef, a government employee from Tobruk. "Everything therefore must be planned and thought through and the government must either take responsibility or resign. The blood of humans is not cheap, especially for those who are considered the protectors of the homeland."

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/04/22/feature-01

- **Egypt's April 6: Still a political force to be reckoned with?**

After playing key role in 2011 uprising, internecine rifts and lack of clear vision appear to have taken their toll on Egypt's most celebrated youth group



In the spring of 2008, the April 6 youth movement burst onto Egypt's political scene. Five years and a historic uprising later, political observers say the group no longer wields the same influence – due to a combination of political inexperience, internecine fissures, and an over-reliance on street mobilisation.

"April 6 remains an important force on Egypt's political stage, but street protests are only effective – in the current political context – if they can succeed in drawing

hundreds of thousands," political science professor Tarek Fahmy told Ahram Online.

Notably, on the occasion of its five-year anniversary earlier this month, the group failed to stage a hoped-for million-man rally. "Taking this as an indication," Fahmy said, "April 6 should consider other means besides street protests to achieve their objectives."

April 6 first emerged as a Facebook group, established by a handful of young activists in the spring of 2008 as a means of voicing support for a massive labour strike in Egypt's industrial city of Mahalla. The strike would go down in history as the largest-ever labour action to take place under the Mubarak regime's security state.

The Facebook group quickly drew some 100,000 members to its cause. In the strike's aftermath, the online solidarity group – which took its name from the date of a seminal workers' protest – emerged as a political force to be reckoned with.

In the run-up to Egypt's 2011 Tahrir Square uprising, the Mubarak regime

attempted to suppress and intimidate the group with the use of arrests and smear campaigns. Nevertheless, April 6 managed to be a primary organiser of the anti-regime demonstrations that erupted on 25 January and which ultimately culminated in Mubarak's departure.

In the wake of the 18-day uprising, the movement achieved international prominence as a primary factor in the revolution's success.

Post-revolution realpolitik

By the time the group celebrated its third anniversary – its first since the uprising – in the spring of 2011, rumours were circulating about its intention to transform itself into a registered political party or NGO.

The idea did not go down well among certain April 6 members. Several advised against the move, arguing that the group would be stifled if it put itself under government oversight by applying for official party or NGO licenses.

"When Ahmed Maher said he was considering turning the group into an NGO or party, several members strongly

opposed the idea on grounds that it would defeat the purpose of the movement, which they thought should remain a protest group," former group member Diaa Hamdy told Ahram Online.

"What's more," he added, "Maher and his inner circle appeared to begin taking decisions unilaterally."

It was at this point that the first crack appeared, when members who opposed Maher's vision formed an 'opposition front' – later renamed the 'Democratic Front.' Despite the group's frequent denial of the existence of internal splits, the Democratic Front took to the media to prove its existence, prompting media skirmishes between the group's two rival camps.

Meanwhile, in the months following the uprising, protest groups escalated their opposition to Egypt's then-ruling Supreme Military Council. April 6 led opposition to military rule, organising rallies and campaigns against the longstanding practice of trying civilians before military courts, and taking part in pivotal clashes between protesters and security forces in late 2011.

This brought the group under the scrutiny of the military, which accused April 6 of trying to sow dissension between Egypt's armed forces and public. The following spring, the beleaguered group launched an awareness campaign in an effort to refute the military's claims.

Backing Morsi

April 6 was one of several politicised youth groups to declare its support for Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi in Egypt's first-ever free presidential election – at a time when many 'revolutionary' youth groups were calling for an electoral boycott. In a hotly-contested runoff vote, Morsi ended up narrowly defeating Ahmed Shafiq, the Mubarak era's last prime minister.

"It's either the former regime or the revolution; we have no third choice," Maher declared in advance of last summer's poll, when he announced the group's decision to back the Brotherhood candidate.

According to Hamdy, however, this decision precipitated the final split between the group's two camps.

"Up until then, the Democratic Front was still just an opposition front within 6 April," said Hamdy, who himself joined the breakaway faction. "It was at this point that we announced our rejection of the group's decision [to support Morsi] and declared our intention to boycott elections."

Soon after, he said, disaffected group members began promoting their alternative stance "in the name of the April 6 Democratic Front."

April 6's fragmentation into smaller groups – which continue to bear the movement's original name – have since caused confusion as to what the group stands for.

"Looking back, I'm saddened by these divisions," said Hamdy. "They have harmed our image on the street, but our views are too divergent to reconcile now."

The Democratic Front has adopted a more radical tone than its parent group, going

so far as to challenge the legitimacy of the presidential elections.

Breaking with Morsi

The group's initial declaration of support for Morsi, however, had been conditional. In advance of the runoff, it signed a 'National Consensus Agreement' laying down several demands that Morsi was expected to fulfil should he win the presidential race.

These included retrials for Mubarak regime figures acquitted of charges of killing protesters; reformation of the Constituent Assembly, tasked with drafting a new constitution; and the establishment of a national minimum wage.

In the months that followed, major rifts emerged between Islamist and secular Constituent Assembly members, culminating in a mass walkout by the latter (who accounted for roughly one quarter of the assembly).

Maher, however, a member of the assembly, did not join the walkout until November, when he said that he saw no

chance of reaching consensus on Egypt's draft constitution. At that point the group began stepping up its criticism of both President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood from which he hails.

"When Morsi took office, we communicated with the presidency," April 6 co-founder Mohamed Adel told Ahram Online. "We submitted project proposals in the fields of economy and development, but they were never considered."

The group's mounting criticism of the presidency, with Maher now calling Morsi an "extension" of Mubarak, has been met with accusations by the Muslim Brotherhood that Maher's celebrated youth group is now overstepping the popular will.

"We haven't turned against the popular choice, we've turned against Morsi's mismanagement of the country," said Adel. "Just because he's the elected president doesn't mean we don't have the right to protest the [proposed \$4.8 billion] IMF loan, or new legislation restricting demonstrations, or ongoing police abuse."

And then there were three

By the group's fifth anniversary earlier this month, there were three different entities calling themselves April 6.

Tarek El-Kholy, who was dismissed from the Democratic Front last year after attempting to turn it into a political party, is still trying to formally establish an April 6 Party.

"Tarek believes it's an opportunity the group should take," said Hamdy. "He believes that, while a real opposition party couldn't exist under Mubarak, we now have a real chance to join the political contest, to have a backbone."

Hamdy, for his part, still disapproves of the idea of launching an official political party, something he has in common with Adel.

"The group was first established with the purpose of bringing down the Mubarak regime – an idea that seemed impossible at the time, but it happened," said Adel. "It's an outmoded, old-guard mentality that cleaves to the notion that we must be

politically institutionalised to achieve anything."

Fahmy, however, believes the group must evolve further to become effective.

"The only chance the group has at becoming the pressure group that it wants to be is to establish a solid structure," he said. "April 6 needs to build political experience. Their inexperience is the reason they stagger back and forth between allies."

"They lost the support of other protest groups when they backed Morsi in the elections," he added. "And now that they've turned against Morsi, they can't win back the opposition. This was reflected in the weak show of support by other opposition groups for April 6's fifth anniversary rallies."

Those rallies, the turnout for which could be counted in the thousands, were billed as a protest against the presidency and police. The group's main demonstration outside Egypt's High Court in downtown Cairo ended – like so many other recent protests – in clashes with police.

"We have no other means at our disposal but to protest and the police know this; they sabotage our protests because of it," said Adel.

But Fahmy believes it is no longer effective – or beneficial – to place so much emphasis on street mobilisation alone.

"Because it is politically inexperienced, April 6 isn't taking the development of Egypt's post-revolution political scene into account," he said. "They can't go on living in their pre-revolution form. By having no organisation or clear, unified vision, they risk going from a potent political force to a merely symbolic movement."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/69893/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-April--Still-a-political-force-to-be-reckon.aspx>

- **Islamist party accuses top judge of endorsing foreign interference**

Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya's Building and Development Party blasts head of Egypt's Judges Club for what it claims was his encouragement of foreign interference in Egypt's internal affairs



The legal advisor of Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya's Building and Development Party Adel Moawad presented a complaint to Prosecutor-General Talaat Abdullah on Tuesday, calling for the removal of the immunity of the Head of Egypt's Judges Club, Ahmed El-Zend.

As a judge, El-Zend has legal immunity. At a press conference on Monday, he spoke out against protests organised by the Muslim Brotherhood on Friday which called for a purging of the "corrupt" judiciary. El-Zend said he would present a legal complaint to the International Criminal Court (ICC) against the organisers of Friday's protests as a "crime against humanity." He also directed a message at President Barack Obama.

"I tell Obama, if you are not aware of what is happening in Egypt, this is a big crisis, and if you are aware, that is a bigger crisis because America should take responsibility and remove the burden

experienced by the Egyptian people, especially its judges."

Moawad stated that El-Zend's actions were an attempt to "encouraging foreign forces to interfere in Egypt's internal affairs."

"At a time where Egypt has broken its shackles of dependency on the West...and removed the dictator Hosni Mubarak, following the 25 January revolution, we were surprised with El-Zend's comments in yesterday's press conference, where he directed his message to Obama," Moawad said.

The anti-judiciary protests and ensuing clashes, which took place on Friday, form the latest chapter in an ongoing tug-of-war between the presidency and the judiciary, which started in November 2012 when President Morsi controversially dismissed former prosecutor-general Abdel Meguid Mahmoud from his post and appointed Abdullah in his place.

A separate statement by the Youth Committee of Judges and Prosecutors on Tuesday called for an end to the current

crisis between the judiciary and the presidency.

On Monday morning, President Morsi met with members of Egypt's Supreme Judicial Council and Abdullah to discuss the situation.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/69970/Egypt/Politics-/Islamist-party-accuses-top-judge-of-endorsing-fore.aspx>

- **U.S. Report Criticizes State of Human Rights in Tunisia**

An annual report released Friday by the United States Department of State presents numerous incidents in which human rights in Tunisia have allegedly been violated or improperly protected.

The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices are issued every year and provide an assessment of the human rights situations of countries around the world.

“The most important human rights problems during the year were security

force laxity regarding extremist crimes, the use of excessive force during protestor arrests, and some constraints on freedom of the press,” the report on Tunisia states.

“The government was slow to investigate claims of police brutality,” it continues, asserting that the government at times refused to cooperate with parliamentary committees looking into abuses. It also cites “instances of impunity for Salafist extremists” who avoided prosecution for alleged crimes.

The U.S. State Department cites specific incidents of unlawful killings allegedly committed by security forces, including the shooting by police of a demonstrator in Sfax in January 2012 and the June 2012 killing of a student by police in Sousse.

The report accuses the government of improperly addressing potentially serious rights violations.

“During the year there were accusations detainees had been tortured, but authorities did not fully investigate these claims,” it states.

The State Department report is also highly critical of the Tunisian prison system and how the facilities are utilized. Of the 21,300 prisoners in the system, fully 11,000 of them have not been convicted of a crime and are held in pretrial detention. The report states that prisoners have inadequate personal space, there is insufficient access to healthcare, and that prisons lack necessary equipment for prisoner safety, including smoke alarms and fire extinguishers. Due to overcrowding, those held in pretrial detention were improperly kept with convicted criminals.

There were a number of instances where security personnel violently confronted protesters, according to the report. Among other incidents, it cites protests in Siliana in November, during which an estimated 300 demonstrators were injured, with some blinded after being shot in the face with birdshot.

The report is highly critical of the government's alleged interference in the independence of the judiciary.

"The executive branch strongly influenced judicial procedures, particularly in cases

involving political dissidents and oppositionists," the report reads. "Cases involving religious extremists or associated hooligans were often not carried through to prosecution, while cases brought against secularists or involving freedom of expression resulted in lengthy trials and harsh verdicts."

It cited a case in which two people were sentenced to seven years in prison for insulting Islam on their Facebook pages.

The document presents numerous instances of interference with journalistic freedom, including the prosecution of journalists, bloggers, and Sami Fehri, the head of the Ettounsiya television station.

The report also asserts that the use of Sharia (Islamic law) as a basis for customary law in family and inheritance disputes infringes on women's rights. Under Sharia, property acquired during marriage is held in the name of the husband and women are forbidden from marrying outside their religion. Customary law based on Sharia prohibits women from marrying outside their religion.

Tunisia Live asked for comment on this report from the Ministry of Human Rights and Transitional Justice, but two ministry personnel contacted for this article said they were not aware of the document.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/04/23/us-report-criticizes-state-of-human-rights-in-tunisia/>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Al-Nusra Front warns Suleiman that “Beirut will be burned”**

The Syrian rebel group, Al-Nusra Front, issued a warning to Lebanese President Michel Suleiman about the Shiite group Hezbollah’s involvement in the ongoing violence in Syria.

“After [failing to] abide by the policy of dissociation...in Syria, we inform you, and you can consider this as a last warning, that you should take immediate measures to restrain the dogs of Lebanon [Hezbollah], whose members are all Lebanese, and move to prevent them from interfering in Syria’s internal affairs,” the statement carried Tuesday on Egyptian news website Al-Yawm al-Sabaa read.

“Fire will soon be kindled in Beirut. If you do not [react] within 24 hours, we will consider you accomplices in the massacres that the members of the party of the devil [Hezbollah] is committing.”

“We will then have to [take] special measures and burn anyone we encounter in Beirut and elsewhere,” the statement added.

The statement by Al-Nusra Front came as reports emerged in the past weeks that Hezbollah has been fighting against rebels in the Homs province and outside Damascus, with news outlets reporting that a number of party members have been killed while fighting in Syria.

Al-Nusra Front is one of the most prominent extremist organizations to emerge in Syria after more than two years of violence between President Bashar al-Assad’s regime loyalists and rebels, following an uprising that began as peaceful protests in March 2011.

Meanwhile, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Monday that elite fighters from Hezbollah are leading the

fight against rebels in the region of Al-Qusayr in the central province of Homs.

The reports created a stir in Lebanon, which is deeply divided over the Syrian crisis, while its government has repeatedly announced that it was adopting a neutral stance regarding the crisis in neighboring Syria and that it will abide by the neutral policy of dissociation.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/al-nusra-front-warns-suleiman-beirut-will-be-burned>

- **EU provides Lebanon with additional funding for Syrian refugees**

BEIRUT: The European Commission agreed Tuesday to provide 30 million Euros (\$38.9 million) in additional funding to help Lebanon cope with the rising number of Syrian refugees.



“The European Commission adopted a decision to provide a 30 million Euros additional financial support to Lebanon to mitigate the impact of the Syrian crisis in the country,” the EU Neighborhood Partnership Instrument’s website reported.

It added that 5 million Euros would be designated for Palestine refugees from Syria who are estimated to number 40,000.

The additional funding brings the total amount of financial assistance offered by the EU to Lebanon at more than 90 million Euros in humanitarian and non-humanitarian aid.

The website quoted the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, Stefan Fule, as saying that Lebanon receives the highest number of people fleeing the fighting in Syria, adding that the regional organization recognized that such an influx “puts this country under enormous strain.”

“The hospitality and generosity displayed by the Lebanese towards their neighbors

is admirable and commendable. The EU remains committed to assisting Lebanon in its response to the refugee crisis,” he said.

He also welcomed Lebanon’s decision to keep its borders open as well as its comprehensive response plan to deal with the refugee crisis.

The EU assistance aims at “improving access to educational and early childhood development services for both Syrian refugees and those Lebanese communities hosting refugees often in their own homes [and] empowering local communities socially and economically.”

The funding would also strengthen existing structures for the care of children and other vulnerable groups as well as providing support to Palestine refugees from Syria.

The office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees said last week it had registered 428,000 Syrians in Lebanon so far. Government officials warn that there could be several hundred thousand unregistered displaced persons, in addition to the 40,000 Palestinian

refugees who have fled the violence from Syria to Lebanon.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Apr-23/214784-eu-provides-lebanon-with-additional-funding-for-syrian-refugees.ashx#axzz2RNCALaz3>

- **Jordanian-Palestinian lobbying at UNESCO ‘pushes Israel to accept Jerusalem expert mission’**

AMMAN — Jordan and Palestine, supported by other Arab states, helped secure Israeli acceptance of a UNESCO experts’ mission to investigate and assess the status of heritage and conservation of the Old City of Jerusalem on Tuesday.

This breakthrough is the result of a recent agreement signed between His Majesty King Abdullah and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, under which Jordan is entitled to take all the necessary legal procedures to defend Al Aqsa Mosque and Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, according to a statement sent to The Jordan Times by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs later Tuesday.

Lobbying at UNESCO is part of these efforts to curb Israeli unilateral measures in the holy city.

According to the statement, the mission will embark on its Jerusalem job on May 15, 2013, and is expected to compile a report and recommendations before June 1st, 2013, just before the beginning of the World Heritage Committee's 37th session.

The Israeli commitment came Tuesday in an official letter presented to the UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova and in a statement read by Israel in front of the current UNESCO Executive Board's 191st Session in Paris.

"The experts' mission mandate will also include a follow-up on the progress of UNESCO action plan for safeguarding and conserving the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls," the statement said.

Jordan registered Jerusalem as a World Heritage Site in 1981 and a World Heritage Site in Danger in 1982.

The ministry added that Israel has also been pressured to participate in a UNESCO technical meeting regarding recent Israeli

violations against the area of the Buraq Wall and Bab Al Magharbeh in Paris next month, adding that Jordan and Palestine have condemned the Israeli absence from a similar UNESCO meeting that was held in April 2012.

Jordanian and Palestinian representatives at UNESCO have made two previous statements warning against the continuation of recent escalatory Israeli violations against the holy sites and the authenticity of the heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem, the ministry noted.

"The two statements also warned Israel against violating its commitments to this mission, which were made in front of a UNESCO delegation." The two representatives emphasised that Israel must be fully committed to international obligations, the ministry said.

Claims over the bias of UNESCO are raised routinely by Israel and the US whenever Jerusalem is discussed at meetings, the official statement added.

Since 2004, Jordan and Palestine have issued annual UNESCO resolutions condemning the Israeli occupation's

violations against Jerusalem and demanding Israel to facilitate the UNESCO experts' mission. According to the statement, "Israel has not complied to these calls until today in an attempt to keep its violations covert and to impose its occupation plans on the ground".

<http://jordantimes.com/jordanian-palestinian-lobbying-at-unesco-pushes-israel-to-accept-jerusalem-expert-mission>

6. SYRIA

- **Kerry: NATO needs plan for Syrian chemical weapons**

BRUSSELS (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry urged NATO on Tuesday to prepare for the possible use of chemical weapons by Syria on the same day that a senior Israeli military intelligence official said Syrian President Bashar Assad had used such weapons last month in his battle against insurgents.

It was the first time Israel had accused the embattled Syrian leader of using his stockpile of nonconventional weapons.

The assessment, based on visual evidence, could raise pressure on the U.S. and other

Western countries to intervene in Syria. Britain and France recently announced that they had evidence that Assad's government had used chemical weapons.

President Barack Obama has warned that the use of chemical weapons by Assad would be a "game changer" and has hinted that it could draw intervention.

But White House spokesman Jay Carney said while the administration is continuing to monitor and investigate whether the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons, it has "not come to the conclusion that there has been that use."

"But it is something that is of great concern to us, to our partners, and obviously unacceptable as the president made clear," Carney said.

Despite the deteriorating situation, NATO officials say there is virtually no chance the alliance will intervene in the civil war. More than 70,000 people have died in the conflict, according to the United Nations. The violence also has forced more than 1 million Syrians to seek safety abroad, and more are leaving by the day, burdening

neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq.

On Tuesday, Brig. Gen. Itai Brun, the head of research and analysis in Israeli military intelligence, told a security conference in Tel Aviv that Assad had used chemical weapons multiple times. Among the incidents were attacks documented by the French and British near Damascus last month.

He cited images of people hurt, but gave no indication he had other evidence, such as soil samples, typically used to verify chemical weapons use.

"To the best of our professional understanding, the regime used lethal chemical weapons against the militants in a series of incidents over the past months, including the relatively famous incident of March 19," Brun said. "Shrunken pupils, foaming at the mouth and other signs indicate, in our view, that lethal chemical weapons were used."

He said sarin, a lethal nerve agent, was probably used. He also said the Syrian regime was using less lethal chemical weapons. And he appeared to lament the

lack of response by the international community.

"The fact that chemical weapons were used without an appropriate response is a very disturbing development because it could signal that such a thing is legitimate," he said.

Israel, which borders Syria, has been warily watching the Syrian civil war since fighting erupted there in March 2011. Although Assad is a bitter enemy, Israel has been careful not to take sides, partly because the Assad family has kept the border with Israel quiet for 40 years and partly because of fears of what might happen if he were toppled.

Israeli officials are concerned that Assad's stockpile of chemical weapons and other advanced arms could reach the hands of his ally, the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, or Islamic extremist groups trying to oust him from Syria.

Kerry, attending his first meeting of NATO's governing body, the North Atlantic Council, as America's top diplomat, said contingency plans should be put in place to guard against the threat of a chemical

strike. Turkey, a member of the military alliance, borders Syria and would be most at risk from such an attack. NATO has already deployed Patriot missile batteries in Turkey.

"Planning regarding Syria, such as what (NATO) has already done, is an appropriate undertaking for the alliance," Kerry told NATO foreign ministers. "We should also carefully and collectively consider how NATO is prepared to respond to protect its members from a Syrian threat, including any potential chemical weapons threat."

Speaking at a news conference after the meeting, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the alliance is "extremely concerned about the use of ballistic missiles in Syria and the possible use of chemical weapons." However, he also noted that NATO has not been asked to intervene.

"There is no call for NATO to play a role, but if these challenges remain unaddressed they could directly affect our own security," he told reporters. "So we will continue to remain extremely vigilant."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in Brussels to talk with his counterparts from NATO countries, said Russia would want any investigation of whether chemical weapons have been used to be conducted by experts and concern only the specific report being investigated.

Speaking through a translator in a press conference at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Lavrov said that, in March, after each side in Syria's civil war accused the other of using chemical weapons in northern Aleppo province, the U.N. investigation became politicized and overly broad. Instead of sending experts to study the specific area and the specific allegation, Lavrov said investigators demanded access to all facilities in the country and the right to interview all Syrian citizens.

In Washington, Pentagon spokesman George Little said the U.S. "continues to assess reports of chemical weapons use in Syria."

"The use of such weapons would be entirely unacceptable," he added.

Later in the day, Kerry appeared to try to soften his earlier remarks, saying he had no way of knowing what the facts were.

"I didn't ask for additional planning," he said. "I think it might have been the secretary general or somebody who commented that we may need to do some additional planning. But there is no specific request. What there was from me was a very clear statement about the threat of chemical weapons and the potential for chemical weapons generically to fall into bad hands."

He also said the Obama administration is "looking at every option that could possibly end the violence and usher in a political transition" and that plans need to be made now to ensure that there is no power vacuum when that takes place. He said increasing aid to the Syrian National Coalition and its military command, the Supreme Military Council, would be critical to that effort.

Many of NATO's 28 members also belong to the European Union, which on Monday lifted its oil embargo on Syria to provide more economic support to the rebels and is now considering easing an arms

embargo on the country to allow weapons transfers to those fighting the Assad regime.

Kerry did not mention the possible easing of the EU embargo but he did say that NATO should begin to think about taking on a larger role in planning for a post-Assad Syria, particularly in dealing with the country's chemical weapons stockpiles.

The NATO ministers were also working Tuesday on defining how the alliance would support Afghan forces after 2014, when NATO will no longer have a combat role.

With next year's transition date looming, Kerry will host three-way talks in Brussels on Wednesday with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and top Pakistani officials aimed at speeding possible reconciliation talks with the Taliban and improving trust and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

On the sidelines of the NATO meeting, Kerry met Lavrov to discuss a range of issues, including Syria. He also thanked Lavrov for Russian President Vladimir

Putin's statement of condolence to the U.S. for last week's bombings at the Boston Marathon blamed on two ethnic Chechen brothers.

http://article.wn.com/view/2013/04/23/Kerry_urges_NATO_allies_to_up_aid_to_Syrian_rebels_5/#/related_news

- **'Children killed' in Syria air raids**

At least 16 die, including children, in Kurdish village in Hassaka as regime jets pound rebel areas, activists say.



Syrian government warplanes have carried out airstrikes on a rebel-aligned neighbourhood of the capital, Damascus, as well as a village in the country's northeast, killing at least 25 people, including 12 children, activists have said.

On Sunday, government jets bombed rebel-held areas in the predominantly Kurdish village of Hadad in the northeastern province of Hassaka, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

It said at least 16 people were killed, including two women and three children.

A Hassaka-based activist who was in Hadad when the planes struck said the bombs sent huge plumes of black smoke billowing over the town. He spoke on condition that he be identified only by his nickname of Abu Qasem - by which he is widely known among his comrades - out of fear of reprisals.

Another airstrike on the Damascus neighbourhood of Qaboun killed at least nine children, the Observatory said.

Civilian areas

With its ground forces stretched thin, President Bashar al-Assad's regime has relied heavily on its fighter jets and helicopters to try to stem rebel advances in the country's civil war.

The air raids also frequently hit civilian areas, drawing criticism from the international community.

A Human Rights Watch report last week accused the Syrian government of committing war crimes by using indiscriminate and sometimes deliberate airstrikes against civilians, killing at least 4,300 people since the summer.

The government frequently targets Qaboun, where rebels pushed in early this year. The district has been ravaged by heavy street clashes and shelling since then as the military has tried to expel the anti-Assad fighters.

The Observatory, which relies on a network of activists on the ground, also reported that four civilians died after being tortured in a jail in the town of Zakyeh. It did not provide any further details.

In the southern city of Deraa, the Syrian army shot and killed a man, the Observatory said.

Lebanese border

Fighting has spilled over on several occasions into neighbouring states, including Lebanon, Turkey and Israel, stoking fears that those countries could be dragged into the conflict.

On Sunday, two rockets fired from Syria exploded in the Lebanese border village of al-Qasr, killing one person and wounding two, a Lebanese security official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to brief reporters.

Two more rockets landed a nearby village of Hawsh, but there were no reports of casualties.

There has been heavy fighting near the frontier in recent days as Syrian government troops try to regain control of the strategic area from rebels.

Also on Sunday, the main Western-backed opposition bloc expressed concern about the Islamic extremist rebel faction Jabhat al-Nusra's pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda last week.

In a statement, the Syrian National Coalition urged Jabhat al-Nusra, one of the most powerful and effective rebel

groups, "to stay within the ranks of nationalistic Syrians, to continue its efforts in fighting the Assad regime, and in supporting and protecting the freedom of all Syrian sects".

Jabhat al-Nusra's pledge of fealty sparked concern that the allegiance to al-Qaeda meant the group would be beholden to non-Syrian interests.

But the broader rebellion desperately needs the extremist group's fighting skills in its battle to topple Assad. Al-Nusra itself has sought to ease concerns by saying it remains dedicated to the Syrian uprising's cause of toppling the Assad regime.

Meanwhile, in the northern province of Aleppo, three journalists working for state TV were wounded in a car bombing on Sunday, the SANA state news agency said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/2013414152259238343.html>

- **US urges NATO to consider role in Syria**

Secretary of state says "careful" consideration required to respond to alleged use of chemical weapons by Syrian regime.

The US secretary of state has said that NATO needs to consider its role in the Syrian crisis, including how prepared it is to respond to a potential chemical weapons threat.

John Kerry told a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels on Tuesday that the planning that the alliance had already done was appropriate.

"We should also carefully and collectively consider how NATO is prepared to respond to protect its members from a Syrian threat, including any potential chemical weapons threat," he said.

NATO, a US-led military alliance of 28 countries, has said repeatedly it has no intention of intervening militarily in the Syrian war.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Israeli military's top intelligence analyst said Syrian government forces had used chemical weapons - probably nerve gas - in their

fight against rebels trying to topple President Bashar al-Assad

Brigadier General Itai Brun made the comments at a Tel Aviv security conference a day after US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel said, at the end of a visit to Israel, that US intelligence agencies were still assessing whether such weapons had been employed.

According to Kerry, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, could not confirm Brun's comments about Syrian chemical arms.

Jay Carney, the White House spokesperson, said on Tuesday that the US has not concluded that chemical weapons had been used and that it was difficult to determine if they were.

'Regional threat'

US President Barack Obama has called the use of chemical weapons a red line for the United States that would trigger unspecified US action.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the secretary-general of NATO, said the organisation

was "extremely concerned about the use of ballistic missiles in Syria and the possible use of chemical weapons".

Rasmussen also said that NATO was concerned about the risk of the conflict spilling over Syria's borders.

"I can assure you that we stand ready to defend, protect our allies, in this case Turkey, as a neighbour of Syria. We have all plans ready to ensure effective defence and protection of Turkey," he added.

"The situation in Syria has dramatically deteriorated," Rasmussen said. "This continues to pose a threat to regional stability."

NATO has previously sent Patriot missile batteries to neighbouring Turkey to help defend the NATO member against possible missile attack from Syria.

Nerve-gas

Brun said that evidence of the usage of chemical weapons could be seen in the physical symptoms suffered by those who had apparently been exposed to chemical agents.

"The reduced pupils, the foam coming out of the mouth and other additional signs provide evidence that deadly chemical weapons have been used," he said adding that the chemical used is most likely Sarin, a deadly, colourless and odourless nerve agent.

Sarin, which was developed as a pesticide in Germany in 1938, in high doses, paralyses the muscles around the lungs and prevents chemicals from "switching off" the body's secretions, so victims suffocate or drown as their lungs fill with mucus and saliva.

There were more than a thousand tonnes of chemical agents in Syria and "a lot" of warheads and missiles that could be armed with the deadly substance, reported Haaretz newspaper quoting Brun.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/2013423133258432886.html>

- **Syria opposition names interim leader**

Syrian National Coalition names veteran dissident George Sabra as interim chief, following Moaz al-Khatib's resignation.

The Syrian National Coalition has named veteran dissident George Sabra as caretaker leader of the main opposition grouping, following the resignation of Moaz al-Khatib.

Sabra "was assigned today to carry out the functions of the head of the Coalition until elections for a new president," one of the Coalition's main constituent groups, the Syrian National Council, said in a statement on Monday.

Sabra is a leftist, secular opposition figure and a leading member of the Syrian Democratic People's party, a former communist party.

He was a co-founder of the Damascus Declaration opposition coalition in 2005.

Sabra has lived in Syria for most of his life and has been jailed many times for dissent.

In October 2011, he fled to Paris to help form the post-uprising opposition.

'Crime against humanity'

At a press conference in Istanbul following his designation as interim opposition leader, Sabra denounced President Bashar al-Assad's regime for what the opposition has called recent "massacres" outside of Damascus.

The exact death toll in the Jdaidet Artouz and Jdaidet al-Fadel districts could not be confirmed, but Sabra put the number at "more than 500".

The two adjacent neighbourhoods are about 15km southwest of the capital.

"It is beyond description and more barbarian than horror movies," Sabra said.

"What's taking place in Damascus are crimes against humanity," Sabra said. "It is nothing short of genocide, and the international community must act".

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the death toll, mostly from shelling, could be as high as 250.

The Local Coordination Committees (LCC), another activist group, put the death toll at 483.

A government official in Damascus told The Associated Press that rebels were behind the "massacre" in Jdaidet al-Fadel, saying they sought to blame government forces who entered the area after the killings.

Jdaidet al-Fadel is inhabited mostly by Syrians who fled the Golan Heights after the area was captured by Israel in 1967.

Jdaidet Artouz has a large Christian and Druse population - two minority communities that have generally stood by Assad or on the sidelines.

Lebanese groups

Sabra also described Lebanese group Hezbollah's role in fighting in the central Syrian province of Homs as a declaration of war against the Syrian people.

"What is happening in Homs is a declaration of war against the Syrian people and the Arab League should deal with it on this basis," said.

"The Lebanese president and the Lebanese government should realise the danger that it poses to the lives of Syrians and the future relations between the two peoples and countries," he added.

Sabra's condemnation of the role of the Lebanese group follows reports that elite fighters from the organisation were taking the lead in the Syrian regime's battle against rebel fighters in the Qusayr area of Homs.

The area, near the Lebanese border, has been the scene of fierce fighting in recent days, with regime troops capturing a string of strategic villages and raising rebel concerns that the town of Qusayr, an opposition stronghold, could also fall.

"It's Hezbollah that is leading the battle in Qusayr, with its elite forces," Rami Abdel Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told AFP news agency.

The area is considered strategically important because it lies near the Lebanese border and the highway connecting Damascus to the coast.

Assad reportedly told a group of visiting Lebanese politicians at the weekend that the fighting in the area was the "main battle" his forces were waging.

"We want to finish it at any cost," a Lebanese politician at the meeting quoted him as saying.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/2013422152033307536.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Bahrain slams US rights report

Report ignores progress in promoting people's rights, says Bahrain foreign ministry

Manama: Bahrain's foreign ministry has expressed dismay over the annual report issued by the State Department on the human rights situation in Bahrain.

"The report lacks objectivity and impartiality, and has overlooked Bahrain's progress in protecting and promoting

human rights,” the ministry said in a statement.

“The report did not shed light on the most significant steps taken by the kingdom towards consolidating human rights achievements. It also undermined the independence of the judicial system and overlooked facts and figures mentioned by the unit tasked with the implementation of the recommendations set by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI),” the ministry said on Tuesday.

The BICI, a fact-finding panel of international crime experts, was set up by King Hamad Bin Eisa Al Khalifa in June 2011 to look into the events that occurred in Bahrain in February and March and their consequences.

In November 2011, following four months of field work and interviews with all parties in the country, it issued a searing report and a series of recommendations to ensure the dramatic events are not repeated.

The government accepted the findings and pledged to implement the

recommendations, especially those related to security and detention issues.

The US report claimed that human rights problems in Bahrain were related to the “arrest and detention of protesters on vague charges” and to the “lack of due process in trials of political and human rights activists, medical personnel, teachers, and students, with some resulting in harsh sentences”.

It however added that “some protesters engaged in lethal acts of violence against security forces, including the use of improvised explosive devices, Molotov cocktails, and other improvised weapons”.

The foreign ministry disputed the conclusions about the security matters.

“The State Department report has failed to mention the reforms and achievements accomplished by Bahrain, especially the ones related to the security sector, including arrest measures and detention conditions,” the ministry said.

According to the statement, the credibility of the US report was seriously affected and its significance eroded after it failed to include the official information provided

by the government upon a request from the US embassy in Manama for the drafting of the account.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-slams-us-rights-report-1.1174430>

- **No place for non-Muslim places of worship in Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Justice Minister says 'home of Muslim holy places' will retain its longstanding ban on non-Muslim places of worship.



RIYADH - Ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia will retain its longstanding ban on non-Muslim places of worship, Justice Minister Mohammed al-Issa said in comments reported by the Saudi media on Wednesday.

As Saudi Arabia is "home to the Muslim holy places, it does not allow the establishment of non-Muslim places of worship," the Al-Hayat newspaper quoted Issa as telling European MPs in Brussels.

Saudi Arabia, home to the holy Kaaba -- the cube-shaped structure at the Grand Mosque in Mecca towards which Muslims worldwide pray -- has come in for repeated criticism for its ban on non-Muslim places of worship.

Although Saudi Arabia's citizen population is Muslim, the kingdom is also home to millions of expatriates of various beliefs.

Unlike Saudi Arabia, the kingdom's Gulf Arab neighbours allow the building of churches and the celebration of non-Muslim feasts.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58327>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Bomb attacks wound 17 in Pakistan**

Bomb attacks wounded 17 people in Pakistan on Wednesday and targeted an

election candidate in the run-up to historic general elections in the nuclear-armed country, police said.

The first attack wounded 13 people near a Shia Muslim mosque and a private hospital in Pakistan's southwestern city of Quetta, police said.

The bicycle bomb exploded in the Satellite Town area of Quetta, the capital of the oil and gas-rich province of Baluchistan, which borders Afghanistan and Iran.

Police official Fayaz Sumbal said the target was not clear as the injured were mainly bystanders and there was no immediate claim of responsibility.

In the northwestern city of Peshawar, police said another bomb wounded four people outside the home of a local leader in the Pakistan People's Party, which is seeking re-election at the ballot box on May 11 after five years in power.

A third bomb hit the convoy of an election candidate, Israr Ullah Gandapur, seeking re-election as an independent.

Police said the attack happened in the northwestern district of Dera Ismail Khan, but that Gandapur escaped unhurt.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. The Taleban has directly threatened the outgoing coalition partners, the PPP, the Awami National Party and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, which are perceived as secular.

Pakistan goes to the polls on May 11 for an election that will mark the first time a civilian government has handed over power at the ballot box after completing a full term in office, in a country used to extended periods of military rule.

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/international/2013/April/international_April952.xml§ion=international

- **Despite Gains Against Taliban, Helmand Residents Feel Insecure**

After years of bloodshed, a tenuous calm has emerged in Helmand. Large swaths of the southern Afghan province, once a

bastion of the Taliban insurgency, have been wrested from militant control.

The daily firefights and roadside bombs that plagued Helmand have abated. Development is evident. Schools have been built, roads have been paved, and markets reopened. Local elections have been held, giving the government the opportunity to expand its presence to remote areas.

But despite the inroads, security in the province has been piecemeal and few residents appear optimistic about the future.

Some express fears that the Taliban will return in force once foreign troops leave. Others say Afghanistan's fledgling security forces will be unable to protect the hard-fought gains made in Helmand. And rampant corruption has diminished confidence in the local government.

A Job Undone?

Around 8,000 American and 9,000 British soldiers are currently deployed in the province, but most are on their way out in

keeping with the expected withdrawal of most foreign forces by the end of 2014.

The 24,000 Afghan National Army (ANA) troops stationed in Helmand now lead the vast majority of combat operations -- about 80 percent. In the coming months, they will take full control of security in the province, with coalition forces stepping back into an advisory role.

Some residents who spoke to RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan said they were concerned that international troops will leave before the job is done. The Taliban, despite being pushed back, has continued intermittent fighting in pockets in the province's north. The province's poppy harvest, which provides some 40 percent of the world's opium supply, remains a prized asset for the militants.

Abdul Aziz is a resident of Lashkargah, the provincial capital. Aziz says that without the presence of Western soldiers, Helmand will descend into chaos. He says that while the daily violence in the capital has slowed, militants have continued to sow fear through sporadic attacks on tribal elders and government officials.

"There is no security. Currently, you see that the Taliban are placing mines inside the city." Aziz says. "And if foreign troops go out [of Afghanistan], it is possible that we will go back to [how it was] three or four years ago. And the Taliban might come back and take control of all the areas and all efforts made by the government and the military will have been in vain."

'Creeping Back'

In several northern districts in Helmand, violence has gone up in the past year. Najeeb Dawari is a resident of the Marjah district, the scene of one of the largest offensives of the war. He says the huge sacrifices made to capture Marjah could all be for nothing if coalition forces leave without leaving behind an Afghan force capable of protecting those gains.

A "surge" consisting of 15,000 U.S. and British soldiers was dispatched to Marjah, a Taliban stronghold in central Helmand. After months of fierce fighting that resulted in high numbers of fatalities, Marjah was wrested from Taliban control by the end of 2010.

Dawari says the Taliban is now "creeping back" and could pounce again once coalition forces depart.

"People are very hopeless now. When I myself go out to the city, I have this point in mind as to whether I will return home soundly," Dawari says, "All is hopeless. When we see the police, they are in danger. Despite being armed and having authority, they are being killed in the city. So, as an ordinary shopkeeper, I am afraid that there will be a suicide attack today and that I will be killed in the next attack."

A sign of the fragile gains was an audacious attack carried out earlier this year by insurgents against Camp Bastion, a heavily fortified NATO base in northern Helmand that houses some 20,000 British troops. Militants using mortars and rocket-propelled grenades killed two American Marines in February and destroyed or severely damaged eight attack jets, causing more than \$200 million in damage.

The bold attack on Camp Bastion, one of the largest and best defended posts in Afghanistan, stands as the costliest single

attack that the international coalition has sustained in terms of damage.

Corruption Allegations

As fearful as locals are of a Taliban comeback, they are equally angry at the provincial and central government, which they accuse of being ineffective and corrupt.

Aziz says farmers, many of whom have been left impoverished as a result of the government's poppy-eradication campaign, will quickly return to cultivation and look to the Taliban for protection.

He alleges that while many officials outwardly support the war on drugs, many turn a blind eye to poppy harvesting and even extort money from farmers.

"In the current situation, the Afghan forces cannot [maintain security] because all the senior and junior officials are thinking about their own pockets," Aziz says. "Because of that, I don't think that the government will be able to safeguard Afghanistan or, in general, Helmand after 2014."

Despite the fragile security in Helmand, the international presence there is diminishing by the day. Out of the 240 NATO bases that were once located in the province, only 44 remain. Helmand's Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), which has been heavily involved in efforts to rebuild hospitals, schools, and roads over the past seven years, is also packing its bags.

The drawdown of foreign forces is going into motion just as Afghan troops enter the heaviest fighting season. Questions surround the readiness of Afghan forces, which suffer from a high rate of desertion, a poor reenlistment record, low morale, and a lack of equipment.

But officials believe the Afghan security forces and police will be able to manage, whatever the Taliban throws at it. Abdul Nabil, the provincial police chief of Helmand, is among those who are optimistic.

"We have always said that the [Afghan National Police] are becoming more professional with every passing day," Nabil says. "The provincial police department of Helmand is trying all it can

to train a police force that the people want and the law requires."

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

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM research assistant **Miray Başar**. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

Bu bülten **ORSAM araştırma asistanı **Miray Başar** tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*