



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces 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



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| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. IRAQ..... | 3 |
| • Kurdish official, US Consul General discuss agreement reached between Central Government, Region..... | 3 |
| • Foreign Ministry : Iraq strongly refuses entry og armed group to its territory | 3 |
| • MP calls the government and parliament to take clear stand on Turkey | 4 |
| • The IS coalition Carry-Maliki Iraqi civilian life and safty responsibility and to protect them from armed criminal militias | 4 |
| • Close to Maliki calls for a position from Erdogan - Ocalan Agreement | 5 |
| • Mutlaq’s bloc protests against the government | 6 |
| • Border guards denies any PKK element’s arrival to the region..... | 7 |
| • Sadr bloc’s efforts to cancel Maliki’s exceptions for Baathists | 8 |
| • American newspaper talks about civil war in Iraq | 9 |
| • Baghdad denies refuge to PKK fighters | 11 |
| 2. IRAN..... | 12 |
| • Envoy: Tehran's Ties with Baku Not Impaired by Detention of Azeri Nationals | 12 |
| • Iranian FM: Bashar Assad Ready to Talk with Opposition..... | 13 |
| • Iran presidential hopeful Aref vows to abide by electoral laws..... | 14 |
| • Turkey parliament speaker calls for enhancement of Ankara-Tehran ties..... | 15 |
| • Sanctions losing effect on Iran: US Congress research arm | 16 |
| • Coalition of Five picks Aboutorabi-Fard to run for president | 17 |
| • Culture, and not nuclear weapons, would make future | 18 |
| • US blacklists firms over sanctions on Iran’s oil sector..... | 19 |
| • Hassan Sobhani registers for presidential election..... | 20 |
| • Iran president still a force even as his era ends | 21 |
| 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE | 25 |
| • Danon vows: Israel won't freeze settlement building..... | 25 |
| • Israel bid to build new settler units sabotages peace process: Erekat | 26 |
| • Israel approves construction of 296 settler units in West Bank | 27 |
| • Palestine calls emergency Arab League meeting | 28 |
| • UN Report: Israeli Policies Hindered Development in East Jerusalem..... | 29 |
| • Hagel: ‘Political, not military’ solutions needed in Middle East..... | 31 |
| 4. AFRICA and EGYPT | 33 |
| • 'Black Decade' terrorists given death sentences..... | 33 |
| • Opposition rallies Friday to condemn 'Morsi failures', demand early elections..... | 34 |
| • Ghannouchi Condemns Militant Violence, Calls for “Peaceful Jihad” | 35 |
| • President Morsi invites Brazilian investment in Egypt..... | 36 |
| 5. JORDAN and LEBANON..... | 38 |
| • Lebanon foils terrorist attacks: Army | 38 |
| • Nasrallah closed government negotiations door, deputy speaker says | 38 |



| | |
|--|-----------|
| • Syria to equip Hezbollah with game-changing arms: Nasrallah..... | 39 |
| • Abu Qatada will go to Jordan if it 'ratifies' UK treaty..... | 43 |
| 6. SYRIA..... | 44 |
| • Iran, Turkey both see dialog as only solution to Syria crisis: Iran VP | 44 |
| • U.S. warns against Russian missile sales to Syria | 45 |
| • Israel's strategic clarity in Syria | 48 |
| • Syria warns Israel against striking | 51 |
| 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA..... | 54 |
| • Sharjah Imam attacker gets support from friends | 54 |
| 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN | 55 |
| • US funds worth \$50 million stolen from Afghan bank: SIGAR | 55 |
| • Karzai Says U.S. Wants Nine Bases After 2014..... | 56 |
| • German chancellor in surprise visit to Afghanistan | 56 |

1. IRAQ

- **Kurdish official, US Consul General discuss agreement reached between Central Government, Region**

Erbil (NINA) – Head of Kurdistan Region's Foreign Relations Department, Fallah Mustafa, and the US Consul General in Kurdistan Region, Paul Sutphin, and Political Advisor at the US Embassy in Baghdad, Anthony Goodfree, discussed the Region's current situation and recent agreement reached between the Region and Baghdad.

A statement issued on Thursday, May 9, by the Region's Government said that Mustafa presented a summary on developments in Kurdistan Region and results of recent visit by the Region's Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, to Baghdad, shedding light on the agreement reached between the two sides.

For its part, the Consulate's delegation welcomed the return of Kurdish ministers to Baghdad, describing the initiative of being objective, renewing the US commitment to the efforts aiming to put an end to all obstacles between Baghdad and Erbil.

On the other hand, the two sides discussed developments in the area, events in Syria and

the reconciliation in Turkey, as well as the region's relations with neighboring countries.

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

- **Foreign Ministry : Iraq strongly refuses entry of armed group to its territory .**

Baghdad / NINA /-- Foreign Ministry confirmed that the Iraqi government strongly refuses the entry of armed groups into its territory.

According to a statement by the Ministry on the start of the withdrawal of the PKK from Turkey into Iraqi territory said : " As much as Iraq is welcoming any political and peaceful settlement for the Kurdish question in Turkey to put an end to the bloodshed and adopt democratic approach, they reject strongly entry of armed groups into its territory which can be exploited in sabotage operations and deteriorating the security situation and stability in Iraq , noting that Iraq expresses this stand on basis of sovereignty and commitment to international principle to secure Iraqi stability.

Head of the Peace and Democratic Kurdish Party , Saladin Dmrtash yesterday confirmed that the PKK begun to withdraw from Turkey to Qandil mountains in Iraqi Kurdistan region in the framework of agreement and ongoing peace process between the P KK and Ankara

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

- **MP calls the government and parliament to take clear stand on Turkey**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the state of law coalition, Yassin Majeed called on parliament and government to take clear position about the recent agreement between the Turkish government, represented by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, to withdraw the fighters of PKK into northern Iraq.

He said in a press conference today May 9 that "Iraq welcomes any agreement between Turkey and its opponents, represented by PKK or the other, but not at the expense of Iraq and its sovereignty and independence," considering that a historic mistake of the Turkish government. "

He wondered: "Is the Iraqi government, represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has informed to this Agreement, which entered into force and stipulates to withdraw PKK from Turkish territory to their bases in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq? Are these lands / Qandil Mountains / is Turkish territory that Erdogan and Ocalan agreed? And why it is in this particular time? "

He made it clear that " there was a triple joint committee between Iraq, Turkey and the United States on anti-terrorist operations carried out by the PKK and after the U.S. withdrawal it became within the responsibility of Iraq and the guards of the region."

Majeed called on the government and parliament to take a clear and explicit stand to this blatant overtaking on the sovereignty and independence of Iraq.

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

- **The IS coalition Carry-Maliki Iraqi civilian life and safty responsibility and to protect them from armed criminal militias.**

Baghdad/ NINA /-- The Iraqiya Slate, carried PM –Nuri al-Maliki on his quality as commander in chief of the armed forces Iraqis' life and safety responsibility and to protect them from armed criminal militias equipped with sophisticated weapons while Maliki government kept silent, but backed them according to what published by media about the support that these militia receive from intelligence services of certain neighboring country.

A statement by the coalition said today, "We are surprised by derogatory statements, full of threats and intimidation against peaceful protestors made by leading members of militias who are allied with some hegemonic parties as the State of Law headed by PM , Maliki, pointing to the so called Aasaib Ahl al-Haq , Almqhtar /chosen/ army , Hezbollah Brigades and other gangs played a major role in the destruction of the country and dismantling the society , in front of the eyes and ears of the security forces and the Iraqi government moreover published by official and not official media outlets .

The statement said that "such irresponsible statements fraught with violence and hatred is directly linked to the bombings of mosques and cafes which occurred in recent weeks, and

the continuing assassinations, which led to the deaths of dozens of innocent young people in different cities of Iraq."

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

- **Close to Maliki calls for a position from Erdogan - Ocalan Agreement**

Shafaq News / MP of State of law coalition, Yassin Majeed demanded on Thursday, for a clear governmental and parliamentary position from the recent agreement between the Turkish government represented by Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the leader of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers Party to withdraw the latter's fighters into Kurdistan.

"Iraq welcomes any agreement between Turkey and opponents represented by PKK or others, but not at the expense of Iraq's sovereignty and independency," considering "the agreement as a historic mistake of the Turkish government," Majeed said in a press conference held in the parliament, attended by "Shafaq News".

" Till the recent past there was a near triple joint committee between Iraq and Turkey and the United States on anti-terrorist operations

carried out by the Turkish -Kurdistan Workers Party and after the US withdrawal , it became the responsibility of Iraq and the region's guards “.

Majid who is close to Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki called,”the government and parliament to take clear and explicit position of this blatant violation on the sovereignty and independence of Iraq”.

Turkish sources and media reports said last January, that the Turkish authorities and the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan agreed in negotiations between them to cease fight taking place since 1984 between the two sides.

It is worth mentioning that the military leadership of Kurdistan Workers' Party has confirmed in a statement published in the media, the withdrawal of its troops from Turkey starting from Wednesday, warning Ankara at the same time of any “provocation”.

“Any element of PKK didn't arrive to Kurdistan borders so far,” commander of the First Brigade in the border guards in Dohuk province, Hussein Tamur told “Shafaq News”.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/6050-close-to-maliki-calls-for-a-position-from-erdogan-ocalan-agreement.html>

- **Mutlaq's bloc protests against the government**

Shafaq News / Arabiya bloc, led by Deputy Prime Minister for Services Affairs , Saleh al-Mutlaq rejected on Wednesday, the threats of Qais al-Khazali, leader of Asaib alhel al Haq against ministers and MPs , calling on the Iraqi government to confront the militias that are trying to “incite sectarian strife”.

Khazali threatened four ago to punish politicians who hold a “foreign agendas” and trying to divide the country.

He called the protesters in the provinces where the demonstrations are taking place “not to ruin their demonstrations by sectarian speech and to expel foolish clerics and all of who calls to make territories and kill the army elements”.

“Qais al-Khazali threats against MPs and ministers is unacceptable and needs a decisive stand by the state,” the member of the bloc, Haider Mulla said in a news conference in the parliament, attended by “Shafaq News”.

“Al-Khazali threat would affect ministers and MPs in hotels, parliament, and ministries and inside their armored vehicles as well,” Mullah added.

It’s worth mentioning that Asaib alhel al Haq in Iraq, announced itself as a resistance movement of the U.S. presence in Iraq, which began in April 2003, it was founded by, Mohammed Tabatabai , Qais al-Khazali and Akram al- Kaabi with a number of men and followers of the Hawza of those who reject the foreign presence.

Asaib alhel al Haq split from the Sadrist movement after the announcement of Moqtada al-Sadr of freezing the actions of Mahdi Army, the relation between the two parties witnessed tension especially after the confirmation of the Sadrist movement in several forums that it is not related to the organization.

The leader of the Sadrist movement, Muqtada al-Sadr has accused Asaib al Haq of killing politicians and members of the Iraqi army and police, demanding Iran to stop supporting this group.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/6042-mutlaqs-bloc-protests-against-the-government-.html>

- **Border guards denies any PKK element’s arrival to the region**

Shafaq News / A military source denied on Wednesday the arrival of elements of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) forces to the region’s border, while pointing out that the situation in Dohuk is clam.

“Any element of PKK didn’t arrive to Kurdistan borders so far,” commander of the First Brigade in the border guards in Dohuk province, Hussein Tamur told “Shafaq News”.

The military leadership of Kurdistan Workers' Party has confirmed in a statement published in the media, the withdrawal of its troops from Turkey starting from Wednesday, warning Ankara at the same time of any “provocation”.

It is noted that Turkish sources and media reports said last January, that the Turkish authorities and the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan agreed in negotiations between them to cease fight taking place since 1984 between the two sides.

Sources said that the agreement includes several stages to suspend the PKK attacks starting from last March, in return for the Turkish state aims to approve rights of Kurds in Turkey.

Observers had expected the arrival of the first groups of PKK within a week to bases in Kurdistan region; where there are fortified camps of the party.

The estimated number of Kurdish fighters who are in Turkey is around 2000 in addition to 2500 in the rear bases of the movement in Iraqi territory.

It is worth mentioning that attempts took place in 2009 to open a dialogue with PKK leaders; but the attempts failed and led to the intensification of fighting between the two sides.

Observers say that the conflict between the two parties in Turkey killed more than 45 thousand people, since the PKK began its armed operations in 1984.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/6040-border-guards-denies-any-pkk-elements-arrival-to-the-region.html>

- **Sadr bloc's efforts to cancel Maliki's exceptions for Baathists**



Shafaq News / Signatures from MPs were collected on Thursday to include a paragraph in the draft law of criminalizing Baath Party that will cancel the preceded and future exceptions on those included by the law of accountability and justice, Parliamentary Ahrar bloc of the Sadrist movement said.

It is hoped that the parliament would legislate during the next period a law criminalizing those who joined Baath Party, which led Iraq during the regime of Saddam Hussein and was banned after toppling the regime in 2003.

There is already a law banning prominent Baath officials from taking over government positions that has faced widespread criticism from the angry Sunni protesters on the government's policies, prompting the

government to amend it but this was rejected by the Sadrist movement.

“Ahrar bloc collected signatures to include a paragraph on criminalizing Baath law demanding to cancel the previous exceptions and prevent any new exceptions on those included in the accountability and justice law,” MP of Ahrar bloc , Maha al-Douri said at a press conference in the parliament, attended by “Shafaq News”.

She accused the government of Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki of not applying accountability and justice law with transparency and excepting people who support his policies.

State of Law coalition led by al-Maliki boycotts the parliament sessions and says that its presence will depend on the inclusion of criminalization Baath law on the agenda while the Presidency of the parliament says that the law needs further study by committees before voting on it.

The law would increase resentment among protesters of anti-government policies who are demonstrating for months to demand legal amendments that would establish justice among the various components.

Name of senior officials of Baath Party are associated with crimes committed against opponents of his rule, particularly Kurds and Shiite Muslims, where tens of thousands of them were killed and buried in mass graves and sentenced without trial.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/6051-sadr-blocs-efforts-to-cancel-maliki-exceptions-for-baathists.html>

- **American newspaper talks about civil war in Iraq**

Shafaq News / “The Washington Post” American newspaper predicted, on Thursday, Iraq's return to the “civil war” that took place in 2006, as it considers that the absence of US forces would lead to the expansion of the war to combine to the internal fighting in Syria and moves to Lebanon.

The newspaper published an editorial titled “A crisis for Iraq - and the Middle East,” briefed by “Shafaq News”, said that “the sectarian regional war was always of the predicted greatest danger to the crisis consequences in Syria close to erupting, as militant group , Hezbollah militia has publicly committed itself to defending the regime of Bashar al-Assad,

and Syrian opposition sources say it has been instrumental in the regime's recent battlefield".

On the other hand, it pointed out that "at least 218 people have been killed in gun battles and bombings since the Iraqi army stormed a Sunni protest encampment near Kirkuk on April 23. The United Nations says 712 people died in political violence during April, the most since 2008.

The Iraqi army forces raided last month the Sit-in Square of Hawija southern of Kirkuk province, killing and wounding dozens, including soldiers.

"What is happening in Iraq at the moment is similar to the events that led to the civil war there in 2006 but there are two differences: There are no U.S. troops available to tamp down the violence, as happened during the Iraq "surge" and the fighting could easily merge with that in Syria and spread to Lebanon. Already, al-Qaeda organizations in Syria and Iraq have proclaimed a joint "emirate" and the strongholds of the two groups are adjacent to each other along the border".

The newspaper added that "Shiite militiamen from Iraq are believed to be fighting on the side of the regime in Syria, and the Iraqi government of Nuri al-Maliki has been turning a blind eye to shipments of Iranian arms and fighters to Syria, despite repeated efforts from Obama administration".

Iraq shares border with Syria extends for about 600 km, bordering Anbar and Nineveh provinces from the Iraqi side.

"Yet Mr. Maliki's behavior has been driven in large part by Syria. The Shiite leader fears that a victory by the mostly Sunni opposition in Syria, with support from the Sunni regimes of Turkey and Saudi Arabia, would lead to an attempt to restore Sunni dominance in Iraq, as during the era of Saddam Hussein," the newspaper said.

Syria is experiencing, a popular uprising calling for an end to the rule of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, as the uprising turned into an armed conflict with government forces that killed thousands, according to human rights organizations and humanitarian groups.

Observers in the region warn that the Syrian crisis began to evolve and take a sectarian turn that may include the region in general

and the neighboring countries of Syria in particular, as Iraq if a religious, sectarian and nationalist plurality.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/6045-american-newspaper-talks-about-civil-war-in-iraq-.html>

- **Baghdad denies refuge to PKK fighters**

Iraq has denied refuge to Turkey's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) fighters, a key element of an accord to bring an end to years of deadly conflicts between Ankara and the PKK.



"The Iraqi government welcomes any political and peaceful settlement to the Kurdish cause in Turkey to stop the bloodshed and violence between the two sides and adopt a democratic approach to end this internal struggle," said a statement issued by the Iraqi Foreign Ministry on Thursday.

"But at the same time ... it does not accept the entry of armed groups to its territories that can be used to harm Iraq's security and stability," the ministry said.

The statement came one day after PKK forces started withdrawing to bases in the Iraqi mountains.

In March, the PKK announced a decision to lay down arms and leave the Turkish soil, under a deal reached in talks between jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and the Turkish government.

The refuge offer was proposed by Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which controls the country's north with limited independence from the central Iraqi government in Baghdad.

The prospect of additional fighters joining the Kurdish forces in Iraq's north could add tension to its relations with Baghdad, already strained by conflict over contested areas, including key oil-producing sectors.

PKK - which began an armed struggle for a Kurdish homeland in southeastern Turkey in 1984 - is believed to have between 1,500 and 2,000 fighters on the Turkish soil, in addition

to several thousand more based in northern Iraq.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/09/302669/iraq-denies-entry-to-pkk-fighters/>

2. IRAN

- **Envoy: Tehran's Ties with Baku Not Impaired by Detention of Azeri Nationals**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Mohsen Pakayeen stressed that the detention of two Azeri nationals in Iran for violating the country's laws will leave no harm on the friendly relations between Tehran and Baku.

"The two Azerbaijani citizens had traveled to Iran as tourists and were detained for breaching Iranian laws," Pakayeen was quoted as saying by the Islamic republic news agency on Wednesday.

The Iranian diplomat made the remark in response to a question by Azerbaijan News Agency (APA) about the arrest of Khalida Khalid, a researcher at the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS), and her driver Shamkhal Huseynov, in the northwestern Iranian city of Tabriz.

Dismissing claims that the arrest of Khalid was related to her being an employee of ANAS, the Iranian ambassador explained that Iran has very good relations with ANAS, and that the academy's members attend seminars in Iran.

Pakayeen reiterated that the arrests of the Azeri nationals were made due to their violation of Iranian law, elaborating that over 130 Iranian nationals are currently being held in detention in Azerbaijan for violating the Azeri law.

He emphasized that the detention of the two Azeri citizens will have no bearing on Tehran-Baku relations.

Iran has recently enhanced efforts to boost political, economic, security and cultural ties and cooperation with the regional and neighboring countries, specially the Central Asian states.

In October, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad traveled to Baku to attend the 12th Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization. The summit was held at the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku.

The Iranian and Azeri presidents met on the sidelines of ECO Summit, where the two leaders underlined the need for rigid efforts to expand bilateral relations and widen mutual cooperation.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107168584>

- **Iranian FM: Bashar Assad Ready to Talk with Opposition**

TEHRNA (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi condemned foreign interference and certain countries' financial and arms support for the terrorists in Syria, and said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is ready to hold talks with the opposition groups.

President Assad voiced his readiness to hold talks with the opposition groups, Salehi told reporters on the sidelines of an international meeting on diplomacy in Tehran on Wednesday.

He added that his recent visits to Jordan and Syria were paid to exchange views with officials of the two countries over major bilateral, regional and international issues.

Salehi said "proper and acceptable" decisions were made during his meeting with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria.

"People of Syria are vigilantly monitoring the ongoing situation," the foreign minister said.

He added that Tehran expects "real opponents of the Syrian government to distance themselves from mercenary groups and hold talks with the government over the country's future".

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.

Hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed, when some protest rallies turned into armed clashes.

The government blames outlaws, saboteurs, and armed terrorist groups for the deaths, stressing that the unrest is being orchestrated from abroad.

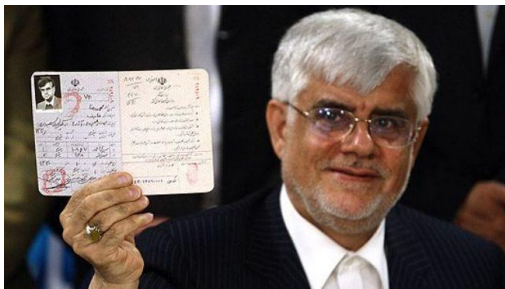
In October 2011, calm was almost restored in the Arab state after President Assad started a reform initiative in the country, but Israel, the

US and its Arab allies sought hard to bring the country into chaos through any possible means. Tel Aviv, Washington and some Arab capitals have been staging various plots to topple President Bashar al-Assad, who is well known in the world for his anti-Israeli stances.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107168550>

- **Iran presidential hopeful Aref vows to abide by electoral laws**

Reformist presidential hopeful Mohammad-Reza Aref has stressed that he will abide by the law throughout the election process.



“The basic duty of every hopeful participating in the presidential election must be to comply with the law and observe regulations,” Aref told a press conference on Friday after signing up for Iran’s June 14 presidential vote.

“I will remain committed to the law from this very moment that I am registering as a hopeful to the end,” he added.

He said he is running for president on account of his decades-long experience in different sectors as well as the current conditions of the country.

Aref, who served as first vice president from 2001 to 2005 under former President Mohammad Khatami, said that if elected, he would try to push the country toward further development.

When asked about his economic plans, Aref said he would seek to curb inflation. “I have drawn up a comprehensive plan to boost development and progress in the country, and in the first phase, inflation will be restrained, and the administration will intervene to rein in the inflation.”

Also on his agenda, he said, are plans to create “fiscal discipline” and promote “investment attraction,” adding that he has envisioned an eight-percent economic growth to decrease inflation.

The registration of hopefuls officially began on May 7 and will run through May 11. More

than 240 people have so far registered for the presidential election.

The president of Iran is elected for a four-year term in a national election. The Guardian Council vets the hopefuls and will publish the final list of candidates later this month.

The next president will replace incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/10/302757/iran-hopeful-aref-vows-to-stay-within-law/>

Turkish Parliament Speaker Cemil Cicek says his country attaches great significance to strengthening ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

- **Turkey parliament speaker calls for enhancement of Ankara-Tehran ties**



Ankara has always regarded its relations with Iran as very important, said the top Turkish parliamentarian in a meeting with Iran's Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs Lotfollah Forouzandeh in Ankara on Thursday.

Cicek said officials from both countries are currently in close contact "at the highest level," adding that Iran and Turkey are two regional heavyweights, which makes such engagements all the more significant.

He further said peace, stability and development in Turkey and in its neighboring countries are closely intertwined.

The Turkish parliament speaker noted that differences in views between Tehran and Ankara on certain regional and international matters should not hinder promotion of mutual relations.

The top Iranian official, for his part, called for further interaction with Turkey, saying any differences of opinion the two countries may have on any issues should be addressed through negotiations.

"Iran believes that the expansion of ties between the two countries and interaction on important international issues benefits both

nations, and friendship with Iran is also important and valuable for Turkey and this is a win-win relationship,” the Iranian vice president said.

Forouzandeh further expressed appreciation over Turkey’s support for Iran’s nuclear energy program, which the Western countries led by the US allege may be geared toward military objectives. Iran vehemently denies the allegations, citing religious prohibitions and a firm commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferations of Nuclear weapons (NPT).

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/10/302743/turkey-underlines-relations-with-iran/>

- **Sanctions losing effect on Iran: US Congress research arm**

A recent report by the US Congress’ research arm says the illegal US-led sanctions against the Islamic Republic are losing their effect.



“The strategic effects of sanctions might be abating as Iran adjusts to them economically,” the Congressional Research Service (CRS) said in a report, adding that the illegal US-led sanctions against Iran's energy sector have even led to a “sharp increase” in non-oil exports such as agricultural goods, minerals and industrial goods.

“Sanctions do not appear to have reduced Iran's influence or strategic capabilities in the Middle East,” the report further said.

The report added that anti-Iran sanctions have also failed to hinder the Islamic Republic’s ability to develop defensive weapons indigenously.

“Some argue that Iran might even benefit from sanctions over the long term by being compelled to diversify its economy and reduce dependence on oil revenues,” the report added.

The CRS report also questioned the efficacy anti-Iran sanctions in curbing the Iranian nuclear energy program.

At the beginning of 2012, the US 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 have been imposed on Iran over the groundless charges of a potential military diversion in Iran's nuclear energy program.

Iran rejects the unfounded allegations over its nuclear energy program, 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/2013/05/09/302661/bans-losing-effect-on-iran-us-think-tank/>

- **Coalition of Five picks Aboutorabi-Fard to run for president**

Iranian presidential hopeful Mohammad Hassan Aboutorabi-Fard has been selected as the candidate from the principlist Coalition of Five to register for the June 14 race.



Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Mousa-Pour, the secretary of the coalition, announced the decision on Thursday, saying Aboutorabi-Fard would sign up for the election at the Interior Ministry on Friday morning.

He said the choice was made based on a consensus among the members.

Yahya Al-e Eshaq, the chairman of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, former Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, General Inspection Office of Iran Director Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, and MP Mohammad Reza Bahonar are the other members of the Coalition of Five.

The registration of hopefuls for Iran's 11th presidential election officially began on May 7 on the order of the Iranian Interior Ministry and hopefuls can register until May 11.

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

Council vets the candidates based on their qualifications.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/09/302689/aboutorabifard-to-register-for-president/>

- **Culture, and not nuclear weapons, would make future**

TEHRAN, May 8 (MNA) – Iran’s president says culture and not the nuclear weapons will make the future of the world.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was addressing the Meeting of Cultural Representatives of Asian Cooperation countries, said that cooperation, synergy, and coordination were major factors of providing security, peace and national progress. “Asia is rich in human capabilities and talents necessary for progress,” Ahmadinejad added.

“Great civilizations have dawned in Asia. Developments in Asia definitely will have the first role in shaping future international order, and any movement in Asia will have effects all over the world,” he asserted.

Ahmadinejad pointed out that Eastern world and Asia has been a pioneer in shaping culture

and human values. “Love for humanity lies in the heart of cultural values in the east and Asia. Human culture is pivotal for human value for being resilient,” he asserted, and that “man without culture does not much differ from other creatures.”

Ahmadinejad believed that those who used atomic bomb, killing more than 250,000 human and rendering millions of others invalid lacked human culture. “In World War I and II, more than 70m people died. The number of those who decided to go to war to plunder other nations’ wealth and solve their economic problems hardly amounted to 100. Iraq and Afghanistan were invaded, and a president raged a war to dominate over oil in Asia and solve his country economic problems, and in a course of a decade, a million were killed or injured,” Ahmadinejad explained.

“They lack human culture and their human soul has been dead,” asserted Ahmadinejad, and that “their heart is deprived of love of humans.”

“Your coming together in the name of culture is a sacred mission. To solve economic and political issues, we should improve culture. Asia is the cradle for culture, and I believe that

your cultural movement soon will be a global current,” he said.

Ahmadinejad expressed his hope that the meeting would be the source of a great change in Asian nations’ cultural relations. “Culture will make the future and not atomic weapons,” he asserted.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1821468>

- **US blacklists firms over sanctions on Iran’s oil sector**

The United States has put two international companies on its blacklist for allegedly helping Iran bypass illegal unilateral oil sanctions and slapped penalties on four Tehran-based firms in connection with Iran's nuclear energy program.



The US Treasury Department announced on Thursday that it has blacklisted the recently

formed Sambouk Shipping FZC, a company based in the United Arab Emirates, saying it is linked to Dimitris Cambis, a Greek shipping magnate, who has been accused of helping Iran sell its oil despite the sanctions.

In March, the Treasury imposed sanctions on Cambis and his Impire Shipping Limited, claiming that he secretly operated a shipping network on behalf of Iran to get around sanctions on the country's oil sector. The Greek businessman has denied the allegation.

The sanctions prohibit US citizens from doing business with Cambis and the shipping firms and may freeze any assets they have under US jurisdiction.

The Treasury Department also slapped sanctions on the joint Iranian Venezuelan Bi-National Bank, claiming that it had helped obscure Iran’s oil deals.

In addition, four Tehran-based companies and one Iranian citizen have been fined for their alleged involvement in procuring equipment for Iran’s nuclear energy program.

Washington is seeking to mount pressure and toughen its unilateral sanctions on Tehran over its nuclear energy activities.

A bipartisan group of US senators on Wednesday introduced new legislation that would block Iran's access to its foreign currency reserves around the world.

The bill aims to block Tehran from converting its oil revenues into local currencies in other countries. It also seeks to limit the ability of the Central Bank of Iran and the National Iranian Oil Company to conduct transactions in foreign currencies. The reserves are estimated to be worth up to 100 billion dollars.

The US, Israel and some of their allies claim that Tehran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program with Washington and the European Union using the false claim as pretext to impose international and unilateral sanctions on Iran.

Tehran rejects the allegation against its nuclear energy activities, 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.

On March 14, the US State Department said that it had placed sanctions on two Iranian firms, saying the companies provide insurance services to Iran's main petroleum shipper. It also imposed a visa ban against six corporate officers with the companies.

In November 2012, the US Senate approved another round of sanctions against Iran's energy, port, shipping and shipbuilding sectors. Under the bans, the United States would impose sanctions on anyone selling or supplying certain commodities to Iran - including graphite, aluminum, steel, and some industrial software - that are relevant to the country's shipbuilding and nuclear energy sectors.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/10/302748/us-blacklists-firms-over-iran-oil-sanctions/>

- **Hassan Sobhani registers for presidential election**

TEHRAN – Hassan Sobhani, a professor of economics at the University of Tehran and former parliamentarian, registered for the presidential election on Wednesday.

In an interview with the Mehr News Agency on the same day, Sobhani said that he would make efforts to promote freedom of political parties and freedom of assembly if elected president.

The registration of candidates started on May 7 and ends on May 11.

According to Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, 75 candidates registered on the first day of the registration. And 65 candidates registered on the second day.

Five of the candidates, who registered on Tuesday, are well-known political figures, namely former nuclear negotiator Hassan Rohani, former housing and urban development minister Mohammad Saeedikia, former vice president for scientific affairs Sadeq Vaezzadeh, former health minister Kamran Baqeri-Lankarani, and former MP Mostafa Kavakebian.

The 11th presidential election is scheduled to be held on June 14.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107519-hassan-sobhani-registers-for-presidential-election>

• Iran president still a force even as his era ends

Public opinion remains a legitimate force in Iran despite the existing theocratic regime, a fact to be stated ahead of presidential elections on 14 June

When many struggling families in this eastern Iranian city take stock of outgoing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's legacy, it's not about the oratory full of bluster and menace or his tussles with Iran's ruling clerics that are known to much of the world.

What matters more here are the dusty rows of government-subsidized, two-story apartment buildings on the outskirts of the once-neglected outpost — testament to an effective populist outreach that has won the president millions of loyal backers in the provinces.

That support could give him influence beyond next month's election to pick his successor, underscoring how public opinion is relevant in Iran despite the heavy hand of clerical rule.

At first glance, Ahmadinejad may appear as a mostly spent political force. Damaging internal battles with the Islamic establishment over

power and policies have left him so politically toxic in ruling circles that the possible leading candidates to replace him have all joined to ridicule his presidency.

But counting Ahmadinejad out grossly underestimates his most critical asset: A deep well of grateful and loyal supporters in hardscrabble places such as Birjand, a city of nearly 300,000 in wind-swept hills near the border with Afghanistan.

"May God bless Ahmadinejad," said Birjand taxi driver Ali Reza Farsi. "He is my hero."

While Iran's theocracy holds many levers in the election, including vetting all candidates and deciding who appears on the final ballot, public opinion remains a legitimate force in Iran.

It gave pro-reform President Mohammad Khatami a landslide re-election in 2001 and unleashed its fury after claims that vote fraud brought Ahmadinejad back for a second term four years ago.

Now, it's Ahmadinejad's backers who could rattle the system. No previous Iranian president has left office on such bad terms with the ruling clerics. A cozy landing for the

56-year-old leader in the inner circle or as an elder statesman is highly unlikely.

This leaves Ahmadinejad with his big political ego and his still-significant political base.

"There is no doubt that an Ahmadinejad loyalist is a tough challenger no matter what," said prominent political analyst Saeed Leilaz. "Conservatives and reformists would have to fight an Ahmadinejad loyalist, who has strong supporters in small towns and rural areas."

His main goal has been to get his chief adviser, Efsandiar Rahim Mashaei, on the June 14 ballot. But the chances that his protege, whose daughter is married to Ahmadinejad's son, would be approved are sharply dimmed because of his messy power struggles with the clerics.

The relationship worsened in 2011 with a dispute over the choice of intelligence minister. The atmosphere became so divisive that Ahmadinejad boycotted government meetings for 11 days to protest being overruled by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say in all critical affairs.

Even without Mashaei on the ballot, Ahmadinejad has clout in other ways stemming from his policies funneling money and public works to long-neglected areas.

He could suddenly be transformed from scorned to courted by the front-runners, including a former nuclear negotiator, a top adviser for Khamenei and the mayor of Tehran, if they decide an endorsement from Ahmadinejad could bring in a potential voter windfall in the provinces

Or he could break away and start his own political movement, which could quickly become a serious force. Ahmadinejad cannot run this year because of term limits, but a comeback bid is possible as early as 2017.

The five-day registration period for candidates closes Saturday. The election overseers, known as the Guardian Council, will announce the handful of candidates on the ballot later this month. The list is expected to be weighted heavily toward establishment-friendly hopefuls.

Reformists and liberal-leaning groups have been widely crushed and left leaderless after massive street protests following Ahmadinejad's disputed 2009 victory.

Ahmadinejad was the surprise winner in 2005 by portraying himself as a champion of the poor. In many ways, he has remained true to this identity even as he morphed from loyal foot soldier for the theocracy to an agitator who broke taboos and challenged the authority of Khamenei.

Those failed battles left Ahmadinejad politically humbled and openly derided by the presumed front-runners in the June election.

But Ahmadinejad has weathered the storms in the hinterlands. For eight years, his political roadshow traveled to small towns and villages across Iran where many people say even local authorities had never visited.

His government redirected oil revenue into development projects and cash handouts in impoverished areas. His critics called it demagoguery and evidence of gross fiscal mismanagement, which is blamed for soaring prices and worsening the blows from international sanctions over Iran's nuclear program.

Yet it also earned Ahmadinejad the devotion of millions outside Tehran and other major cities.

In a rare message to his eventual successor, Ahmadinejad said last week that government "subsidies belong to the people" and they should continue despite the shrinking resources under sanctions.

Ahmadinejad has offered no clear signals on his next moves. Any kind of political future, though, would almost certainly tap into the support built in rural areas and small cities such as Birjand, which had some of the highest reported turnout for Ahmadinejad in the past two elections.

"My husband would have never been able to buy a place to live in his lifetime without Ahmadinejad's support. God may prolong his life," said Razieh Esmaeili, 41, whose husband works in a bakery.

Last year, they received an apartment in Birjand's Mehr housing development, part of a nationwide low-income project initiated under Ahmadinejad.

"I'll vote only for the candidate Ahmadinejad supports," she added.

In 2005, Ahmadinejad, then mayor of Tehran, reportedly took 88 percent of the votes in

Birjand, his highest percentage in the country. In his re-election, Ahmadinejad still took about 70 percent of the votes, according to official results that have been dismissed by opposition groups as tainted with fraud.

The low-income housing project, however, also is an example of the shortcuts taken by Ahmadinejad's government in its populist outreach.

The streets are still dusty. Electricity and natural gas have been hooked up gradually, but some of the houses still don't have water, which is supplied by a tanker truck. Some of the houses were given to residents half-complete.

Still, few in Birjand complain about the president — a major contrast to Tehran where even Khamenei in February described Ahmadinejad's combative political style as "bad, wrong, inappropriate."

The taxi driver Farsi likes to recount a story about a 2005 letter he wrote to Ahmadinejad asking for help to expand his small house.

"Two months later," he said, "I got a call from the governor's office" offering a loan of about \$3,400.

"My family and I will vote for anyone who will be supported by Ahmadinejad, no matter if is Mashaei or somebody else," said Farsi, who is also an active member of the Basij, a paramilitary force allied with the Revolutionary Guard in the South Khorasan province around Birjand.

But Abdollah Hadinia, conservative editor of Khorasan daily in Birjand, has dropped his support for Ahmadinejad after the feud with Khamenei.

"I was proud of Ahmadinejad's statements. But some of his decisions in the past two years have shamed us," he said. "He deviated from his path, and this has harmed his popularity."

Still, there is little sign of reformist activity in Birjand, which reflects the significant gulf between the pockets of liberal-leaning politics in some of Iran's urban areas and the deep traditionalism in the provinces. Voters in Birjand will likely look to Ahmadinejad for cues on how to vote.

"A pro-Ahmadinejad candidate will have a good number of votes. There are 2,000 villages in South Khorasan province and most people in those villages have benefited from

Ahmadinejad's government," said Abolfazl Zahei, a pro-reform activist. "People here care about making their ends meet and welfare, not politics."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/71102/World/Region/Iran-president-still-a-force-even-as-his-era-ends.aspx>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Danon vows: Israel won't freeze settlement building**

At Moskowitz Prize ceremony, deputy defense min. says "stopping building does not result in peace and we will continue to build."

During an award ceremony for the Moskowitz Prize for Zionism, Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon drew rousing applause by pronouncing that Israel will not institute a construction freeze, haredim will be drafted into the IDF and thousands of soldiers will be stationed on Mount Scopus.

The ceremony, now in its sixth year, was held Thursday night in the Tzurim Valley, at the foot of Mount Scopus, before an audience of hundreds, including Tourism Minister Uzi

Landau and Construction and Housing Minister Uri Ariel.

“There will be no building freeze,” said Danon from a lectern atop a dais, his image illuminated on a large screen. “We have proven in the past that stopping building does not result in peace and we will continue to build.”

Danon went on to say that he plans on moving thousands of soldiers from around the country to be stationed on Mount Scopus, and that he will ensure that ultra-Orthodox Jews serve in the IDF.

“We will move thousands of soldiers to Mount Scopus and they will live beside hundreds of Jewish families that are making sure to preserve the Jewish presence here,” he said.

“We will take steps to ensure that haredi citizens serve in the IDF to share the burden,” he continued, to loud applause. “There will be protests, but this is what we must be done for Zionism.”

This year’s recipients included Rabbi Moshe Levinger, Yigal Cohen-Orgad, Amotz Eyal and Michal Barkai, who will divide the \$100,000 prize. At the ceremony, Cherna Moskowitz

explained why she and her husband, Irving, created the award.

“This award was established to honor those who put Zionism into action in today’s Israeli society, at times risking their own personal security, placing the collective before personal needs and doing what it takes to ensure a strong, secure Jewish homeland,” said Moskowitz.

She added that none of the recipients saw themselves as heroes but as people “who simply fulfill their duty, as an Israeli, to make Israel a better place, a safer, more just place, and at the end of the day – a more Zionist home.”

<http://www.ipost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Danon-vows-Israel-wont-freeze-settlement-building-312728>

- **Israel bid to build new settler units sabotages peace process: Erekat**

A high-ranking Palestinian official says Israeli plans to build nearly 300 new illegal settler units in the occupied West Bank indicates that Israel is trying to undermine efforts to revive the so-called peace talks.

“We condemn this new decision which is proof that the Israeli regime wants to sabotage and ruin efforts to revive the peace process,” chief Palestinian Authority negotiator, Saeb Erekat, said on Thursday.

He added, "This is a blow to the peace process.... This aims to drag the region into violence instead of peace and stability."

His remarks came shortly after the Israeli Ministry of Military Affairs gave the green light for the construction of 296 housing units at Beit El settlement near Ramallah.

The Israeli settlements are considered illegal by the UN and most countries because the territories they are built on were captured by Israel in a 1967 war and are hence seen as being subject to the Geneva Conventions, which forbid construction on occupied lands.

Israel agreed to freeze settlement construction under the Roadmap for Peace plan in 2002.

But it has failed to fulfill that commitment despite repeated and widespread international condemnation.

Not only has the presence and continued expansion of these settlements been a major source of international criticism against Israel, but they are also considered one of the main obstacles to Middle East peace.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 120 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem).

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/09/302621/new-settler-homes-damage-peace-process/>

- **Israel approves construction of 296 settler units in West Bank**

The Israeli regime has approved the construction of 296 new illegal settler units in the so-called Beit El settlement in the occupied West Bank, despite international condemnation.

An Israeli official said on Thursday that Tel Aviv had given the green light for the settler units, but this was only the first stage of a process before actual construction could begin.

The official said the new units were part of a compensatory measure for those settlers who were evicted from the illegal Ulpana outpost - which has not been authorized by the Tel Aviv regime - following a court ruling.

Outposts are newer and smaller Israeli settlements and Israel considers those outposts that were built without authorization from the Tel Aviv regime to be illegal.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 120 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem).

The Thursday announcement to build new settler units comes days after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered a freeze on tenders for new settler units.

The United Nations also called on the Tel Aviv regime on Wednesday to halt its settlement building.

The Israeli regime maintains a defiant stand on the issue of its illegal settlements on Palestinian land as it refuses to freeze settlement expansion. Tel Aviv has come

under repeated and widespread international condemnation over the issue.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/09/302594/israel-approves-296-new-settler-units/>

- **Palestine calls emergency Arab League meeting**

CAIRO (Ma'an) – Palestine has called an emergency meeting of the permanent representatives of the member states of the Arab League to discuss the recent Israeli escalation against Islamic and Christian holy places in Palestine, the ambassador of Palestine to Egypt Barakat al-Farra said.

Al-Farra said the Israelis have been practicing a series of assaults against East Jerusalem, al-Haram al-Sharif (al-Aqsa Mosque) and other Muslim and Christian holy places.

These assaults, he added, are outrageous violations of international and human laws.

“Any changes to the city’s features aimed at consolidating Israel’s grip are null and void according to international law and UN resolutions,” he said.

Al-Farra highlighted that the UN General Assembly recognized Palestinian statehood on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=594082>

- **UN Report: Israeli Policies Hindered Development in East Jerusalem**

JERUSALEM, May 9, 2013 (Wafa) – Israeli policies in East Jerusalem since its occupation and unilateral annexation in 1967 but more so since the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993 have hindered development of the city’s economy and created many socioeconomic problems to its Palestinian residents, a new report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said on Thursday.

According to the report titled “The Palestinian Economy in East Jerusalem: Enduring Annexation, Isolation and Disintegration,” the deterioration in the socioeconomic conditions in East Jerusalem has had a significant impact on its Palestinian residents in their standards of living, housing, health care and education.

“The weight of the economy of East Jerusalem has been steadily diminishing relative to that of the rest of occupied Palestinian territories since the signing of the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, known as the Oslo Accords, and related Israeli-Palestinian agreements,” said the report in its executive summary.

“This decline, in large part, has been the result of an array of Israeli policies that have hindered development of the East Jerusalem economy as an integral part of the larger Palestinian economy and labor market. The deterioration in socioeconomic conditions has had a significant impact on Palestinian Jerusalemites in their standards of living, housing, health care and education,” it said.

“Israeli policies have entailed a partial and distorted “integration” of the East Jerusalem Palestinian economy into Israel and its regulatory framework. Meanwhile East Jerusalem has been gradually detached from the rest of the Palestinian economy despite the city’s historic position as the commercial, transport, tourism, cultural and spiritual centre for Palestinians throughout the occupied territory,” explained the report.

UNCTAD said in the first such report on the economy of occupied East Jerusalem that since the onset of the occupation in 1967, Israeli authorities began to pursue a policy of physical, political and economic segregation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

“Segregation strategies gained momentum during the last decade through measures that have altered the physical and demographic realities of the city and its predominantly Palestinian and Arab landscape. These include the city’s annexation and the expansion of Jewish settlements in and around East Jerusalem, as well as the construction of the separation barrier, which has effectively redefined the borders away from the pre-1967 armistice line,” said the report.

“The separation barrier, among other obstacles to movement, hinders movement into and out of East Jerusalem, cuts it off from the remainder of the West Bank, its natural hinterland, and hinders access to its markets and health services by Palestinian Jerusalemites now living on the other side of the barrier nominally under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction. Land expropriation by Israel and restrictions on Palestinian building activities have increased recently,” it said.

The report said that because of the Israeli measures, the East Jerusalem economy finds itself in a world quite apart from the two economies, Palestinian and Israeli, to which it is linked.

“It is at once integrated into neither, yet structurally dependent on the West Bank economy to sustain its production and trade of goods and services and for employment, and forcibly dependent on Israeli markets to whose regulations and systems it must conform and which serve as a source of employment and trade and as the principal channel for tourism to the city.”

UNCTAD suggested that “several actions can help mitigate the effects of segregation policies, but the real prerequisites for sustainable development entail ending the Israeli settlement and occupation of East Jerusalem in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.”

It said that this “would confer significant benefits to the Palestinian economy in general, and to that of East Jerusalem in particular, especially its tourism and services sectors.”

It said that effective short-term interventions include enhanced coordination and planning among international organizations, semi-governmental and nongovernmental bodies operating in East Jerusalem, and the provision of targeted support to specific sectors such as tourism, housing and services.”

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22334>

- **Hagel: ‘Political, not military’ solutions needed in Middle East**

The problems that plague the Middle East, including Iran’s nuclear ambitions and Syria’s civil war, require “political, not military” solutions, U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said in a speech on Thursday.

Saying that the region’s “old order” was vanishing, Hagel stressed that the U.S. would work to promote democratic reform while bearing in mind the “limitations” of American power.

Although Hagel made clear that Washington had not ruled out potential military action against Iran or Syria, his remarks highlighted President Barack Obama’s cautious stance on resorting to armed force in the volatile region.

Hagel said that regional challenges, including the nuclear challenge posed by Iran, dangerous instability in Syria, the continuing threat of al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups must be addressed through “coalitions of common interests,” including Israel and other allies in the region.

“A common thread woven into the Middle East fabric is that the most enduring and effective solutions to the challenges facing the region are political, not military,” Hagel told the audience at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

“America’s role in the Middle East is to continue to help influence and shape the course of events -- using diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, intelligence, and security tools in coordination with our allies,” Hagel said, adding that Arab uprisings had shaken the established political landscape in the Middle East.

Hagel, who traveled to the region last month, said that prospects for stability in the longer run would hinge on the outcome of political transitions in Egypt, Libya and Syria.

“The best hope for long-term stability relies on countries like Egypt, Libya, and Syria making transitions to democratic rule,” Hagel said.

The U.S. would “remain engaged in helping shape the new order, but we must engage wisely.”

“This will require a clear understanding of our national interests, our limitations, and an appreciation for the complexities of this unpredictable, contradictory, yet hopeful region of the world,” Hagel said.

The war in Syria was turning “sectarian” and the possibility the state would break apart was “increasing.” The war was also putting Syria’s “stockpiles of chemical weapons and advanced conventional weapons at risk, and the escalation of violence threatens to spill across its borders,” he said.

Hagel struck a restrained tone on Syria and did not reiterate Obama’s declared “red line” warning Damascus not to use its chemical weapons.

The Obama administration has faced renewed calls for intervention after U.S. intelligence agencies said the Syrian regime probably used

chemical weapons on a small-scale. But the White House says the spy services are still investigating the allegations.

After the speech, when asked about Syria, Hagel said that the administration would not take any action until it had all the facts and alluded to the intelligence disaster in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war.

“It’s fair to say that we’re all probably a little wiser today than we were before and when we take action, there is always the reality -- that you accept -- that there may be consequences and unintended consequences may come from that,” Hagel said.

In answering the question on Syria, Hagel joked about his outspoken style before he took over at the Pentagon in February this year.

Hagel said that now he had to watch his words more carefully as he was no longer a senator and could not “speak as irresponsibly as I would like.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/05/10/Hagel-Political-not-military-solutions-needed-in-Middle-East.html>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **'Black Decade' terrorists given death sentences**

An Algiers court on Sunday (May 5th) sentenced two terrorists to death for killing some 500 people between 1996 and 2004. The charges include the rape and murder of 60 women.

Djilali Kouri, 32, and Antar Ali, 35, admitted to killing members of the security forces but denied any violence against civilians.

APS cited a judicial official as saying that the defendants confessed that they joined a terrorist group in Oued El-Romane Mountain, Chelf, in 1997, that they took part in several assassinations against members of the People's National Army, Self-Defence Force elements and citizens in several villages in Boumerdes, Médéa, Khemis, Tiaret, Chlef, Relizane and Blida. They also took part in mass rapes against a large number of girls who were later slain.

During the hearing, Kouri, alias "al-Molheb", confessed to massacres and terrorist operations targeting military personnel carried out by al-Nasr brigade

led by Emir al-Sedik. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) member also took part in slayings, shooting people to death, and setting up fake ambushes and checkpoints to kill army and security agents.

The group carried out mass murders and rapes against more than 250 women in one day and killed whole families. The two defendants took part in assassinating at least 700 citizens, including civilians and military personnel, before the security agencies put an end to their spree by arresting them in 2005 with fake IDs and weapons in their possession. They were about to carry out a terrorist operation against the People's National Army.

As to defendant Ali, he committed many massacres since he joined terrorist groups in 1996, including assassinating 23 members of the same family at a wedding in Larebaa, Blida; assassinating nine Qur'an reciters in Hwadna; attacking a municipal guards barracks in Hammam Righa; assassinating 16 citizens on a passenger bus; kidnapping 17 women; setting up fake checkpoints; and assassinating citizens.

Defendant Kouri was previously sentenced to life imprisonment in four criminal cases by Chlef criminal court for his involvement in murders and destruction of public properties and for carrying out a massacre in June 2002 in which 22 people, including three babies, were killed. He also carried out a heinous massacre in 2001 of seven Qur'an students in al-Hajjaj municipality, south of Chelf.

In other terror trial news, an Algiers criminal court on April 30th sentenced defendant Dandani Redha, a political refugee in Britain, to six years in prison for belonging to a terrorist group operating abroad. The defendant was deported to Algeria in 2007 because of his involvement in embezzling money in Britain for terrorist groups operating in Algeria, Iraq and Chechnya.

He was convicted of collecting money through fake credit cards to send it to fighting groups in Chechnya and Pakistan. During the investigation, the defendant admitted to travelling to Kandahar in 2001 and receiving three months of training in the use of different weapons, shells and explosives to fight in Kabul. He then returned to Britain to settle and filed a

political asylum application under the pretext of being threatened in Algeria by terrorist groups.

The criminal court in Algiers on April 23rd also convicted six out of 12 terrorists from a terrorist group operating in southern Algeria and Sahel countries. They belonged to the terrorist group that planned the attack on Tiguentourine gas complex near In Amenas on January 16th. The trial was held in the presence of five defendants while the rest were tried in absentia.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/05/09/feature-01

- **Opposition rallies Friday to condemn 'Morsi failures', demand early elections**

Cairo's Imbaba and Heliopolis to witness protests calling for action against deteriorating economic and social conditions

Opposition groups will hold two marches in Cairo on Friday to condemn the failures of President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.

A march will begin at Virgin Mary Church in Cairo's working class district of Imbaba at 5pm and finish at Imbaba court.

During the march, the grassroots Rebel Movement will be collecting signatures calling for the withdrawal of confidence in President Mohamed Morsi, who hails from the Muslim Brotherhood, and for early presidential elections to be held.

According to a statement published by the Free Front for Peaceful Change (FFPC), a revolutionary youth coalition and one of the main organisers of the march, the rally will also protest rising prices, deteriorating economic and social conditions, the lack of security and the targeting and arresting of activists.

Egyptian Popular Current, Constitution Party and April 6 – Democratic Front have endorsed the protest.

Meanwhile, the FFPC has called for another protest at 6:30pm in Al-Alf Maskan Square in Cairo's upscale Heliopolis district in coordination with the Constitution Party, Socialist Popular

Alliance and Egyptian Social Democratic Party.

The protest will also "condemn the performance of President Mohamed Morsi and his economic policies.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/71101/Egypt/Politics-/Opposition-rallies-Friday-to-condemn-Morsi-failure.aspx>

- **Ghannouchi Condemns Militant Violence, Calls for "Peaceful Jihad"**

Rached Ghannouchi, head of the ruling Ennahdha party, addressed ongoing security issues today related to militants near the border with Algeria and condemned terrorist activity in Tunisia.

He spoke at a press conference at Ennahdha's office in the Tunis suburb of Cité Tahrir, where he also addressed recent controversial political matters.

Ghannouchi stated that Ennahdha, an Islamist party leading the ruling Troika coalition, condemns the violent incidents that have taken place on Chambi

Mountain near Algeria and have resulted in serious injuries to members of Tunisian security forces. He called on all Tunisians to support the security forces.

“There is no place or future for terrorism in Tunisia,” he said.

Ghannouchi described the alleged terrorists who have been hiding on the mountain and who are responsible for land mine explosions as “reckless youngsters.” He additionally explained that values of Islam and jihad have been distorted to serve the goals of terrorists.

“There is no place for jihad in Tunisia, except for peaceful jihad of development and democracy,” he said.

The conference attracted a significant number of media outlets and both local and international journalists. When asked about the controversial Tunisian anti-terrorism law of 2003, Ghannouchi asserted that the law is still applicable. However, he added, it will only be used when the law is violated and not as a political tool to stifle opposition, as it was used by former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.

“No one will be arrested for their ideologies and thoughts in Tunisia,” he said.

In response to questions about impunity for “Salafists,” Ghannouchi stated that non-violent Salafists, despite some extreme beliefs, are also Tunisians and should be considered “our children.” He called for people with different ideologies and backgrounds to participate in a dialogue with them and help integrate them into civil society.

“The Salafist phenomenon should evolve from its current status of carelessness and terrorism to wisdom and dialogue,” he said

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/05/09/ghannouchi-condemns-militant-violence-attributes-it-to-reckless-youngsters/>

- **President Morsi invites Brazilian investment in Egypt**

In first-ever visit to S. American nation by Egyptian head of state, President Morsi

encourages Brazilian businessmen to invest in Egypt, promises 'friendly' climate for foreign investment

During his first visit to Brazil, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi on Thursday stressed his country's desire to cooperate with the leading South American nation in the military and transport sectors, according to a statement issued by the presidency.

During a visit to the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo, Morsi addressed members of the Egyptian-Brazilian business forum, saying that Brazil stood "at the top of the list" of countries from which Egypt hoped to learn regarding development issues.

According to the presidency's Thursday statement, cooperation between the two countries could be seen as a "gateway" for Brazilian investment in the Middle East and Africa, as well as a gateway for Egyptian products entering Latin America.

The president also said that future economic cooperation would be aided by a planned free trade agreement with Latin America's Mercosur trade bloc.

Morsi asserted that his government was taking "serious steps" towards removing all obstacles that stand in the way of foreign investment – especially Brazilian – in Egypt, and was striving to create a "friendly" investment environment.

Morsi's visit to São Paulo, Brazil's financial and economic capital, rounds off the president's tour of the so-called 'BRICS' countries, which also saw him visit Russia, India, China and South Africa in recent months.

The trip represents the first such visit by an Egyptian president to Brazil.

Morsi's Brazil visit comes at a difficult time for Egypt's economy, which is plagued by a widening budget deficit and plummeting foreign currency reserves, in addition to difficulties associated with securing a \$4.8 billion IMF loan.

According to government sources, Egypt is not seeking loans from Brazil but is rather focusing on luring Brazilian investors.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/71086/Egypt/Politics-/President->

[Morsi-invites-Brazilian-investment-in-Eg.aspx](#)

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Lebanon foils terrorist attacks: Army

The Lebanese army says the country's military intelligence service has arrested members of a group planning to carry out terrorist attacks in the country.



"As a result of intensive investigations, the military intelligence service apprehended on May 6 members belonging to the suspicious cell, and seized a quantity of explosive devices and detonators in their possession," DPA quoted the army as saying on Thursday.

"Other members of the group are being tracked down," it added.

The suspects had reportedly planned to assassinate leading politicians and military

installations inside Lebanon, according to a security official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The army did not say how many were arrested nor did it specify their identities, but the official said the main suspects are Lebanese and Syrian nationals, with the Syrian suspects having links with the terrorist al-Nusra Front, a branch of al-Qaeda in Syria.

The al-Nusra Front has been behind many of the deadly bombings targeting both civilians and government institutions across Syria.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/09/302702/lebanon-busts-suspicious-cell-army/>

• Nasrallah closed government negotiations door, deputy speaker says

Lebanese Deputy Speaker Farid Makari said that the leader of the Shiite group Hezbollah was undermining efforts to form a new government.

“Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has closed the door on negotiations on a new government, unless they are conducted according to the conditions imposed by his own group,” Makari said in remarks published by An-Nahar newspaper on Friday.

“[Nasrallah’s speech] reflects his party’s ongoing role in obstructing the formation of the cabinet, while opening the door for an extension of the term of the parliament if the Orthodox law is not implemented.”

During a speech on Thursday, the Hezbollah leader said that his party would vote for the Orthodox law proposal in a plenary session in parliament on May 15, and called for parties to be represented in the new cabinet based on their representation in the parliament.

The Future Movement and caretaker Prime Minister Najib Miqati have both said they would boycott the upcoming parliament session if the Orthodox law—which calls for proportional voting along sectarian lines—came to a vote.

In remarks published Wednesday, Speaker Nabih Berri said that he will convene the

parliament from May 15 to May 18 to tackle a new electoral law, and if no agreement is reached on one, then existing draft laws would be put to a vote.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam announced earlier in the day that he would not grant a “blocking third” veto in the government to any coalition in the country.

Lebanon's political parties are jockeying over the composition of the new government as Salam is working on creating a cabinet to replace the resigned cabinet.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/nasrallah-closed-government-negotiations-door-deputy-speaker-says>

- **Syria to equip Hezbollah with game-changing arms: Nasrallah**

BEIRUT: Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah said Thursday Syria would supply Hezbollah with game-changing weapons in response to recent Israeli air raids near Damascus and that his party stands ready to assist resistance groups seeking to liberate the occupied Golan Heights.

“The Syrian response to Israel’s air strikes was to tell Israel that if your goal is to prevent boosting the capabilities of the resistance then take note ... [Syria] will give [Hezbollah] arms,” he said.

“And [Syria] will provide [Hezbollah] with sophisticated weapons that the resistance has never obtained before,” he added.

He spoke during a televised speech commemorating the 25th anniversary of Hezbollah’s An-Nour radio station.

Nasrallah said his group was ready to use such strategic weapons in its fight against the Jewish state.

“The Lebanese resistance announces that it is ready to receive any sophisticated arms even if it is a game changer and we are ready to obtain and safeguard such weaponry and use it to defend our people and country,” he added.

Last week, Israel carried out air raids on targets in Syria, bringing the total number of strikes by the Jewish state in Syria this year to three.

Western media, quoting Israeli sources, said the Israeli warplanes targeted Iranian-made missiles headed for Hezbollah. Damascus said a Syrian military research center was the target.

Israel has repeatedly warned that it will prevent Hezbollah from obtaining game-changing arms, voicing its concern that Syria’s stockpile of sophisticated weaponry could fall in the hands of its enemies.

Nasrallah denied media reports that 300 Syrian soldiers were killed in the attacks on the military facility, saying “according to my information only three or four martyrs from the Syrian military were killed.”

He said the Jewish state had sought to achieve two objectives through its air strikes: neutralize Syria in terms of the Israeli-Arab conflict and prevent the Lebanese resistance group from building up its arsenal.

Nasrallah, who hinted last week President Bashar Assad’s allies Iran and Russia would intervene militarily to prevent the fall of the embattled Syrian leader, also

said Syria's response to the Israeli assault was to activate its front with Israel – the occupied Golan Heights.

"The second response [by Damascus] is that it opened the Golan front and by that it transformed the threat [against it] into an opportunity," he said. "So whoever wanted a war on Syria, the response was to open the Golan front for any popular resistance groups," he added.

"The third response is to prepare rocket launchers and give orders to implement without referring to the leadership and that frightened Israel which began sending messages [to Syria] of calm," he said.

Nasrallah also vowed to assist, back and support resistance groups seeking to liberate the occupied Golan Heights.

"Just as Syria stood in support of the resistance to defend and liberate the south [of Lebanon], we announce that we are with the Syrian popular resistance groups to cooperate, coordinate and liberate the occupied Syrian Golan," he said.

Such a response to Israel, Nasrallah said, pointed out Assad's careful approach to dealing with the crisis.

"Everything that is happening today indicates that Syria has a strong leadership that is managing the battles with the enemy in a wise, calm and courageous manner which will achieve victory in the future, God willing," Nasrallah said.

While he reiterated that the only solution to the crisis in Syria was through a compromise between the regime and the opposition, Nasrallah slammed Arab countries for not acting to end the bloody conflict.

"It is shameful that the U.S. be the one seeking Syria's interests while the Arabs appear as if they're the ones destroying Syria which is something that falls in the interests of the enemy," he said.

Turning to domestic issues, including the process of forming a new Cabinet and the drafting of a new electoral law for the upcoming elections, Nasrallah reiterated his party's demand that the next Cabinet be made up of political parties according to their clout in Parliament.

"Given the domestic and regional circumstances, as well as the recent Israeli strikes on Syria and its continuous daily aggression on Lebanon, in addition to regional tensions, there should be a government of true national partnership," he said.

"We didn't ask for a government that represents the actual clout of parties [in terms of popular support] but their [representation] at the parliament level and this government will administer not only the elections but will have other responsibilities even if it lasts for one week," Nasrallah added.

He also called for a swift formation of the new government.

Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam has said he wants a government whose ministers are not running in the upcoming elections. The primary task of the new government, according to Salam, should be to administer the general elections with the needed transparency.

The March 14 coalition, particularly the Future Movement, has supported Salam's

Cabinet vision and has asked the Beirut lawmaker to rotate the ministerial portfolios between the various political parties.

Nasrallah also reiterated that his party's lawmakers would vote in favor of the controversial Orthodox Gathering electoral law if it is put up for a vote during Parliament's May 15 session.

"Hezbollah will vote on the Orthodox Gathering law because we have already given our word on that and we were clear," he said.

"But our group has not yet reached an agreement on an alternative law but we are ready to negotiate based on the outcomes of the May 15 talks," he said, referring to the legislative session called for by Speaker Nabih Berri to discuss and approve a new electoral law.

<http://dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/May-09/216501-israeli-strikes-aimed-to-prevent-hezbollah-building-up-arsenal-nasrallah.ashx#axzz2SoGkRQHd>

- **Abu Qatada will go to Jordan if it 'ratifies' UK treaty**

Terror suspect's lawyer says Abu Qatada will voluntarily return to Jordan if Jordanian parliament ratifies treaty with Britain that forbids use of evidence obtained by torture.

LONDON - Islamist terror suspect Abu Qatada will voluntarily return to Jordan if a treaty with Britain that forbids the use of evidence obtained by torture in legal cases is ratified by the Jordanian parliament, his lawyer said on Friday.

Lawyer Edward Fitzgerald gave the pledge at Britain's Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) in London, which is hearing a bid by the radical preacher against his detention for breaching his bail conditions.

British interior minister Theresa May announced the new treaty on April 24 in London's latest bid to deport Abu Qatada - whose real name is Omar Mohammed Othman -- after a 12-year legal battle.

"If, and when, the Jordanian parliament ratifies the treaty, Mr Othman will

voluntarily return to Jordan," Fitzgerald told the tribunal.

There was no immediate word from Jordan on the statement by Abu Qatada's lawyers.

May told parliament at the time that the agreement contained "fair trial guarantees" that will "provide the courts with the assurance that Qatada will not face evidence that might have been obtained by torture in a retrial in Jordan."

She unveiled the treaty just days after Britain's Court of Appeal refused her permission to challenge its ruling that he could not be sent back to Jordan due to rights concerns.

May said the government could pull out of the European Convention on Human Rights if it could not deport Abu Qatada by other means.

The 52-year-old preacher has been resident in Britain since he claimed asylum in 1993.

A judge in Spain once branded him Osama bin Laden's right-hand man in Europe,

even though Abu Qatada denies ever meeting the late Al-Qaeda leader.

The cleric was convicted in Jordan of terrorism charges in absentia, and he is likely to face a retrial if he is returned.

The European Court of Human Rights originally blocked his deportation due to fears that evidence obtained through torture would be used against him in the new trial -- but it then backtracked in May 2012 and said Britain could expel him.

But SIAC ruled again in November that he could not be sent back because of the concerns about torture, and the Court of Appeal upheld that decision last month.

<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58671>

6. SYRIA

- **Iran, Turkey both see dialog as only solution to Syria crisis: Iran VP**

Tehran and Ankara both consider dialog as the only solution to the crisis in Syria, Iran's Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs Lotfollah Forouzandeh says.

In an interview with Turkey's state news agency, Anatolia, on Friday, Forouzandeh said he had discussed the issue of the crisis in Syria with Turkish officials, adding that both sides had stressed the importance of negotiations between the parties to the conflict to end the unrest in the Arab country.

Syria has been gripped by a deadly unrest since March 2011, and many people, including large numbers of government forces, 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 fighting in Syria are foreign nationals.

Several international human rights organizations have accused militants operating in Syria of committing war crimes.

The Iranian vice president, who is on a visit to Ankara at the invitation of Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdogan, further assessed as "positive" the outcome of his talks with Ankara officials.

“The visit was aimed at expanding Iran-Turkey ties, particularly in the parliamentary sector,” Forouzandeh said.

He added that Iran and Turkey expressed their readiness to bolster cooperation, exchange experience and remove certain obstacles in the way of bilateral trade and economic growth.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/10/302763/iran-turkey-both-want-dialog-in-syria/>

- **U.S. warns against Russian missile sales to Syria**

BEIRUT: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Thursday the transfer of advanced missile defense systems from Russia to Syria would be a “destabilizing” factor for Israel’s security, as Damascus welcomed a Washington-Moscow initiative for peace talks.

However, despite the regime’s praise of the proposed peace accord, Bashar Assad’s government also said it would retaliate immediately to any new Israeli

airstrike, after two reported attacks on military targets over the weekend.

Kerry said the U.S. had expressed concerns about what Russian defensive systems in Syria would mean for Israel’s security. He wouldn’t address what the missiles might mean for Syria’s civil war.

He spoke to reporters in Rome after the Wall Street Journal reported that Russia was preparing to sell the weapons to Assad’s regime.

Coming just days after Kerry hailed what he described as a U.S.-Russia breakthrough on Syria, the report suggested Moscow may already be angling to further strengthen the Assad regime two years into a war that has killed more than 70,000 people.

“We have previously stated that the missiles are potentially destabilizing with respect to the state of Israel,” Kerry said. “We have made it crystal clear that we prefer that Russia would not supply them assistance,” he told reporters alongside new Italian Foreign Minister Emma Bonino. “That is on record. That hasn’t changed.”

Israeli officials said they had asked Russia to cancel the imminent sale to the Assad regime of advanced ground-to-air missile systems.

Such weapons would enhance the Syrian government's defensive ability and make it even harder for the U.S. and other governments to consider even the possibility of trying to enforce a no-fly zone in the country or otherwise intervening militarily.

Russia rarely comments publicly on arms sales or transfers, and there has been no official word on the deal.

Even before Syria's 2011 uprising, the Israelis warned about a sale of S300 batteries, which can target manned planes, drones and incoming missiles. Moscow had held off on the deal under persistent U.S. and Israeli pressure.

Despite friction between Russia, which supports Assad, and the U.S., which backs the rebels, in recent days Moscow and the Washington agreed to seek new peace talks that would bring together the opposing sides.

Syria's Foreign Ministry Thursday welcomed the initiative, under which the two countries will seek to convene an international summit to build on a six-point accord agreed in Geneva last year.

Kerry said that all sides were working to "effect a transition government by mutual consent of both sides, which clearly means that in our judgement President Assad will not be a component of that transitional government."

But the Damascus said "only the Syrian people will decide on their future and the constitutional system of their country, with no foreign interference."

And it said it was "confident that the Russian position, which is based on the principles of the U.N. charter and international law, will not change."

In the wake of the Russia-U.S. proposed deal, U.N.-Arab League mediator Lakhdar Brahimi has agreed to stay on in his post despite frustration at the international deadlock that has prevented U.N. action to halt the 2-year-old war, the United Nations said Thursday.

The plan was praised by the United Nations as long overdue.

“We were waiting for it for a long time, pushed very hard for a negotiated transition,” U.N. Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson told reporters.

“We doubt whether a military victory is possible, particularly within the near future,” he said. “An explosion of revenge could lead to an even worse situation. So this [U.S.-Russian initiative] is welcome. This is good news.”Eliasson said it would not be easy to bring about an end to a conflict that the United Nations says has killed at least 70,000 – a figure that U.N. diplomats and officials say is out of date and well below the likely actual death toll.

“We now of course have challenges ahead of us,” he said. “Lots of work that has to be done. The secretary-general takes it seriously and has asked the joint special representative [Brahimi] to stay on, and he has accepted to stay on.”

Brahimi has repeatedly threatened to step down and recently told Security Council members he wanted to leave the job,

though all tried to persuade him to remain, diplomats said.

As the peace plan garnered support, Damascus warned that it would not hesitate to respond militarily if Israel strikes inside Syrian territory again.

In an interview with AFP, Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Muqdad said “the instruction has been made to respond immediately to any new Israeli attack without [additional] instruction from any higher leadership, and our retaliation will be strong and will be painful against Israel.”

Senior Israeli sources have said strikes on early Friday and Sunday targeted weapons bound for Hezbollah, but Muqdad denied that.

“They absolutely did not achieve their objective and they lied when they said they are targeting Hezbollah,” he said, adding there is “no way Syria will allow this to happen again.”

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/May-10/216553-us-warns->

[against-russian-missile-sales-to-syria.ashx#axzz2StAfudOC](#)

- **Israel's strategic clarity in Syria**

It was perhaps fitting that the multiple Israeli strikes in Damascus last week followed Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah's address from Tehran. Nasrallah had warned last Tuesday that the "resistance" was ready to face any Israeli assault and would emerge victorious in any confrontation. Instead, Nasrallah returned from Tehran just in time to witness Israel destroy multiple consignments of Iranian ballistic missiles intended for his group. The Israeli raids provide much needed strategic clarity to the conflict in Syria, throwing into sharp relief two basic points: Israel is not about to let the balance of power with Iran change. In addition, Iran's ability to strike back has been shown to be decidedly limited.

There's been some confusion in some of the media commentary as to the purpose and meaning of Israel's aerial attack in Syria. However, the targets – long-range rockets and ballistic missiles storage sites

– are enough of a clue to understand Israel's objective. The Israeli government's calculus is rather clear: It will not allow the transfer of Iranian strategic weapons to Hezbollah. In other words, in contrast with the Obama administration, Israel is thinking about the regional balance of power – which is being fought out in Syria – in strategic terms.

Former Mossad operations officer Michael Ross further pressed this point to me in an email. The Israeli Air Force attack, he wrote, "underscores how differently the dynamics of the Syrian conflict are perceived by the Israelis and the rest of the world." The Obama administration, for instance, has found it politically expedient to emphasize that its primary preoccupation is with the rise of Sunni extremists and the possibility of the Assad regime's chemical weapons "falling into the wrong hands," namely those same Sunni extremist groups.

However, these are not Israel's strategic priorities regarding Syria, Ross explained. "While the issues of ascendant jihadism and chemical weapons are important," he wrote, "the absolute top priority of the Israeli government – and by extension the

intelligence community and the military – is the prevention of a first strike weapons capability that threatens Israel’s population centers from reaching the hands of Hezbollah.”

As I wrote in February, following the first Israeli strike in Syria against an arms convoy headed for Hezbollah, these hits are part of a broader campaign dating back to the immediate aftermath of the 2006 war. That’s when the Iranians made a decision to focus on ballistic missile and long-range rocket capabilities, and on deploying them in Lebanon and Gaza. Syria was a critical node in this regional chain.

Israel made a decision of its own, to target this Iranian network and go after its key figures. Since 2008, we’ve seen the assassination of Hezbollah’s military commander Imad Mughniyeh, the two Hamas commanders in charge of missile procurement, Muhammad Mabhouth and Ahmad Jabari, the Syrian liaison, General Muhammad Suleiman, and the head of Iran’s ballistic missile program, General Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam.

These assassinations are in addition to the various air strikes on factories and distribution centers in the Sudan, arms convoys, and the mysterious explosions at various storage depots in Lebanon, as well as in Iran, such as the one that killed Gen. Moghaddam in 2011. In fact, one is tempted to add to the list the explosions reportedly heard this past Tuesday in western Tehran, in an area where Iran carries out missile research and storage.

According to a very well-informed source in Washington, “Israel can see anything that moves in Syria with all-weather satellites.” In March 2010, when Assad transferred Scud-D rockets to Hezbollah, the source told me following the January strike, “it was a particularly cloudy night and even though the Israelis saw the transfer it was in an area of high probable collateral damage, so they held fire. They regretted it ever since and this time they were not going to.” Maybe it really was weather, or maybe the Obama administration, then at the height of its engagement effort with the Syrians, advised Israel against it, preferring to express US “concerns directly to the Syrian government.”

Curiously, comments attributed to Hassan Nasrallah published in the Kuwaiti al-Rai yesterday seem to confirm my source's information. The Hezbollah chief reportedly told visitors that the Israeli raid was "expected to be carried out in Spring 2010, but was postponed."

Although Hezbollah has managed to acquire a limited number of these missiles, Israel would be able to absorb it, and its missile defense systems would likely be able to handle the threat. "Israel has a good handle on what's in the current arsenal," Ross told me. "But any increase – especially of a more advanced or longer range system – will not be allowed to be put in range of Israel's cities."

With the Iranians clearly accelerating the transfer of as many assets as possible from Syria to Lebanon, the likelihood of future strikes in Syria is high. According to the al-Rai report, Nasrallah said that had this strike occurred in Lebanon, "the response would have been immediate." Perhaps. Nasrallah may be full of it, or he may have conceded that, whether his group can afford it or not, such a major strike in Lebanon would force his hand. However, what he also effectively

admitted is that, all the bravado notwithstanding, Israel can degrade the strategic assets of the "axis of resistance" in Syria with the reasonable expectation that Iran and Hezbollah would have to take it quietly. As Ross put it, Israel recognizes that Syria is now 'Iran's Achilles Heel' – something the Iranians are fully aware of.

In fact, in addition to hitting ballistic missiles storage depots in the heart of Damascus, the Sunday strikes have reportedly hit facilities manned by Iranian Revolutionary Guard personnel. When the Iranian foreign minister complained in Damascus on Tuesday that it was "high time to deter the Israeli occupation," he underscored precisely Tehran's inability to do so. Instead, it has seen Israel take out some of its key assets from Sudan, to Gaza and Lebanon, all the way to Tehran itself. And now, it watches as its strategic systems and personnel in Syria become targets for Israeli operations – not to mention exceptional intelligence penetration – which had no problems bypassing the Russian defense systems which Iran financed (and acquired for itself to protect its nuclear sites).

When read in this context, these tactical strikes are shown to be part of a broader, clearly articulated strategic vision – something that’s been sorely missing in Washington. As the US plays for more time pursuing another “process” with Russia, and contorts itself as it walks back the red line it never intended to enforce, Israel, as Lee Smith put it, “sees Iran’s regional project strategically, and Syria as part of greater whole.” In contrast, Smith adds, the US “resembles less a superpower than a mid-level manager.”

By focusing on the right priorities in Syria – the regional balance of power and breaking the Iranian network – Israel is providing strategic clarity while all the US is offering is confusion.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/israels-strategic-clarity-in-syria>

- **Syria warns Israel against striking**



Syria will "respond immediately" to any new Israeli attack against its territory, its deputy foreign minister told AFP on Thursday, after two reported Israeli strikes on military targets last week.

In an exclusive interview in the Syrian capital, Faisal Muqdad also said Syria is ready to receive a UN team to investigate claims of the use of chemical weapons in the country's conflict.

"The instruction has been made to respond immediately to any new Israeli attack without [additional] instruction from any higher leadership, and our retaliation will be strong and will be painful against Israel," Faisal Muqdad said.

Senior Israeli sources said the strikes targeted weapons bound for the powerful Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah, a close ally of Damascus.

Muqdad denied that.

"They absolutely did not achieve their objective and they lied when they said they are targeting Hezbollah," he said.

There is "no way Syria will allow this to happen again," he added.

Israel reportedly targeted military sites near the capital Damascus early on Friday morning and again early on Sunday morning, with at least 42 soldiers reported dead in the second strike.

The Jewish state has repeatedly warned it will intervene to prevent the transfer of advanced weaponry to Hezbollah, with which it fought a devastating 2006 war.

The strikes last week were the third time Israel is thought to have hit sites inside Syria since the beginning of an uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in March 2011. That first was in January of this year.

The uprising, which began with peaceful protests, has devolved into a bloody conflict that has killed more than 70,000 people, according to the UN, and displaced millions of Syrians.

Muqdad meanwhile said Assad, like his US counterpart Barack Obama, believes the use of chemical weapons would be a "red line" in the country's conflict.

"We were ready and we are always ready, right now, to receive the delegation that was set up by [UN chief] Ban Ki-moon to investigate what happened in Khan al-Assal," Muqdad said.

Syria first asked for the inquiry shortly after accusing opposition rebels of using chemical weapons at Khan al-Assal near Aleppo on March 23 in an attack in which authorities say more than 30 people died.

There have since been unconfirmed reports of the possible use of chemical weapons elsewhere in the strife-torn country.

"Once the investigation in Khan al-Assal proves to be professional, and proves to be honest and neutral, we will let them look into other issues," said Muqdad.

Syria is under mounting international pressure over the possible use of banned arms. The United States said in April it believed the Syrian government has used

chemical weapons but was awaiting definitive proof.

The UN says Damascus has refused the deployment of investigators, while Britain and France have also accused the Syrian regime of using chemical weapons in Khan al-Assal and in Homs, in central Syria, on December 23 last year.

"The rumors started that Syria prevented the mission from coming, which is absolutely incorrect, crazy and unacceptable," Muqdad said. "This is a big lie."

A UN commission of experts was mandated at the end of March by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to investigate the possible use of chemical arms in Syria. The UN said the Syrian regime was responsible for blocking the experts' entry.

In late April, the UN chief a new plea to Damascus to stop blocking the international inquiry, adding that he "takes seriously" US reports that such weapons were probably used. He said an investigation should "proceed without delay and without any conditions."

But Muqdad blamed Britain, France and insurgents fighting Assad's regime for putting pressure on the UN to stop the commission from deploying.

"It is not that we in Syria were delaying or preventing the team established by the secretariat of the UN... it is the secretariat, under instruction and pressure from Britain, France and the armed groups. They don't want to come," he said.

"Many people speak about red lines, including President Obama, against the use of chemical weapons. This is also a red line for President Assad. President Assad will never, ever use chemical weapons, if Syria possesses them, against the people in Syria," said Muqdad.

"So we are sure those who used chemical weapons are the others," he added, referring to insurgents.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syria-to-respond-immediately-to-any-new-israeli-strike>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Sharjah Imam attacker gets support from friends**

Alumni friends suggest Al Far's psychological condition could have been a factor

Dubai: Friends of the man who stabbed an imam at the American University of Sharjah are surprised and shocked by his action.

AUS alumni Ahmad Abu Gosh, who claims to be a close friend of the attacker Ahmad Al Far, told Gulf News that a group of friend will launch a campaign to collect letters of support for Al Far.

Abugosh said Al Far is on medication to treat bipolar disorder.

Sharjah Police have not confirmed that Al Far had such a condition, but said in an earlier statement that the suspect is believed to have some mental illness. They also claimed to have found found medication in Al Far's bag.

"I know that this is not who he is, Ahmad is a very nice person who would never

hurt a fly. He stopped his medication because he felt it was restraining him and making him a different person," Abu Gosh said on Thursday.

He added that he and Al Far's family were not aware that he had stopped his medication.

"I don't know why he targeted the imam, but I truly believe that it was not planned. If you meet him when he is on medication, he is a completely normal person, who is optimistic. You will never think that he has any problems," Abu Gosh added.

Dr Saliha Afridi, a clinical psychologist at Lighthouse Arabia, explained that some symptoms related to bipolar disorder might drive a person to unconventional behaviour.

"There are two types: Bipolar I and Bipolar II. The first type causes the patient to shift between mania and depression. The manic state causes the patient to have racing thoughts, restlessness, sleepless nights and take impulsive decisions while the depressed state causes the patient to be the opposite; they don't have energy to do anything. Bipolar II is similar to the first one, but is less intense," she added.

Afridi said that if, in fact, Al Far was having a bipolar episode, he was in a manic state when he attacked the imam.

“However when patients take medication they can lead a normal life,” she said.

Al Far is currently undertreatment.

Abu Gosh said: “Many people are posting mean messages on Facebook and Twitter.

I believe people shouldn’t be judgemental because they don’t know what he went through. We are collecting anonymous letters in order to show Al Far that people do support him.”

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/crimine/sharjah-imam-attacker-gets-support-from-friends-1.1181527>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• US funds worth \$50 million stolen from Afghan bank: SIGAR

Top US Federal Watchdog, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has announced that fifty million dollars located in an Afghan bank account last year have suddenly gone missing while under the Afghan government’s watch, The Foreign Policy (FP) reported.

Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) John Sopko also accused the Afghan government of being a “criminal patronage network” from civil servant to the highest officials.

John Sopko on Wednesday also claimed that SIGAR office had served the Afghan government an order to freeze the account.

While delivering a speech at the New America Foundation, John Sopko said, Briefly put, we identified roughly \$50 million stolen from the U.S. government which was sitting in an Afghan bank account.”

“We obtained a court order here in the United States and served it on the Afghan government to get them to seize the money. For months we pressed the Afghan attorney general’s office to freeze the account and begin the legal process to allow us to seize the cash,” John Sopko said.

He also added, “At first, we were told the bank account was frozen and the money protected. Unfortunately, as is too many

times the case, a few weeks ago we learned that the money was mysteriously unfrozen by some powerful bureaucrat in Kabul. Now, most of it is gone.”

In parts of his speech, John Sopko urged US to consider withholding vital aid to Afghanistan in a bid to put pressure on Kabul in order to adopt a stronger financial protections.

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

- **Karzai Says U.S. Wants Nine Bases After 2014**



Afghan President Hamid Karzai says the United States wants to keep nine military bases in Afghanistan after the planned withdrawal of most foreign troops from the country by the end of 2014.

Addressing Kabul University students in a televised speech, Karzai set a number of

conditions for the approval of the military bases by his government.

He said he wanted the United States to intensify efforts in the peace process with the Taliban, strengthen Afghan security forces, help build the economy, and provide assistance in governance.

Afghanistan and the United States are currently negotiating a deal to allow a limited U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan after the planned withdrawal next year.

Washington has not revealed extensive details about its plans in Afghanistan after 2014.

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

- **German chancellor in surprise visit to Afghanistan**



Chancellor Angela Merkel and her Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere have arrived in Afghanistan for a surprise visit, a German government spokesman said early Friday.

Merkel and de Maiziere went to the German forces' headquarters in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, the spokesman said, without giving details of the visit. It comes six days after the death of a German soldier, part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

A German soldier was killed and another wounded in an attack by insurgents in northern Afghanistan on Saturday. German special forces had been supporting an Afghan operation near the northern city of Baghlan when insurgents opened fire on the Afghan and NATO International Security Assistance Force troops, according to an army statement posted on its Internet site Sunday.

It added that no information was available about losses among the Afghan forces, but said "presumably" several insurgents had been killed.

It was the first German fatality during two years of working within ISAF.

Merkel has condemned it as a "terrorist attack."

A total of eight NATO soldiers, including five Americans, were killed in Afghanistan on Saturday – the bloodiest day this year for international forces.

The militants' annual offensive opened a crucial period for Afghanistan as its security forces take the lead in offensives against insurgents who are fighting to topple the U.S.-backed government.

All NATO combat missions will finish by the end of next year, and the 100,000 foreign troops deployed across Afghanistan have already begun to withdraw from the battlefield.

Germany now has the third-biggest foreign troop deployment in Afghanistan after the United States and Britain, but has drawn down numbers from more than 5,000 to 4,200 now.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/05/10/Merkel-in-surprise-visit-to-Afghanistan-spokesman-says.html>



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