



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

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25 APRIL 2013

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ORSAM

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STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
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1. IRAQ

- **Motahedoon list: We are the second winner in Baghdad's elections.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Motahedoon list, headed by the Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi confirmed that the rate of participation in the provincial elections in Baghdad did not exceed 27% according to observers' reports, confirming it came second after the State of Law coalition.

A press release of the list said that through the numbers that have accumulated during the past few days confirmed that it got 164177 votes, indicating that the (citizen list and the Ahrar came third and fourth.

The press release added that the number of voters in Baghdad elections amounted 1378 687 out of 4 968608 of those who are entitled to participate in the elections, which means that the rate of participation in Karkh and Rusafa not more than 27%, noting that it will continue to publish the results remaining sequentially.

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

- **Breaking News... Parliament fails to convene its session today**

Shafaq News / Iraqi parliament delayed its session today that was already delayed from Tuesday to next Sunday because the majority of political blocs boycotted the session and the worsening crisis in Haweeja and other areas of the country.



Kurdish MPs boycotted parliament sessions weeks ago to protest the non-inclusion of their demands within the country's budget for the current year, especially dues of the oil companies operating in Kurdistan.

They were joined on Tuesday by al- Iraqiya List;s MPs led by , Iyad Allawi, in protest against the Iraqi army storming Sit-in Square in Haweeja in Kirkuk province north of the country after government forces said that they were looking for wanted men who killed an Iraqi soldier last Friday.

Violent clashes took place between both sides and led to deaths and injuries on both sides.

“Shafaq News” reporter in the parliament said that the Presidency of the parliament decided to postpone today's session, to next Sunday.

It is scheduled for Tuesday’s session to be an emergency session to discuss Haweeja’s events and the subsequent developments.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/590-5-breaking-news-parliament-fails-to-convene-its-session-today.html>

- **Minaret destroyed at 12th-century Syrian mosque on World Heritage list**



Both sides in Syria's civil war were in rare agreement Wednesday: The minaret at a

12th-century mosque in Aleppo has been obliterated.

Unclear, however, was who destroyed the tower at the Great Umayyad Mosque, which has witnessed the march of nine centuries. It was just last month that a United Nations official expressed concern about the two-year war possibly damaging the mosque, a World Heritage site.

An opposition group blamed the government.

"Regime forces have committed today a new crime against human and cultural heritage by targeting the minaret of the mosque and completely destroying it," the Local Coordination Committees said. The group released a photograph of the mosque without its signature minaret, apparently reduced to rubble.

The Syrian Coalition also blamed President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

"Today, the Assad regime committed a new crime against history and civilization, as they destroy(ed) the minaret of the Great Mosque of Aleppo. The minaret was hit by tank shells and was shattered to the ground," the coalition said in a statement.

"The Assad regime has done all that they can to destroy the social fabric of Syria," it added.

The Syrian government, however, blamed one rebel group, Jabhet al-Nusra, for blowing up the minaret. The jihadist al-Nusra Front in Syria has been linked to al-Qaeda in Iraq.

"Terrorists from Jabhet al-Nusra detonated explosives in one of the minarets" at the Great Umayyad Mosque, the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency reported Wednesday. "An official source told SANA that terrorists placed highly explosive materials in the minaret and the mosque's southern door and set them off."

The agency also reported Wednesday that government forces launched special operations against "Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists in the Aleppo countryside." An official source told the state-run agency that those maneuvers "resulted in destroying many of their dens and gatherings."

http://www.pukmedia.com/EN/EN_Direje.aspx?Jimare=4357

- **Car bomb kills 7, injures 23 in Baghdad, Iraqi officials say**

At least seven people have been killed and 23 others injured in a car bomb explosion in the Iraqi capital, police and medical sources say.



The incident took place in a mobile phone market in the al-Husseiniyah neighborhood in eastern Baghdad on Wednesday, AFP reported.

The attack brought to 125 the total number of people killed in the violence in the country since Tuesday. At least 268 others have also been wounded.

Five soldiers and seven gunmen were killed and 63 people, including 20 soldiers, were injured in clashes in the town of Sulaiman Bek north of Baghdad earlier on

Wednesday, security officers and an official said.

In another incident, gunmen attacked a checkpoint run by the pro-government and anti-al-Qaeda Sahwa (Awakening) militia in Khales northeast of Baghdad.

Gunmen injured a policeman in the northern city of Mosul, and another soldier was wounded in a shooting south of the city.

Other violence, including a car bombing in the capital and attacks in three other areas, claimed the lives of at least 11 people and wounded 33 others.

Violence has increased in Iraq since December 2011, when an arrest warrant was issued for fugitive Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, who has been charged with running a death squad targeting Iraqi officials and Shia Muslims.

The government has stepped up efforts to boost security across the country over the past few months.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/24/300071/bomb-kills-7-injures-23-in-baghdad/>

- **Iraqi PM warns against 'sectarian war'**

Nouri al-Maliki calls for dialogue and blames "remnants of Baath Party for violence" which has left more than 100 dead.

Nouri al-Maliki, the Iraqi prime minister, has blamed "remnants of Baath Party for creating rift" in the country and said he would not listen to those who spread sectarianism, as a wave of violence killed more than 100 people over three days.

Maliki called on everyone worried about Iraq's future "to take the initiative, and not be silent about those who want to take the country back to sectarian civil war", in remarks broadcast on state television on Thursday.

The Iraqi prime minister said dialogue and not terrorism and hatred was the way to answer legitimate demands. "If rift spreads, we will all lose."

Al Jazeera's Omar al-Saleh, reporting from the capital Baghdad, said, "In his speech he [Maliki] tried to reach out to his opponents and protesters in different towns and cities."

Our correspondent said Maliki had in the past called the protesters' demands as "stinking and sectarian"... But in his speech he took a detour from his earlier position saying, their [protesters] "demands were legitimate".

The violence began on Tuesday when security forces moved in against anti-government protesters near the northern town of Hawijah, sparking clashes that left 53 people dead.

A wave of subsequent unrest, much of it apparently revenge attacks for the Hawijah clashes, killed dozens more people.

The violence is the deadliest so far linked to demonstrations that erupted in Sunni Arab areas of the Shia-majority country more than four months ago.

The Sunni protesters have called for the resignation of Maliki, a Shia, and railed

against the alleged targeting of their community by the authorities.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/2013425123452971800.html>

2. IRAN

• Iran Calls on West to Show Commitment to Talks

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior Iranian negotiator said that Tehran has been fully committed to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and cooperated with the UN nuclear agency, and added that world powers should prove their commitments to talks.

Addressing to representatives of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on the sidelines of the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference in Geneva on Wednesday, Iran's deputy chief negotiator Ali Baqeri recalled Iran's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors and its full commitment to the NPT, and regretted the West's obstructionism and sanction policy despite Tehran's goodwill gestures in the past years.

He stated that Tehran is ready to engage with the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) to find a solution to all the outstanding issues between the two sides.

"The ball is now in the court of the Group 5+1," Ali Baqeri added.

He reiterated that that the G5+1 (Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States, and Germany) must now demonstrate its commitment to constructive talks with Iran if it is interested in a negotiated solution to the West's dispute with Iran over its nuclear energy program.

Earlier this week, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi called on the world powers to take confidence-building measures in a bid to show interaction with Iran, adding that Iran is prepared to cooperate, in return.

"They (the six world powers) have always said that they are ready to interact with Iran and we, too, declared that the principles of our foreign policy are based on logic and if there are honestly eager to cooperate with Iran, we will be ready

again," Salehi told reporters on the sidelines of a meeting on the Caspian Sea legal regime here in Tehran on Tuesday.

He pointed to the recent meeting between Iran and the Group 5+1 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and stated that the group has not fulfilled its pledges yet since the EU foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, who presides over the delegations of the six world powers in talks with Iran, was to inform Iran's chief negotiator Saeed Jalili about the outcomes of her consultations with the six countries, but she has not done so yet.

The Iranian minister further said that the West has no way out but to interact with Iran, and stated, "For interaction, confidence-building measures should be taken..."

On April 6, Iran and the six world powers wrapped up two days of intensive negotiations in Almaty.

The Iranian team was led by Jalili, who is also the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), and the G5+1's representatives were presided by Ashton.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107164468>

- **Attacking Iran will be Israel last mistake: Vahidi**



Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi says military action against Iran will be the Zionist regime's last mistake.

"The US and the Zionist regime's threats have no value and at the same time, show their aggressive nature, and reveal their deceitful and misleading claims," Vahidi said on Wednesday.

He reiterated Iran's complete readiness to give a swift response to any military aggression against the country.

Vahidi advised US authorities to try and solve the problems in their own country instead of making warmongering remarks.

The Iranian Defense Minister made the remarks after US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel supported the Tel Aviv regime's warmongering rhetoric against the Islamic Republic on April 21, saying Washington and Israel see "exactly the same" threat from Tehran.

Vahidi said the United States issues inhuman threats while proudly donating weapons and funds to the criminal regime of Israel, which is notorious for killings and terrorist actions.

On April 16, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee adopted "Senate Resolution 65," according to which the US will provide the Israeli regime with diplomatic, economic and military assistance if Tel Aviv decides to launch an attack against Iran.

Israeli Chief of Staff Lt. Gen Benny Gantz said earlier on the same day that, "We have our plans and forecasts.... If the time comes, we'll decide" on whether to take military action against Iran.

The US, Israel and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program, with the Israeli regime repeatedly threatening to attack Iran's nuclear facilities based on the unfounded allegation.

Iran has rejected the allegations and warned that any military action could result in a war that would spread beyond the Middle East.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/24/300035/attacking-iran-will-be-israel-last-mistake/>

- **Iran presidential hopefuls give priority to economy in their agendas**

With less than two months to Iran's 11th presidential election, most hopefuls have launched their campaigns on a platform of improving the country's economy and dealing with financial issues, Press TV reports.

"In our campaign slogan, the first letter stands for creating a strong economy. I

promise to lower inflation to below 20 percent and unemployment to below 10 percent," reformist presidential hopeful Mostafa Kavakebian told Press TV.

He is not the only presidential hopeful to put solving the country's economic problems on top of his agenda.

Mohammad-Reza Aref, also a reformist, has said that promoting an 'economy of resistance' would top his economic agenda.

Principlists as well as independent hopefuls have also focused their attention on economy.

Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, who is affiliated with the principlist Coalition of Five, has promised to fight economic and financial corruption.

"Campaign slogans have always revolved around the economy in the elections held so far in Iran. But we should not forget that Iran has been dealing with economic problems and sanctions ... for more than three decades. A ... candidate should recognize that and go for something more profound," Motahareh Jalali, a journalist,

told Press TV when asked about the slogans of the presidential hopefuls.

“Anyone who decides to run for president should first and foremost be a good manager. Being just and fair is the most important quality for a president,” said an Iranian citizen.

“I expect the next president to live up to his promises. We don’t need slogans. We need someone who can run the country properly,” another individual said.

Iran’s 11th presidential election will be held on June 14.

Presidential hopefuls can register from May 7 to 11. The president of Iran is elected for a four-year term in a national election and candidates must be vetted for qualification by the Guardian Council.

Meanwhile, a member of the Coalition of Three, Ali-Akbar Velayati, said the unilateral sanctions against Iran have not caused all the economic problems in the country. He said he would act wisely on economic issues and gradually change the source of Iran’s revenues to non-oil exports, if elected.

He stressed the importance of showing firm determination and gaining self-sufficiency to resolve the ongoing economic problems in the country.

Velayati, who served as Iran's Foreign Minister for 16 years until 1997, emphasized that Iran would achieve economic success through self-reliance and efforts to gain self-sufficiency in agricultural and industrial fields.

Velayati is also a senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The Coalition of Three also includes senior lawmaker Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel and Tehran Mayor Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf.

Meanwhile, another presidential hopeful Mohammad Reza Bahonar said sanctions are not the root cause of all the economic problems that the country is currently facing.

Bahonar, who is the vice-speaker of Iran’s Majlis, added that Iran can overcome the US-engineered sanctions by better planning.

The United States, Israel, and some of their allies have falsely accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program, with the US and the European Union using the unfounded claim as a pretext to impose illegal sanctions against Iran.

Iran rejects the allegation, arguing that as a committed signatory to the 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.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/25/300155/iran-presidential-hopefuls-focus-on-econ/>

- **Iran's Majlis speaker warns of enemy plots against Syria**

Iran's Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani has warned of plots by certain regional and extra-regional countries to create problems in Syria.

"There are dangerous plans at work to make long-term changes in the region,

and regional and extra-regional enemies of Iran and Russia are after adventurism and seek to create problems in Syria," Larijani said in a meeting with Deputy Speaker of Russia's Federation Council Ilyas Umakhanov on Wednesday.

The Iranian Majlis speaker also urged Tehran and Moscow to hold close consultations on the ongoing crisis in Syria.

The two neighboring countries of Iran and Russia have close strategic relations and their common interests are all the more reason for continued cooperation and consultations, said the top Iranian parliamentarian.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011. Many people, including large numbers of Syrian army and security personnel, have been killed in the violence.

The Syrian government says the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

Damascus says the West and its regional allies including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey are supporting the militants.

Larijani further said that, in parallel with political ties, Iran is also interested in maintaining sustainable relations with Russia in other fields, including economy and industry, and expressed the Iranian parliament's full support for strengthening bilateral cooperation.

The Russian official, for his part, said Iran is a very important country in the region and a real friend of Russia, adding there are "very bright horizons" ahead when it comes to the promotion of bilateral ties.

He called for closer partnership between Tehran and Moscow to resolve common issues and concerns at regional and international levels.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/25/300147/iran-warns-of-enemy-plots-in-syria/>

- **Iran determined to pursue all legal areas of nuclear technology**

TEHRAN, Apr. 25 (MNA) – The Iranian ambassador to the UN nuclear agency has said that Tehran is determined to push ahead with its peaceful nuclear program.

Iran is determined to pursue "all legal areas of nuclear technology, including fuel cycle and enrichment technology, exclusively for peaceful purposes" and this will be carried out under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision, Ali Asghar Soltanieh told a meeting in Geneva on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on Tuesday, Reuters reported.

Soltanieh, in an apparent reference to Israel which has not joined the NPT regime, said, "Iran is paying a heavy price for its membership and full commitment to the NPT while others outside the treaty are exempted from any inspection and sanctions, but receiving full nuclear cooperation of western countries, specifically the U.S. and Canada."

The IAEA said on Tuesday it will hold a meeting with Iran on May 15 aimed at reaching a deal for further investigation into Iran's nuclear activities.

Thomas Countryman, chief U.S. delegate to the NPT talks, said on Monday that Iran's nuclear program poses the greatest threat to the credibility of the NPT, which aims to halt the spread of nuclear weapons.

Iran and its ally Syria called for a conference aimed at banning nuclear weapons in the Middle East and urged major powers to stop helping Israel to acquire nuclear technology.

The talks, which were supposed to be held last December in Helsinki after being agreed at a 2010 NPT conference, were postponed without a new date being set.

Israel is widely believed to possess the Middle East's only nuclear arsenal but neither confirms nor denies having nuclear weapons.

Syria's Faysal Khabbaz Hamoui, told the Geneva conference, "The Israeli nuclear arsenals increase tension in an already explosive situation."

"We call on states, parties, especially nuclear states, to stop their support to Israel in developing its nuclear capabilities

and prohibit providing it with nuclear technology. This should help pave the way for a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons in the Middle East," he said.

Iran can be West's 'reliable partner' in Middle East

Elsewhere in his remarks, Soltanieh said that Iran would be a "reliable partner" in the Middle East if Western countries would take a more cooperative approach in talks on its nuclear program.

He added that U.S. and European policies, including extensive sanctions on the Islamic Republic, were bound to fail.

"Western countries are advised to change gear from confrontation to cooperation, the window of opportunity to enter into negotiation for long-term strategic cooperation with Iran, the most reliable, strong, and stable partner in the region, is still open," he said.

"Hostile policies of Western countries, including dual track, carrot and stick, sanctions-and-talks policies are doomed to failure," the ambassador said.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1820667>

- **Iran can be optimistic about 5+1 talks if its rights are to be recognized: Larijani**

TEHRAN – Iran can be optimistic about talks with world powers over its nuclear program if the country’s nuclear rights are to be fully recognized, Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Wednesday.



“We can be optimistic about the... success of negotiations with the 5+1 group if Iran’s nuclear rights under the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) are to be fully recognized,” Larijani said at a meeting with Deputy Speaker of Russia’s Federation Council Ilyas Umakhanov in Tehran.

He was referring to negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany) which are aimed at finding a diplomatic solution to a decade-old dispute over the country’s nuclear program.

Iran says its nuclear program is entirely peaceful, but the West suspects it may be aimed at developing a nuclear weapons capability.

Larijani said that Iran had always been sincere in regard to its nuclear activities based on the fatwa (religious edict) that Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei issued in 2005 declaring that the production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons are all haram (prohibited in Islam).

Elsewhere in his remarks, Larijani commented on relations between Tehran and Moscow, saying, “There are various common areas for regional and international cooperation between the two countries, such as countering dangers arising from terrorism and drug smuggling.”

Commenting on the situation in Syria, Larijani said, “Regional and extra-regional enemies of Iran and Russia are seeking to take acts of adventurism and create problems in Syria, and this situation requires continuation of cooperation and extensive consultations between the two countries.”

Umakhanov for his part said that Russia was keen to expand its cooperation with the Islamic Republic in various areas.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107-113-iran-can-be-optimistic-about-51-talks-if-its-rights-are-to-be-recognized-larijani>

- **Qalibaf outlines foreign policy plans**

Presidential hopeful Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf says inflammatory rhetoric will not be on his foreign policy agenda if he wins the election.

Qalibaf, who is the current mayor of Tehran, said Wednesday that fiery rhetoric and a confrontational approach in foreign policy will do more harm than good.

He further criticized blaming all the country’s problems on the U.S.-led sanctions against Iran, saying that some of these issues are due to mismanagement.

Tehran mayor added that the Islamic Republic has managed to support the Palestinian cause for 30 years without instigating charges of anti-Semitism, thanks to the foresight of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini.

Qalibaf is a member of the principlist Coalition of Three, along with former foreign minister Ali-Akbar Velayati, who currently advises Leader of the Islamic Revolution Seyyed Ali Khamenei on international affairs, and Iranian lawmaker Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel.

The coalition is to pick one of its members with the highest approval rating as the nominee to succeed President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Iran’s 11th presidential election will be held on June 14. Presidential hopefuls can register from May 7 to 11.

The president of Iran is elected for a four-year term in a national election and

candidates must be vetted for qualifications by the Guardian Council.

The United States, Israel, and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program. Using the unfounded allegation as a pretext, the U.S. and its European allies have imposed several rounds of unilateral sanctions against Iran.

Iran rejects the allegation, maintaining that as a committed signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency it is entitled to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107110-qalibaf-outlines-foreign-policy-plans>

- **Iraq PM warns of attempts to start sectarian war**

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki warned on Thursday of attempts to return the country to "sectarian civil war," as a wave of violence killed more than 140 people over three days.

Maliki called on everyone worried about Iraq's future "to take the initiative, and not be silent about those who want to take the country back to sectarian civil war," in remarks broadcast on state television.

The violence began on Tuesday when security forces moved in against anti-government protesters near the northern town of Hawijah, sparking clashes that left 53 people dead.

A wave of subsequent unrest, much of it apparently revenge attacks for the Hawijah clashes, killed dozens more people.

The violence is the deadliest so far linked to demonstrations that erupted in Sunni Arab areas of the Shiite-majority country more than four months ago.

The Sunni protesters have called for the resignation of Maliki, a Shiite, and railed against the alleged targeting of their community by the authorities.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/mena/iraq-pm-warns-of-attempts-to-start-sectarian-war>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel airport security 'allowed to read tourists' email'**

JERUSALEM (AFP) -- Israeli security officials at Ben Gurion airport are legally allowed to demand access to tourists' email accounts and deny them entry if they refuse, the country's top legal official said on Wednesday.



Details of the policy were laid out by Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein in a written response to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the group said in a statement.

In June 2012, ACRI's Lila Margalit wrote to the attorney general demanding clarification following media reports about security officials demanding access to tourists' email accounts before allowing them into the country.

"In a response dated April 24, 2013, the attorney general's office confirmed this practice," ACRI said, quoting sections of the document which said it was only done in exceptional cases where "relevant suspicious signs" were evident and only done with the tourist's "consent".

"However, the attorney general's office also noted that while a tourist may refuse such a search, 'it will be made clear to him that his refusal will be taken into consideration along with other relevant factors, in deciding whether to allow him entry to Israel'," it continued.

ACRI slammed the policy as a "drastic invasion of privacy" heaping scorn on the idea a tourist could freely give their consent while facing the threat of possible deportation if they refused.

"A tourist who has just spent thousands of dollars to travel to Israel, only to be interrogated at the airport by Shin Bet (domestic security) agents and told to grant access to their email account, is in no position to give free and informed consent," Margalit said.

"Such 'consent' -- given under threat of deportation -- cannot serve as a basis for such a drastic invasion of privacy," she said.

"Allowing security agents to take such invasive measures at their own discretion and on the basis of such flimsy 'consent' is not befitting of a democracy."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=589166>

- **UN says Hope Renewed with US Engagement in Peace Process**

NEW YORK, April 25, 2013 (Wafa) – United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman Wednesday said that the renewed United States engagement in the peace process has renewed hope for a negotiated settlement.

Yet, he warned, Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to undermine the two-state solution.

Briefing the UN Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, Feltman said

that the UN remains “deeply troubled by continued developments with respect to settlement activity” in the West Bank.

“Let me reiterate unequivocally the United Nations’ consistent position that settlement activity violates international law,” he said. “Settlement activity further undermines Palestinians’ confidence in the viability of the two-state solution.”

He said that the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was “particularly worried about reports suggesting that the Israeli Minister of Housing has predicted the construction within a year and a half of housing units in E1 area of the West Bank.”

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said construction in E1 is “a red line,” threatening to take the matter to international forums, including the International Criminal Court, if Israel starts building a settlement in that area of the West Bank.

Feltman said last month’s visit by US President Barack Obama to the region “marked an important opening.”

He said that US Secretary of State John Kerry's subsequent trips, and continued engagement with the parties and regional leaders, "demonstrate a serious commitment to breaking the political deadlock."

He said that Ban and Obama agreed in their April 11 meeting that "there is at least a window of opportunity for both Israelis and Palestinians to resume negotiations."

Feltman said that Ban has "reconfirmed the United Nations commitment to support, including through the Quartet, a substantive initiative with a defined political horizon to achieve a two-state solution. He spoke to the urgency of progress towards peace."

He said: "Now is the time for the international community to work in a concerted manner and without delay."

He said that "the fragile hope triggered by the renewed US engagement must be sustained and translated into serious efforts by the parties. The desire for peace needs to be cultivated by early measures

to reverse negative trends on the ground, and build trust."

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22222>

- **Israel Demolishes House in East Jerusalem**

JERUSALEM, April 24, 2013 (Wafa) – The West Jerusalem municipality workers Wednesday demolished three apartments of a building under the pretext of building without a permit, in the town of Al-Tor in East Jerusalem, according to the house owner.

Kayid Jaradat told Wafa that this is the third time the Israeli municipality workers demolish his house despite the fact that he obtained all the required papers to stop the demolition.

He added that the 500-square-meters apartments were to house 40 of his family members including three blind and six disabled members.

Ahmad Sob-Laban, the Jerusalem affairs field researcher, told Wafa that since 1967 the Israeli municipality gave four

thousand construction permits to Palestinians in Jerusalem; whereas 52 thousand permits were given to Jewish settlers.

He added “this systematic policy of the Israeli occupation aims to empty Jerusalem of its rightful residents.”

He continued that nearly 20 thousand homes are exposed to demolition in East Jerusalem and that the Jerusalem municipality demolishes up to 100 houses each year as part of its transmigration policy.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22217>

- **Locals say Israeli tanks, bulldozers enter Gaza**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Israeli military forces entered the northern Gaza Strip on Thursday morning, locals said.

Eight bulldozers were accompanied by tanks, entering approximately 100 meters into farming land east of Khan Younis, witnesses said.

No clashes were reported.

An Israeli military spokeswoman did not immediately return a request for comment.

On Wednesday, witnesses reported a similar incident east of Beit Hanoun. At the time, an Israeli army spokeswoman said there was "routine activity adjacent to the security fence," without providing further details.

Israel imposed a military no-go zone around the Gaza Strip's borders, known as the buffer zone. Palestinians are barred from accessing the land in the buffer zone or building in the area. According to the Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights, the area contains most of Gaza's valuable arable land.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=589203>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Algeria cracks down on Syria recruiting networks**

Jihadist networks recruiting Maghreb youth to fight in Syria and northern Mali have found a new front. They are now setting their sights on Algeria.

Algerian security services arrested four individuals affiliated with the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) in Chlef province for alleged links with jihadist groups in Syria, Echourouk reported last Thursday (April 18th).

They were accused of recruiting Algerians to fight under the banner of Jabhat al-Nusra, which has recently declared allegiance to al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The leader of the AIS, the armed wing of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), was among the four. He is also suspected of establishing ties with jihadist groups in Libya and Tunisia, according to the Algerian daily.

"The networks which recruit Algerians, and Maghreb young people in general, use religious discourse and hadiths about the advantages of jihad in the Levant to convince young people to go to Syria," commented Mohamed Saadi, a researcher in Islamic sciences.

The war in Syria has revived the sleeping cells that were organising the entry of jihadists to Iraq through Syria, he added. They now use almost the same networks and mediators to transport Algerians and Tunisians to Syria, taking advantage of decade-long relations.

For more than a year now, the Algerian security agencies have been cracking down on elements engaged in recruiting jihadists to Syria. Last year, security forces detained one person suspecting of transporting Algerians through Libya.

The investigations focused on networks operating in eight provinces: Algiers, Ghardaia, Tebessa, Tlemcen, Oued Souf, Djelfa, Tiaret, Biskara, and Illizi.

Algerians who moved to Syria were mostly recruited through internet forums, security investigations found.

The security authorities compiled a list of 10 Algerians who travelled during that period to Syria through Turkey, and before it through Libya and Tunisia, El Khabar reported last July. They also received

notifications about disappearance of 7 Algerians within two months.

"Networks recruiting jihadists for fighting in Syria are trying to bring in fighters who have military experience, including Algerians given the years of terrorism that Algeria has been through," said Mohamed Smiem, an academic specialising in security affairs.

"These networks use religious discourse first and then financial incentives to bring in fighters to Syria," he said.

While the number of Algerian fighters in Syria remains unknown, Lebanese daily Al Diyar alleged that there were about 10,000 Algerians fighting against Bashar al-Assad's regime.

But Algerian observers doubt these numbers.

"It's unlikely, if not impossible, that there are 10,000 Algerians in Syria. The number of Algerians there is much less," Smiem said. He blamed some media outlets for "rushing to promote unfounded information" without verifying it.

Still, putting an end to recruiting cells for jihadists in Syria "requires co-ordination among security agencies in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya", the analyst said.

According to the analyst, co-operation will help "identify the networks that recruit Maghreb young people and provide them with money and necessary documents to go to Syria".

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a-wi/features/2013/04/24/feature-01

- **Bomb hits French embassy in Tripoli**

A bomb exploded Tuesday (April 23rd) outside the French embassy in Tripoli, injuring two guards and causing extensive damage to the building and adjacent villas in the upscale Hay Andalus district.

The force of the explosion was felt throughout the neighbourhood, home to many foreign embassies in the Libyan capital.

No entity claimed responsibility for the attack, the first on a diplomatic site in Libya since September 11, 2012, when US

Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans were killed at the US mission in Benghazi.

"I came to Libya as soon as I heard about the blast," French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said later Tuesday at a press conference with his Libyan counterpart Mohamed Abdul Aziz.

"This terrorist operation was aimed at killing," he said. "We have personally seen the extent of damage and destruction in the buildings and we visited the wounded at hospital and intensive care units."

Fabius strongly condemned the attack. "An investigation was opened to identify the perpetrators," he said. "The Libyan government and authorities have confirmed their full co-operation in this regard and have offered help."

He said he met with General National Congress head Mohamed Magarief, Prime Minister Ali Zidan and Foreign Minister Mohamed Abdul Aziz.

"They confirmed their support for the French people," he said.

"I have issued instructions to beef up security measures at all areas where we have a presence in the region," he added. "The Libyan government has pledged to stand by our side so the French embassy can continue to do its work in Libya."

Speaking about relations between the two countries, Fabius said: "The terrorists who wanted to attack Libya and France and undermine the friendship between the two countries will eventually lose."

"Attempts to undermine relations between France and Libya will fail," Libya's foreign minister agreed.

Abdul Aziz also expressed "full solidarity with the government and people of France, who were victims in this terrorist, criminal act".

"This will only make us more determined to build the state of institutions and law, and to combat terrorist acts," the minister added. "We will also enhance our partnership with France and friends."

Amina al-Mahmoudi, a teacher, voiced certainty that the attackers would be brought to justice.

"France and Libya have good relations and this blast won't affect them. I think that co-operation to identify the perpetrators will be fruitful," she told Magharebia.

Journalist Miftah Belaid said, "This is a cowardly act aimed at distancing Libya from the international arena and putting it under the mercy of terrorism."

"Everyone knows that if Libya's security is undermined, it will be catastrophic for the region, which can bear no more," he said.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/04/24/feature-02

- **Draft Constitution Completed, but Still No Consensus**

The National Constituent Assembly
The National Constituent Assembly (NCA) committee tasked with writing Tunisia's new constitution produced a final draft on Tuesday, but members of a commission of experts chosen to review it are refusing to do so.

The Joint Committee for Coordination and Drafting had a deadline of April 27 to complete its work. A commission of constitutional and linguistic experts was chosen to undertake a final reading of the draft before submitting it to the Speaker of the NCA, the Prime Minister, and the President.

However, most of the experts selected for the commission have refused to participate in its work. Acceptance by the commission is not legally required, but it was created as final stamp of approval for the draft constitution.

In an interview with Tunisia Live, constitutional expert Kais Saied explained the reasons behind his refusal to be a part of commission.

"As choices were already made, experts have nothing to add at this point," said Saied. "It is now a political matter, not a legal one."

Saied, along with other experts, attended sessions of the different subcommittees that assisted in drafting the constitution and shared his views and suggestions with members of the NCA, he said. This

included perspectives from similar constitutional experiences in other countries.

“The final agreement has to take place among political parties,” he said. “Politicians should have the final say and be held responsible for it.”

Fadhel Moussa, a member of the NCA representing the opposition Al Massar party, told Tunisian radio station Mosaique FM that the experts panel was not well-chosen, as some of its members did not have a clear understanding of the constitution. He also expressed doubts about reaching a political consensus on the final draft.

A national dialogue has been taking place during the past week among parties of the ruling Troika coalition, opposition parties, and Tunisia’s largest union, the UGTT. According to Mosaique FM, a consensus was not reached among political leaders on the structure of Tunisia’s next political system – whether it will be presidential, parliamentary, or mixed.

The same source also reported that Nidaa Tounes, a large opposition party, is no

longer participating in the dialogue as an act of protest.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/04/24/draft-constitution-completed-but-still-no-consensus/>

- **Tunisians in Syria Report Neglect by Home Government**

A widely-watched investigative report on the Ettounisya television station has highlighted the difficult circumstances faced by Tunisians in Syria, whether they are residing in the country by choice or have been detained because they came to fight in the war.

Tunisian journalist Zouhair Letaief, host of the Fi Samim program, reported from Damascus in an episode aired April 23 that detailed the extent to which Tunisians in Syria feel neglected by the Tunisian government.

The Tunisian embassy in Syria has been closed since February 2012 and three Tunisian students told Letaief that even though their lives are threatened by constant bombing, they are stuck in

Damascus because they cannot process paperwork to leave the country.

A former employee at the Tunisian consulate in Damascus told Letaief that there are around 2000 Tunisians in Syria and most of them feel abandoned by their government.

“Some Tunisians have died because of the bombing; others are trapped outside of Damascus,” he said. “Some of them tried to go to Lebanon to fix their papers, but it wasn’t possible.”

Even for Tunisians who do not intend to leave, it can be difficult to pursue daily life since they cannot attain official recognition for marriages, deaths, or births, he added.

Nour Yahyaoui, a Tunisian resident in Syria “There are Tunisians who are in trouble at the immigration office, as their residence here expired,” said student Nour Yahyaoui.

Letaief interviewed four detainees, three of whom were Tunisians who have been imprisoned for a year. They all paid a recruiter in order to get to Syria, and their

reasons for doing so were similar: they wanted to join the fight against the Syrian government after seeing the atrocities of the war on news channels.

The three detainees said they were driven by their religion to “rescue” their “Syrian brothers and sisters,” as one said. One of the detainees asserted that President Moncef Marzouki’s decision to expel the Syrian ambassador from Tunisia last year signaled that the situation in Syria was disastrous.

In a press release issued April 22, the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that staff at the Tunisian embassy in Beirut is being enhanced in order to provide improved services to Tunisians in Syria.

But on Tuesday, families of Tunisians recruited to fight in Syria protested in front of the National Constituent Assembly building in Bardo, demanding a more efficient response from government officials.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/04/25/tunisians-in-syria-report-neglect-by-home-government/>

- **Final Issue: Media stuck between the state and the corporate sector**

Amid a troubled political climate and an unsettled transition process, Egyptian media outlets are struggling to endure the state's tight grip over press freedoms and the abusive working conditions imposed by proprietors of some private media.

For decades, media ownership was completely controlled by the state, as print, broadcast and radio outlets functioned as its mouthpiece, spoon-feeding the public its propaganda schemes.

In the mid-2000s, a new class of business owners formed what was then described as more "independent" media outlets. A wave of private channels and newspapers were opened to challenge the regime's tight grip on media freedoms.

But hopes for a truly independent media are being threatened, as private media owners continue to either intervene in the editorial policies set by journalists or abuse the rights of journalists working there.

The problems at Al-Badeel and Al-Tahrir newspapers are just minor examples. Last October, a group of editors and journalists at Al-Badeel were laid off due to what was described by former Editor-in-Chief Khaled al-Balshy as an editorial intervention by the owners.

"Al-Badeel was a different, bright experience by all measures. Regrettably, however, it was stifled for several reasons," said Ahmed Ramadan, one of the senior editors.

Ramadan recalled that when Balshy tried to reopen the paper in 2010, he began with the website, soliciting the help of former editors and reporters. All made financial contributions to revive the website but the money was not enough.

Then, in March 2011 — two months after the 25 January revolution broke out — several interested investors emerged.

"More than one group approached us to fund the project, but several of them were capitalists or part of the [Hosni] Mubarak regime. We weren't enthusiastic about working with them, since this would go

against our paper's leftist principles," he said.

Later, he said, a group of Nasserist-leaning businessmen came forward and promised to start reprinting the paper while bearing all the costs of running the website, as well as paying the editorial team's salaries. They also promised to invest LE25 million in the first year, but these promises never came to fruition.

Shortly afterward, however, conflict emerged between the staff and the management when the new owners attempted to interfere in the editorial policy, said Balshy.

"The paper's stance toward the Syrian revolution was not very much liked by the Nasserist owners. Their intervention led me to present my resignation four times, but my resignations were always rejected," Balshy, who was later elected to the Journalists Syndicate's board, told Egypt Independent at the time. "They believe that what's happening in Syria is a Western conspiracy against the regime, while I believe it is a conspiracy by the repressive regime against its own people."

In this polarized context, the owners decided to drastically reduce their investment to LE720,000, and canceled plans to start printing again. They reneged on promises to hire many of the journalists who worked on temporary contracts, Balshy said.

"We felt like we were in big danger after the arbitrary measures taken by the owners. But the biggest surprise was when they sold the website to an Egyptian-Saudi investor named Mohamed al-Sabban, who is known to belong to the Muslim Brotherhood," Ramadan said.

That was the straw that broke the camel's back, he added. "Some of us decided to leave, but unfortunately, the majority decided to stay for financial reasons."

Meanwhile, journalists at Al-Tahrir newspaper who were hired on temporary contracts went on strike last month, demanding their contracts be changed to permanent ones so they could become syndicate members.

The newspaper's outspoken editor-in-chief, Ibrahim Eissa, rejected their appointments, claiming their editors had

submitted reports to him stating that the journalists were not yet eligible.

But some of the editors, who are syndicate members, supported their striking colleagues. Their efforts were, however, dealt with harshly, as the administration dismissed the striking journalists and the editors who supported them. Eissa briefly resigned.

The current rift between journalists and a regime that is highly critical of the media on the one hand, and between journalists and corporate owners on the other, have led many independent journalists to seek a third way.

In 2011, a group of rights activists and media experts proposed to find a third route to ensure a total separation from the dual control of the state and the corporate bosses over media, but thus far efforts have faced serpentine legal constraints.

These activists planned to establish an independent channel called “The People Want” through the formation of a cooperative with an initial public offering,

but legal constraints dogged the ambitious project.

Lawyer Reda Eissa, who was part of the initiative, said Egyptian laws prevent cooperatives from establishing media projects.

“Unfortunately, there is no unified law to organize cooperatives at large. We have a law for agricultural cooperatives, another for industrial ones, another one for consumption goods cooperatives; but we cannot establish a cooperative for a media product, and we cannot establish a cooperative for a bank, for example,” Eissa said. “The Egyptian citizen who wants to establish a cooperative does not enjoy the same privileges given to his or her counterpart in a company.”

The initial public offering can only be established for a company, not for a cooperative, which makes the enterprise subject to a complete takeover from any investor in the stock market.

“This threatens the whole idea of having no certain media owner to control the project,” he added.

Those who worked on the initiative also suggested establishing the channel by licensing an NGO concerned with media freedoms. One of the NGO's activities would be to launch a channel.

Gamal Eid, executive director of the Arab Network of Human Rights Information and one of the initiative's founders, told Egypt Independent that even this option is invalid within the current legal infrastructure.

According to the current NGOs law, the state can suspend the activity of any non-governmental organization, which makes such a project subject to closure at anytime.

"Once the channel presents content that the state would not like, it is going to be shut down by a judicial employee. It's very risky," Eid said.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/final-issue-media-stuck-between-state-and-corporate-sector>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Jordan, Britain sign legal deal likely to help deport radical cleric Abu Qatada

LONDON — Britain has signed a new legal treaty with Jordan in the hope of being able to deport a radical cleric accused of being Osama Bin Laden's "right-hand man in Europe" later this year, the interior minister said on Wednesday.

The British government has for years been unable to deport Abu Qatada back to his native Jordan, where he is wanted on terrorism charges, because judges have said evidence obtained through torture could be used against him.

The saga has been embarrassing for the Conservative-led government, which wants to appear tough on security and immigration, and in particular for Home Secretary Theresa May, who has been tipped as a future party leader.

A year ago, she said she was confident that Abu Qatada, whose sermons were found in a Hamburg flat used by some of those who carried out the September 11 attacks on the United States, would

“soon” be on a plane out of the country for good, but judges have ruled otherwise.

“I have signed a comprehensive mutual legal assistance agreement with Jordan,” May told parliament, a day after a court rejected the government’s latest appeal of a judicial decision to block Abu Qatada’s extradition to Jordan.

“The agreement also includes a number of fair trial guarantees... I believe these guarantees will provide the courts with the assurance that Qatada will not face evidence that might have been obtained by torture.”

The treaty is expected to be ratified by the Jordanian and British parliaments by the end of June, but May said it could still take several months to secure Abu Qatada’s deportation.

Once described by a Spanish judge as “Osama Bin Laden’s right-hand man in Europe”, Qatada has been in and out of jail since first being arrested in 2001, and was last month sent back to prison for breaching his bail conditions.

May’s lawyers have described him as a “truly dangerous” individual, a point judges do not dispute, but despite assurances from Jordan they fear a “flagrant denial of justice” if Abu Qatada were returned there for a retrial.

The use of evidence obtained through torture would breach the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Britain is a signatory, prompting speculation that Britain may ditch the treaty to get rid of the cleric.

A spokesman for Prime Minister David Cameron said on Wednesday Britain was looking at “every option” to deport the Jordanian, and did not rule out withdrawing from the convention.

Such a move would delight Cameron’s increasingly anti-Europe centre-right Conservative Party, but would dismay his left-leaning pro-Europe Liberal Democrat junior partners in government. It would also anger human rights campaigners.

The opposition Labour Party blamed Abu Qatada’s continued presence in Britain on legal missteps.

“In the past, the home secretary has overstated the evidence, overstated her legal position and overstated her legal strategy, which has not worked,” Labour interior affairs spokeswoman Yvette Cooper said.

<http://jordantimes.com/jordan-britain-sign-legal-deal-likely-to-help-deport-radical-cleric-abu-qatada>

- **Hizbollah’s Syria role threatens Lebanon ‘neutrality’**

BEIRUT — Lebanese Shiite group Hizbollah’s decision to fight openly alongside the Syrian regime will increase Lebanon’s involvement in Syria’s conflict, despite a policy of neutrality, analysts say.

But despite inflaming tensions, the country is unlikely to face serious instability as a result, because none of its political forces have an interest in such a scenario for now, they say.

“Hizbollah’s public involvement is no longer the world’s worst-kept secret, and now we are in a crisis where the Lebanese are not only politically divided... but also militarily divided,” Ghassan al-Azzi, a

professor of political science at the Lebanese University, told AFP.

“Hizbollah’s involvement in the Syrian crisis now involves all of Lebanon because we’ve heard from the other side calls to fight jihad alongside the opposition to the Syrian regime,” he added, referring to Lebanon’s Sunni community.

This week, senior Hizbollah official Nabil Qauq defended the group’s actions in Syria, where its elite fighters are reportedly leading the battle in parts of the Qusayr area of central Homs province near the border.

He said the group’s members were carrying out “a national and moral duty” to defend Lebanese citizens living in border villages inside Syria.

In response, two Salafist Sunni Lebanese sheikhs urged their followers to go to Syria to fight a jihad (religious war) in defence of Qusayr’s Sunni residents.

“There is a religious duty on every Muslim who is able to do so... to enter into Syria in order to defend its people, its mosques and religious shrines, especially in Qusayr

and Homs,” Sheikh Ahmed Al Assir told his followers.

For now, experts say, such calls on the part of Lebanon’s Salafists are largely bluster because the movement is far from able to wield either the arsenal or the fighting forces of Hizbollah.

“Talking without doing anything is less intelligent than doing something without talking about it,” Azzi said.

But Wadah Charara, a sociology professor at the Lebanese University, said there was little reason to think the inflamed rhetoric would produce serious domestic instability for Lebanon.

“The impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon is worrying, and there may be some incidents, but the general political trend is towards stabilisation and not upheaval,” he said.

Rising numbers of Hizbollah dead

Charara, an expert on Hizbollah, said it was forced to publicly acknowledge its role in the conflict by the rising number of deaths among its fighters in Syria.

“It’s a ‘common sense’ policy. In the last year, the party has published photos of some of its activists killed in Syria, but the phenomenon gained momentum with the increasing number of deaths and burials. They couldn’t hide it anymore,” he said.

The movement began explaining to the Shiite community, its base, that it was acting to defend 13 Lebanese Shiite villages inside Syria, which it said were coming under rebel attack.

In addressing the broader public, the movement is trying to maintain the capital it acquired for its “resistance” to Israel during a devastating 2006 war.

“They explain that their fight against jihadists, who are presented as the ‘allies of imperialism and the United States,’ is part of a consistent attitude, not a drift,” he said.

They say “we maintain the same line by fighting against Israel and against the enemies of the Syrian people,” he added.

“But in fact, Hizbollah had no choice,” added Azzi, saying the group’s loyalty to a

regime that has long offered it support and aid forced its hand.

“In any case, it couldn’t abandon its alliance with Syria because it’s a question of life or death,” he added

According to Charara, Hizbollah has around 20,00 fighters, between 5,000 and 7,000 of them battle-hardened forces, and has deployed between 800-1,200 members to fight in Qusayr.

<http://jordantimes.com/hizbollahs-syria-role-threatens-lebanon-neutrality>

- **A different type of spillover**

Al Qaeda’s Syrian Jabhat al Nusra might threaten Hezbollah at home



The recent skirmishes between Hezbollah and the rebels of the Free Syrian Army in

the border villages of the eastern Bekaa Valley have intensified talk that the Syrian conflict is spilling into Lebanon. The attack on the Lebanese village of Qasr, in Hermel, left one resident dead and up to nine injured. However, an FSA leader said that his group will not antagonize any Lebanese sect, adding that the rebels’ military council had issued a statement vowing to attack Hezbollah locations inside Syria. “Which means that the Free Syrian Army does not attack any [Hezbollah] locations inside Lebanon,” the local FSA leader added.

But it is not only the FSA that Hezbollah has to confront in Syria. Hezbollah’s involvement on the side of the Syrian government in the civil conflict created a different enemy for the group: the jihadist Jabhat al Nusra, which recently publicly stated its loyalty to al Qaeda’s leader Ayman al Zawahiri.

Hezbollah has been reportedly fighting on the side of the Syrian regime against rebels in the Homs province and outside Damascus, not only in the area close to the Lebanese border, where the party’s leaders said that supporters had to pick up arms to defend the predominantly Shiite

villages attacked by the rebels. News outlets in the past week reported that a number of party members had been killed in fighting in Syria and buried in Lebanon. On Wednesday, several sources from the Syrian opposition also signaled that hundreds of Hezbollah fighters had deployed around Homs.

If the Free Syrian Army has made a decision not to attack Hezbollah targets inside Lebanon and the skirmishes have been limited to a narrow border area in the eastern Bekaa Valley, experts say that jihadist fighters loyal to al Qaeda pose a different type of danger, as they might strike not only Hezbollah's positions in Syria, but also the Party of God's bases, militants and supporters in Lebanon.

A bomb discovered on April 8 in the predominantly Shiite neighborhood of Beirut's Hay al Sellom with a message targeting Hezbollah and signed by Jabhat al Nusra raised fears among the inhabitants of the area that the Syrian conflict might reach their homes in Beirut's southern suburbs. "May Bashar Fall. Death to Hezbollah. Al-Nusra Front," the message on the bomb read. The explosive was loaded into a 30-cm glass

bottle connected to electrical wiring. The home-made device did not explode and was defused by a Hezbollah expert.

According to al Balad's commentator on Hezbollah affairs Ali al Amine, "the bomb could be a message from Jabhat al Nusra or a message from any other party, but it was definitely a direct message to Hezbollah."

Lebanese commentator and analyst Qassem Kassir, however, disagrees. "The bomb in Dahieh was made not to explode. When the Islamists plan an attack, they make sure the bomb explodes," he pointed out. But he agrees that there is a danger that al Qaeda-related factions in Lebanon and Jabhat al Nusra operatives might attack Hezbollah because of its involvement in Syria.

"Jabhat al Nusra's fighting tactics are based on bomb attacks, not bombing cities with rockets," Kassir told NOW. "Hezbollah's military bases and supporters will be in danger because we're dealing with an al Qaeda-related group, and they don't usually dissociate between a militant and a civilian. They just target a place aiming at the maximum damage.

This is how al Qaeda and Jabhat al Nusra would work,” he pointed out. He also said that there are plenty of Lebanese Islamists and jihadists directly related to al Qaeda who can target Hezbollah.

Jihadist and al Qaeda-affiliated groups have had a presence in Lebanon before the Syrian conflict. Organizations like Fatah al Islam, Jund al Sham or Osbat al Ansar have had bases in Lebanon for years and have given state authorities a hard time. But they never engaged Hezbollah in direct confrontations. However, after the beginning of the Syrian conflict, jihadists reportedly regrouped in a new radical organization inspired by the emergence and successful military operations of Jabhat al Nusra in Syria. According to Fatah sources in the Ain al Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp, jihadist leaders such as Haytham and Mohammed al Saadi, Tawfic Taha, Oussama al Shehabi and Majed al Majed are recruiting followers and fighters in Lebanon.

Al Amine argued that he doesn't believe that Jabhat al Nusra makes no difference between civilians and military. “They are attacking Hezbollah as a military entity,

not the Shiites as a community,” he pointed out.

For his part, Kassir noted that Jabhat al Nusra is not organized enough to fight against Hezbollah in a conventional war, but they could cause great damage by organizing bomb attacks against the Party of God's bases and militants. “However, Hezbollah is too well organized to lose a war like this against Jabhat al Nusra,” he said.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reports/features/a-different-type-of-spillover>

- **Bogdanov in Lebanon to discuss regional situation**



BEIRUT: Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov arrived in Beirut Thursday where he is expected to hold a

series of meetings with the country's top officials and politicians over the situation in the region.

Upon his arrival at the Rafik Hariri International Airport, Bogdanov said his visit aimed at hearing the viewpoints of officials in Lebanon.

“It seemed right to exchange views with our friends, partners and officials [about the situation in the region],” the Russian official told The Daily Star.

“You know better than I do that the situation in the region remains complicated,” he said. “We take into consideration how our Lebanese friends evaluate the situation.”

He also noted that he would discuss bilateral relations with officials in Lebanon, which were revitalized after President Michel Sleiman visited Moscow last year.

Bogdanov will meet with Sleiman, caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati, Speaker Nabih Berri , Kataeb Party leader Amine Gemayel and MP Walid Jumblatt.

The deputy FM also voiced his country's support for Lebanon's stability, unity and security.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Apr-25/215040-bogdanov-in-lebanon-to-discuss-regional-situation.ashx#axzz2RTsIHGD>

6. SYRIA

• US trying to change Syria's political structure: Iran MP

A senior Iranian lawmaker says the United States and its allies intend to change the political structure of Syria in line with Israeli interests.



“Syria is the axis of support for the resistance front in the fight against the Zionist regime [of Israel],” Chairman of Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Alaeddin Boroujerdi said on Wednesday.

“And therefore, the United States and its allies are using all their financial, political and arms facilities to change the political structure of this country in line with the interests of the Zionist regime,” added the Iranian lawmaker.

Boroujerdi further highlighted the destruction of Syria’s infrastructure by foreign-sponsored armed groups, saying that such a move shows the Israeli regime’s direct interference in the war on the Arab state.

The US encourages al-Qaeda members to enter Syria from different countries and carry out the massacre of Syrians, he added.

The Iranian lawmaker also said that the Islamic Republic would continue its “economical, political and international support” for Syria.

Boroujerdi dismissed the claim that Iran and Russia provide military support to the Syrian government, describing the baseless statements as a “propaganda war” incited by the US to justify its own defeats.

On April 20, US Secretary of State John Kerry said Washington has boosted its support for the foreign-sponsored militants in Syria with a new package, which would provide an additional USD 123 million aid to the militants, bringing the total of US help to USD 250 million.

US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said on April 17 that the US is sending 200 troops for military operations along the Syrian border. The Pentagon “has made plans to expand the force to 20,000 or more if necessary” for a potential intervention in Syria, the Los Angeles Times reported a day later.

Many people, including large numbers of security personnel, have lost their lives in the violence that broke out in Syria in March 2011.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/24/300057/us-trying-to-change-syria-structure/>

- **Syrian troops recapture key town near Damascus**

Syrian forces have recaptured a key town near the capital, Damascus, after weeks of clashes with foreign-backed militants.



According to Syrian state media, government forces captured the strategic town of Otaybah on Thursday, after five weeks of fighting. Syrian soldiers say a large number of militants were also killed.

Otaybah is said to have been an arms route for the militants.

Syrian officials say they also discovered tunnels used by the militants to transfer weapons.

The Syrian government says the chaos that has gripped the country for more than two years is being orchestrated from outside.

Syrian President Bashar a-Assad has said that if the militant groups take power in

Syria, they could destabilize the entire Middle East for decades.

The United States and Qatar recently announced their readiness to boost their support for the militants operating inside Syria, in an act of foreign interference in the internal affairs of the crisis-hit country.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/04/25/300149/syria-recaptures-key-town-near-capital/>

- **Syria air force strikes rebels near Damascus**

Warplanes also struck villages in Idlib, Al Raqqa, Hasake and Daraa

Beirut: Syria's air force carried out air strikes on rebel enclaves near Damascus on Thursday, while clashes pitted rebels against troops in the north of the capital, a monitoring group said.



Warplanes also struck villages in the northwestern province of Idlib, rebel-controlled Al Raqqa in the north, Hasake in the northeast and Daraa in the south, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Helicopters, meanwhile, strafed several targets in the Eastern Ghouta area, east of Damascus, a rebel stronghold and scene of intense battles in past months. Thursday's violence comes a day after an army takeover of the town of Otaybeh, east of Damascus, which the Observatory said "opens the gate for the army into the Eastern Ghouta area".

Warplanes also struck Moadamiyet Al Sham and Daraya, southwest of Damascus, where the army has for several months tried to crush the insurgency

ateways into the capital. The Observatory also reported fierce clashes pitting troops

against rebels in the flashpoint Barzeh district of northern Damascus, which rebels have infiltrated from the east. Elsewhere, warplanes struck Maaret Al Numan in Idlib province, as well as several villages in the Hasake and Daraa countryside.

In Raqqa province, fighter jets struck an area near a sugar factory, while "fierce clashes pitting troops against rebels raged near army Base 17", near the provincial capital.

Rebels have had the base under siege for several weeks. Although rebels have controlled the provincial capital Raqqa since March, troops holed up in the base have held out. On Wednesday, at least 138 people were killed in violence across Syria, the Observatory said. Among them were 44 civilians, 59 rebels and 35 troops.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/region/syria/syria-air-force-strikes-rebels-near-damascus-1.1175252>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahrain calls for GCC efforts to combat threats**

Recently discovered terror plots have proven links to Iran, interior minister says



Manama: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states need to boost their coordination efforts to confront the increase in the threats to the region, Bahrain's interior minister has said.

"The law should be the top option in addressing security-related issues and stances," Shaikh Rashid Bin Abdullah Al Khalifa said. "However, there is no question in any case that we will ever compromise the security of our nation. Anyone plotting to undermine our sovereignty and security should not expect us to consent and bow. The aggression that we have lived through and the security incidents that the region has

witnessed have made us better aware of the threats to our security and stability. This stimulates us to move forward towards more cooperation and unity through words and deeds," Shaikh Rashid said as he chaired the 14th consultative meeting of GCC interior ministers in Manama on Tuesday.

Numerous security-related incidents have occurred in the region since the 13th meeting held in Riyadh, the minister said.

"In Bahrain, the security authorities have discovered a terrorist cell that aimed to set up a military network to perpetrate acts of terror in vital locations. The suspects' confessions as well as the details about their movements, calls, money transfers and technology in making explosives proved their links with Iran and Tehran's attempts to interfere in the homeland security of Bahrain. All this in addition to the continuation of violence, vandalism and criminal acts by terrorists against policemen and civilians," he said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-calls-for-gcc-efforts-to-combat-threats-1.1174520>

- **JEM internal divisions turn deadly:
Darfur rebel leader killed**

THE HAGUE - Darfur rebel leader Saleh Jerbo, charged with war crimes by the International Criminal Court, has been killed in the war-ravaged western Sudanese region, fellow rebels and his defence team said.

"The defence of Mr Saleh Mohammed Jerbo Jamus hereby notifies the trial chamber, with great sadness... that Mr Jerbo died in North Darfur, Sudan on the afternoon of 19 April 2013, and was buried the same day," said an ICC document published late Tuesday.

Jerbo, along with fellow Darfur rebel leader Abdallah Banda, faced three war crimes charges for allegedly leading an attack on African Union peacekeepers in northern Darfur in September 2007, killing 12.

The two had been due to go on trial at The Hague-based ICC in May 2014.

Banda, around 50, and Jerbo, 36, appeared voluntarily before the court in June 2010 and urged other war crimes suspects to surrender to justice.

"Mr Jerbo was killed during an attack on his location by forces of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) faction led by Gibril Ibrahim," said the ICC document.

Last Friday Ibrahim's group, the main JEM group, announced it had clashed around Jebel Darma in North Darfur state with a breakaway faction led by Mohamed Bashar.

Ali Wafi, spokesman for JEM's Bashar faction within which Jerbo was the deputy commander, confirmed Jerbo's death.

"Our deputy commander was killed on Friday at 2:00 pm when he came back from visiting his family in an area in north Darfur," Wafi said by telephone from Doha.

"He was ambushed by the Gibril group and he was killed with his four guards and we are now preparing to take revenge for our deputy commander."

Bashar's faction signed a peace deal with Khartoum in early April. It became only the second group to join the 2011 peace pact signed in the Gulf state of Qatar

between Sudan's government and the Liberation and Justice Movement, an alliance of rebel splinter factions.

Four others are wanted for war crimes in Darfur: Sudanese Defence Minister Abdelrahim Mohamed Hussein, former Sudanese government minister Ahmad Harun, pro-government Janjaweed militia leader Ali Kushayb, and Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir, whom prosecutors accuse of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur.

Bashir continues to defy an ICC arrest warrant as he travels around the continent.

At least 300,000 people have been killed in Darfur and two million people forced to flee their homes since non-Arab rebels first rose up against the Arab-dominated Khartoum regime in 2003, the United Nations says.

The government puts the death toll at 10,000.

While the worst of the violence has long passed, instability has been complicated by inter-Arab fighting, kidnappings,

carjackings and other crimes, many suspected to be the work of government-linked militia and paramilitary groups.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58332>

- **Arab countries divided over media credibility**

Many in Egypt and Tunisia remain distrustful of news media, says new research on media habits in the Middle East.



Doha, Qatar - People in some Arab countries appear to be divided when it comes to trusting the credibility of their national news agencies, according to the results of a recently conducted survey of media habits in the region.

Preliminary results of the survey, released on Wednesday during a session of the Qatar Media Industries Forum in Doha, showed that a majority of adults in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates believed their news media to be "credible".

However, in Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia, only a quarter of those surveyed trusted the credibility of their media outlets, according to results of the survey of nearly 10,000 adults conducted by Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q).

"This is a particularly interesting phenomenon in Lebanon, as this is thought to be a country with 'free press'", Everette Dennis, dean and CEO of NU-Q, said in a statement.

Over a four-month period, researchers from Harris Interactive surveyed 9,693 adults in eight Arab countries - Egypt, Qatar, Tunisia, Bahrain, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the UAE - in an effort to show how people use media, particularly news media, following the "Arab Spring" that began in 2011.

Kerry Hill, a research director at Harris Interactive, described the survey as "the largest study in the region for public release on media use".

Freedom of expression

The research highlighted a seeming paradox: A majority in most of the countries surveyed said they thought people should have the freedom to express their opinions on the internet, even when these views are unpopular. An especially high number in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates agreed.

Yet at the same time, about half of respondents also said they support tighter regulation of the internet in their countries, with a somewhat higher percentage saying so in Qatar, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia.

Humphrey Taylor, the chairman of the Harris Poll, said it is "very common to find this kind of apparent contradiction" - noting that in the United States during the Cold War, large majorities said they supported the principle of freedom of speech, yet objected to allowing speech supporting Communism.

The Gulf gap

The survey data highlighted a big gap between the wealthy Gulf countries and less affluent Arab nations to the west. Overwhelming majorities in the Gulf have internet access, including about 9 in 10 people in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. But just 46 percent are connected in Jordan and 22 percent in Egypt. (Yemen has the lowest internet penetration rates in the region: a scant 2 percent, according to a 2011 Gallup poll.)

Egypt and the small island state of Bahrain are close to polar opposites in terms of media habits. Hill described Egypt as “very media-poor, with the exception of TV” - whereas Bahrainis are voracious consumers of all types of media, with large numbers saying they use social media sites and read books, magazines, and newspapers.

When asked about the top news sources they consume, about a quarter of those across the region named Al Jazeera, followed by Saudi Arabia-based Al Arabiya at 16 percent and social networking website Facebook at 10 percent.

Google was found to be the most popular news source among Bahrainis, Facebook among Tunisians, LBC among Lebanese, Al Hayat among Egyptians, and Al Arabiya in Saudi Arabia. Al Jazeera topped the list in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/2013424125618802556.html>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Earthquake kills 13, injures 105 in Afghanistan

At least 13 people have been killed and 105 more sustained injuries in a 5.7 magnitude earthquake that rattled Afghanistan, with strong tremors felt in neighboring Pakistan, Press TV reports.

According to the US Geological Survey (USGS), the Wednesday quake struck at a depth of 65 kilometers (40 miles), some 25 kilometers northwest of Jalalabad in Afghanistan’s Nangarhar province, close to the Pakistani border.

Pakistan's meteorological office put the magnitude of the earthquake at 6.2.

On April 4, an earthquake measuring 5.9 on the Richter scale jolted parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The epicenter of the quake was on the Afghan-Tajikistan border at a depth of 225 kilometers (140 miles), Pakistani meteorological officials said.

The quake also hit northwestern Pakistan, Islamabad and parts of Pakistan's central province of Punjab.

The worst earthquake to hit Afghanistan in recent years occurred on May 30, 1998, when a quake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale struck Takhar and Badakhshan provinces. Between 4,000 and 4,500 people died in the tremor.

About 7,000 families were affected and approximately 16,000 houses were destroyed or damaged, according to The New York Times.

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

- **Turkey plans to keep troops in Afghanistan after NATO pullout**

The government of Turkey announced its intention to keep its peacemakers in Afghanistan, even if NATO withdraws its troops from the country by the end of 2014.

Turkish defense minister Ismet Yilmaz on Wednesday said the decision was taken following his visit to Afghanistan where Afghan officials expressed their hope that Turkey will keep its troops in Afghanistan.

Ismet Yilmaz said, "If we keep our peacemakers in Afghanistan beyond NATO troops withdrawal, it will create a confidence among the Afghans."

This comes as NATO-led coalition security forces are preparing to end their combat mission in Afghanistan by 2014 after Afghan security forces take full lead of the security responsibilities across the country.

In response to Turkish hostages who were captured by Taliban militants in eastern Logar province of Afghanistan, Turkish defense minister Ismet Yilmaz said the captives are in good condition however there have no development regarding their freedom so far.

He also added that the government of Turkey expects that the captives are released by Taliban soon.

<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.*

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