



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

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ORSAM

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AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION

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1. IRAQ

- **Barzani, Alawi discuss political developments in Iraq**



Baghdad (AIN) -The President of Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani discussed on Thursday with head of the Iraqiya Slate, Aiyad Alawi, the recent developments on the Iraqi political scene.

A statement by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) reported "The meeting discussed the recent events in Iraq where Alawi's delegation informed Barzani about its perspectives towards the latest political updates."

"Barzani discussed with the delegation, Kurdistan leaders' attitudes towards the current situation in Iraq, stressing "It is unacceptable to marginalize any Iraqi components, referring to the necessity of not giving space for power manipulation by any side," according to the statement.

"Both parties emphasized the importance of the coordination, partnership and balance in the political process and avoid pushing the security forces in the political problems of the country," the statement concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33287:barzani-alawi-discuss-political-developments-in-iraq-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Seven Naqshbandi leaders arrested in Baghdad**

Shafaq News / Baghdad Operations Command announced on Thursday arresting seven leaders of the "Naqshbandi organization " in Karkh side and seizing weapons, rockets and roadside bombs northern Baghdad.

"A police force managed today from arresting seven of the Naqshbandi Army leaders in Baghdad," A statement issued by the Operations Command obtained by "Shafaq News" said.

"Naqshbandi men "are the military wing of the second man in the former regime, Izzat al-Douri.

Naqshbandi organization called last month, protesters to take up weapons against the government, following Hawija events in Kirkuk province, which killed dozens, including soldiers.

“Naqshbandi” organization announced in the 26th of last month, completing all preparations to attack Baghdad and urged the diplomats who are in Iraq to boycott the federal government.

The Naqshbandi organization is an armed groups accused of “terrorism” and responsible for numerous acts of violence that have taken place over the past years, it is linked with Vice President of the former regime, Izzat al-Douri, as it has emerged for the first time in 2008 via his Blog and spreads in areas of northern Iraq, it also has extensions with militants Islamists in Kurdistan region.

http://www.shafaaq.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5986:breaking-news-seven-naqshbandi-leaders-arrested-in-baghdad&catid=50:security&Itemid=76

- **April Iraq’s deadliest month since 2008, UN says**

A new report by the United Nations says April has been the deadliest month in Iraq since 2008 as terrorist acts killed over 700 people across the country.



According to figures released by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) on Thursday, a total of 712 people died and some 1, 633 others were wounded in terrorist acts throughout Iraq in April.

The UN mission to Iraq also said in a statement that 595 of those killed and 1,438 of the injured were civilians, while the rest of the casualties were among Iraqi security forces.

“Baghdad was the worst affected governorate, with a total of 697 civilian casualties, followed by Diyala, Salahuddin, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Anbar,” the statement added.

Sources differ on the casualty tolls in Iraq. Other reports said more than 400 were killed in April.

There has been a surge of violence in Iraq since April 23, when security forces clashed with militants and anti-government protesters in several towns and cities, including Ramadi and Hawija near the northern city of Kirkuk.

On April 29, Iraqi security officials said over 35 people were killed and dozens of others wounded in a series of car bomb attacks that targeted mostly Shia cities and districts in Iraq.

On Thursday, Martin Kobler, the special representative of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in Iraq, urged Iraqi officials to adopt decisive measures to end the escalating violence.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki also called for unity among the people of Iraq on April 25, warning of plots to drag the country into a sectarian conflict.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/03/301573/april-iraqs-deadliest-month-since-2008/>

- **Othman: Kurds did not raise their demands with Baghdad**

Shafaq News / The independent Kurdish MP in Kurdistan Alliance bloc , Mahmoud Othman,

said on Friday that the Kurds' demands with Baghdad did not rise, denying the validity of what is being said about Kurds exploitation to the conditions experienced by Baghdad government.

President of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Nechirvan Barzani visited Baghdad earlier where he met senior government officials and politicians to resolve the crisis between Baghdad and Erbil.

“The visit of the Kurdish delegation headed by Nachirvan Barzani to Baghdad and his meeting with Maliki and other parties in the National Alliance is just the beginning,” Othman told “Shafaq News”.

Othman denied “our conditions are the same as before the outbreak of the recent crisis, represented by the application of the Constitution , the law of oil and gas , Peshmerga , Article 140, the budget and the rest of the outstanding problems between Erbil and Baghdad”.

Nachirvan Barzani announced on Wednesday, signing an agreement with Nuri al-Maliki included several points, notably taking into account the partnership, balance and consensus on ruling the country, as well as

forming committees to resolve all disputes and outstanding issues between Erbil and Baghdad.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/5988-othman-kurds-did-not-raise-their-demands-with-baghdad-.html>

- **Iraq: Prospects of partition as violence takes its toll**

Some observers see the current flare-up in Iraq as the worst crisis to afflict the country since its emergence into statehood in 1921.

Others deem it the most critical moment since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003... or since the final withdrawal of US troops at the end of 2011.

Many are convinced that Iraq is on the brink of a destructive sectarian civil war that would herald its disintegration as the country we know, and that agreement on partition would be the least-bad option.

Apart from its own often centrifugal internal dynamics, Iraq finds itself caught up in acute regional tensions, with its disparate components pulled in different directions by the same outside forces engaged in the

struggle in neighbouring Syria, whose conflict is impacting directly on Iraq.

However you look at it, it is not good.

But that does not necessarily mean the direst predictions are fated to come true.

The country has in the past shown a remarkable ability to hobble from crisis to crisis, muddling along without either reaching a stable solution or exploding into pieces.

But a clear worst-case scenario is visible and plausible.

It would see the country fragment in turmoil on sectarian and ethnic lines between its three major communities, the majority Shia (60%), the Sunnis and the Kurds.

Warning signs

The warning signals are already there, not least in the casualty figures from the latest outbursts of violence in many parts of the country.

Most estimates agree that April was the bloodiest month since 2008. The UN says that more than 700 people were killed in bomb

attacks and other violence including more than 430 civilians.

Much of the violence came towards the end of the month, following the incident at the town of Hawija in Kirkuk province on 23 April when security forces loyal to Shia Prime Minister Nouri Maliki killed a large number of Sunni protestors.

This prompted more disturbances and incidents, especially in Sunni areas which have been in uproar against Mr Maliki's government since last December.

Insurgent bombers, presumed to be linked to al-Qaeda and its "Islamic State in Iraq", also stepped up their provocative bomb outrages aimed at Shia population centres.

The presence of a Sunni militant insurgency has never gone away

None of this came out of the blue. It is part of a logical progression going back to the formation of the current government in December 2010, a world-record length of time after the March general elections that year.

The government led by Nouri Maliki was supposed to be one of national partnership.

Under a power-sharing deal brokered by Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani, the man whose Iraqiyya coalition actually came out ahead of Mr Maliki in the polls, Iyyad Allawi (a secular Shia who garnered most of the Sunni vote), was supposed to head a "Higher National Strategy Council" with considerable powers.

None of that happened. Instead of being seen as a partner, Mr Maliki has been accused increasingly of going it alone with autocratic powers stemming from his control of the entire security apparatus, including the defence and interior ministries.

Sunni participation has been increasingly marginalised and opinion alienated by Mr Maliki's failure to address key Sunni demands and complaints, especially relating to the release of detainees, counter-terrorism laws, job opportunities etc.

And in the background the insurgent activities of Sunni militants never went away.

In the year following the Maliki government's formation, violence stayed at roughly the same levels as in 2010. It worsened in 2012, and now seems to be intensifying further as

the embers that have been glowing beneath the ashes burst into flames again, fanned by mounting Sunni grievances.

If Mr Maliki continues on a collision course with the Sunnis, there is a clear risk that tribal, religious and political strands will come together in such Sunni heartlands as al-Anbar and Nineveh provinces to create a real revolt against the Shia-dominated government.

Kurdish withdrawal

In March the Kurds, who have their own differences with Mr Maliki, pulled their ministers and MPs out of Baghdad. Their military forces have also expanded their zone of control in the disputed, oil-rich Kirkuk province in the wake of the Hawija incident.

So it is not hard to imagine Iraq breaking up as Sunnis and Shias plunge into a vicious sectarian civil war, while the Kurds go their own way in the north.

The Shia-dominated Iraqi government led by Nouri Maliki backs Syrian President Bashar al-Assad

Ignoring the internal dynamics and his own role, Mr Maliki himself has warned of such a civil war, saying that "sectarian strife" is coming back to Iraq from Syria.

"There is a wind behind it, and money, and plans," he said, apparently referring to support from Sunni regional powers for insurgents and dissidents.

Certainly there has been interaction from the beginning between the Sunni areas of western Iraq and the Sunni-based revolt across the border in Syria, not surprisingly given tribal and family ties as well as the to-and-fro activities of al-Qaeda-related Sunni militants.

While the Sunnis have generally favoured the Syrian rebels, Mr Maliki's Shia-dominated government, perhaps lent on by Iran, has largely backed President Bashar al-Assad despite prior differences.

So, for Iraq, a lot will depend on the outcome of the struggle in Syria. If the minority Alawite regime collapses and the country either breaks up or falls under majority Sunni rule, it may be harder to keep the Iraqi Sunnis within the central government's orbit.

If they were to team up in one way or another with a Sunni Syria, that might leave the Iraqi Shias with little option but to fall back even more on their influential co-religionists to the east, in Iran.

But within an Iraqi context, if Mr Maliki can demonstrate that Hawija was an aberration, and come up with some judicious concessions to placate Sunni opinion, he may be able to retrieve the situation, not least because the Sunnis find it hard to pull together in a unified manner.

Iranian influence

Much will also depend on what Iran actually wants, given its undoubted sway with most of the Iraqi Shia political groups - and to a lesser extent with the Kurds.

Tehran's thinking is dominated by the need to save its floundering strategic ally in Damascus.

Iraq's future is heavily weighed on the outcome of the Syria conflict and Iran's sway over Shia groups

It is hard to see how that objective could be furthered by fragmentation and chaos in Iraq.

Tehran was involved in the Iraqi power-sharing deal adopted at the end of 2010 and there is no particular reason to suppose it now favours destabilisation and disintegration.

There may be separatist elements in all the main Iraqi communities but, in overall terms, partition may not be in the interest of any.

The Kurds in the north already enjoy the best of both worlds, having a degree of autonomy only a few steps short of independence while having a big (if currently disputed) share of the federal budget and a large slice of power and a vital brokering role in Baghdad.

While independence remains their dream, they know they are landlocked and dependent on neighbours - Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey - whose approval would be vital to their viability. For the time being, doing their own thing within a federal Iraq is the best option.

That may be one reason why this week's talks between the Kurds and Mr Maliki seem to have produced initially positive results, and could end up throwing the embattled prime minister a lifeline. Kurdish ministers and politicians are already reported to have returned to Baghdad.

The Shias "would have the most to lose from partition - and what would they gain by joining up with Iran?" said one veteran Iraqi observer.

"As for the Sunnis, not many of them want to break up Iraq - they want to control it all, like they did before for centuries."

All of this is not to say that the doomsday scenarios may not happen.

But there are still powerful factors holding Iraq together.

And at least for the moment, Iraqis are still talking about a fierce struggle at the ballot boxes, in general elections next year, and not at the sandbags and trenches.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22390083>

2. IRAN

- **Iran Voices Concern over Extreme Violence in Myanmar**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast renewed Tehran's call for an immediate halt to extreme violence in Myanmar.



Mehman-Parast strongly criticized extreme ethnic violence in Myanmar that has also destroyed holy places buildings in Muslim residential areas.

He said conflicts in Myanmar hurts the feelings of the whole Islamic world, stressing that such acts will also put the Myanmar political and economic situation in danger.

Mehman-Parast further stressed the need to take serious action against the agents of such violence in Myanmar.

He then urged the Myanmar government to cooperate root and branch with the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and contact group as well to prevent occurrence of such extremist actions and systematic conflicts in that country.

Earlier in April, a leading rights watchdog, citing evidence of mass graves and forced displacement, said Myanmar has waged "a campaign of ethnic cleansing" against Rohingya Muslims.

The Rohingya, who are denied citizenship by the country also known as Burma, have faced crimes against humanity including murder,

persecution, deportation and forced transfer, New York-based Human Rights Watch said.

Myanmar officials, community leaders and Buddhist monks organized and encouraged mobs backed by state security forces to conduct coordinated attacks on Muslim villages in October in the Western state of Rakhine, HRW said.

"The Burmese government engaged in a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya that continues today through the denial of aid and restrictions on movement," said HRW deputy Asia director Phil Robertson.

HRW noted that while ethnic cleansing was not a formal legal term, it was generally defined as a policy by one ethnic or religious group to remove another such group from certain areas by violent and terror-inspiring means.

In Rakhine, more than 125,000 Rohingya and other Muslims have been forcibly displaced, denied access to humanitarian aid and are unable to return home, the group said.

At least 180 people died in two outbreaks of Buddhist violence against Muslim in Rakhine since June 2012, according to the official toll,

but rights groups believe the real figure is much higher.

In a report based on more than 100 interviews, HRW said that it had uncovered evidence of four mass-grave sites in Rakhine, accusing the security forces of trying to destroy evidence of crimes.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107166556>

- **Iran Urges Halt to Israeli Aggressions against Palestinians**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Ambassador to Beirut Qazanfar Roknabadi renewed Iran's support for the oppressed Palestinian nation, and called on the international organizations to prevent more crimes by Israel in the Gaza Strip.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Secretary-General of the Beirut-based Arab Advocates Union Omar Muhammad Zein in the Lebanese capital on Thursday.

"There is an urgent need for regional and international organizations to use their all possible means and capacities to condemn

and prevent further war crimes against Palestinians by the Israeli regime," Roknabadi said in Beirut.

Zein, for his part, praised Iran's positions in defending the Palestinian cause.

"Although the Zionist regime has perpetrated massive crimes, necessary legal actions have not been so far taken to condemn and address these crimes against humanity," he added.

Earlier this year, Iran's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mohammad Khazayee called on the UN to take serious action to halt Israeli aggressions against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Khazayee made the remarks in separate meetings with the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and President of the UN Security Council Vitaly Churkin in March.

"I asked Mr. Ban and Mr. Churkin to act a practically and seriously aim at urging the Zionist regime to pay heed to its international commitments and to response to the UNSC demands," he said.

The Iranian envoy also discussed Gaza blockade, Israeli settlements in Gaza and the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Representatives of the Arab League and the Arab group at the United Nations and the Palestinian representative at the UN were also present in the meetings.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107166702>

- **Iran Cautions Regional States on Israel's Plots**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast called on the regional countries to be vigilant against the Israel's plots aiming to provoke ethnic and religious conflicts.

"We have repeatedly warned that regional countries should remain prudent and cautious, and not fall for Zionist conspiracies and pay due regard to their own interests and those of the regional states," Mehman-Parast said.

He noted that the countries of the Middle East should closely work together and step up efforts to maintain security and stability.

The Iranian diplomat underlined the importance of preventing foreign interference in regional affairs by eliminating any pretext that could set the stage for the presence of transregional powers in the Middle East.

Last month, Iran's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Gholam Hossein Dehqani described Israel and its nuclear threats as the root causes of insecurities in the Middle East region.

Dehqani made the remarks in a meeting of UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) in New York in April.

He pointed to Iran's proposal for a Middle East free from nuclear arms, and said, "The Israeli regime hampers efforts to cleanse the entire region of all nuclear weapons."

Dehqani noted that Iran calls for implementation of all UN amendments for freeing the Middle East and the world from nuclear arms.

The Israeli regime is widely believed to be the only possessor of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. The regime reportedly maintains between 200 and 400 atomic warheads.

Moreover, the Israel has never allowed any international inspection of its nuclear facilities and has refused to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It has also refused to join the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which limits members to civilian uses of the nuclear technology.

The UNDC meets annually in geographical working groups for three weeks in the spring, but over the years it has failed to agree on any substantial outcome.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107166694>

- **US seeks to ruin Iran-Turkey relations: Turkish Labor Party**

Deputy Chairman of the Turkish Labor Party Bulent Aslanoglu says the US is opposed to the expansion of Iran-Turkey relations and seeks to sabotage the ties between the two neighbors.



Aslanoglu said Thursday that the US has long sought to restrict the sources of energy available to Turkey and its pressures on Ankara in this regard are ongoing, IRNA quoted Turkish Labor Party sources as saying.

The said pressures are applied via various channels on Turkey, Aslanoglu added, citing a recent meeting between a delegation of US Senators and Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz.

According to Aslanoglu, the US has been pressing Turkey not to import oil and gas from Iran and Russia and instead meet its energy needs from northern Iraq.

Iran, which owns the world's second-largest natural gas reserves, is Turkey's second biggest gas supplier after Russia. Turkey uses a significant portion of its imported Iranian natural gas to generate electricity.

Last month, the Turkish energy minister said that Ankara will continue importing natural

gas from Iran, despite US pressures to hinder Tehran-Ankara energy cooperation.

The United States, Israel and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program. Over the false allegation, Washington and the European Union have imposed a series of illegal and unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic's energy and financial sectors.

Iran refutes the allegation over its nuclear energy program and argues that as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is entitled to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/03/301534/us-seeks-to-ruin-iranturkey-ties/>

- **Iran's Jalili agrees to meet P5+1's Ashton in mid-May**

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili has agreed to meet European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who represents the P5+1 group of world powers, later this month, Press TV reports.



A source close to the talks between Tehran and the P5+1 told Press TV that Jalili, who is also the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, would seek answers to Iran's proposals to the six powers made in the Kazakh city of Almaty in April.

Ashton's office had earlier announced that the meeting would be held on May 15th in the Turkish city of Istanbul as a "follow-up to the last round of negotiations held in Almaty."

Iran and the P5+1 - Russia, China, France, Britain, the US and Germany - have held several rounds of talks mainly over Iran's nuclear energy program. Their latest rounds of talks were held in Almaty on April 5-6 and February 26-27.

The United States, Israel, and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Washington and the European Union have used the allegation to impose several rounds of sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/03/301521/jalili-agrees-to-meet-ashton-in-istanbul/>

- **Iran to boost navy with indigenous destroyer, minesweeping system: Cmdr.**



Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari has announced that an indigenous destroyer and a new naval minesweeping system will join the Islamic Republic's naval fleet "in the near future."

Speaking to reporters on Thursday, Sayyari characterized Shaheed Bayandor destroyer as one that has been designed based on “state-of-the-art technological systems.”

In recent years, Iran has made great achievements in its defense sector and attained self-sufficiency in producing essential military equipment and systems.

Iran's Navy launched the Jamaran 2 destroyer in the Caspian Sea on March 16, 2013. Jamaran 2, a Mowj-class warship, has been designed and built by Iranian experts and is equipped with high-tech navigational devices and complex defensive systems.

The Iranian Navy launched its first destroyer, Jamaran, in the waters of the Persian Gulf in February 2010. The 1,420-ton vessel comes with modern radar systems and other electronic warfare capabilities.

Sayyari said Iran’s naval forces are also currently working to launch a minesweeping system and noted that the deployment of the system would enable the country to immediately sweep any mines laid in port entrances.

“Iran’s Navy is currently a grand force and if the enemy seeks to make any disruptions to our [presence] in the seas and the route of our ships, we can confront it by our own equipment,” the Iranian naval commander pointed out.

He stated that the deployment of Iran’s naval forces in the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea has helped secure the region against pirate attacks.

The Iranian Navy has been conducting anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden since November 2008 to safeguard the vessels involved in maritime trade, especially the ships and oil tankers owned or leased by Iran.

The Gulf of Aden, which links the Indian Ocean with the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea, is the quickest route for thousands of vessels traveling annually between Asia, Europe and the Americas.

However, attacks by heavily armed Somali pirates on speedboats have prompted some of the world's largest shipping firms to switch routes from the Suez Canal and reroute cargo vessels around southern Africa, leading to climbing shipping costs.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/03/301540/iran-to-add-indigenous-destroyer-to-navy/>

- **Iran, Lebanon keen on promoting trade, economic ties: Iranian envoy**

Iran's Ambassador to Beirut Ghazanfar Roknabadi says Iran and Lebanon enjoy very good political relations and are keen on promoting trade and economic relations to the same level.

"[Economic and trade] ties will witness a favorable growth and expansion in the near future and will reach the same level of the excellent political relations between the two countries," Roknabadi said at a press conference in Beirut on Thursday.

He added that Tehran and Beirut have taken positive steps toward the expansion of bilateral trade ties over the past three years.

The envoy noted that the formation of a joint council of the Iranian and Lebanese merchants and the founding of a society for traders of Iranian carpets in Lebanon were among the recent economic achievements by the two countries.

Roknabadi further cited the increase in the number of trade delegations exchanged between the two countries and the signing of many trade agreements as other successes achieved by the two countries.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/03/301574/iran-lebanon-seek-to-boost-trade-ties/>

- **US human rights report aims to pressure Iran: Judiciary chief**

Iran's Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani says the US State Department's "fake" human rights report against Iran simply aimed to exert more pressure on Tehran.



In its annual human rights report released in April, the US State Department accused Iran as well as some other countries of restricting their people's human rights.

”[The issue of] human rights is a tool for Western countries [to use] against [other] countries which do not accept their principles,” Amoli Larijani said on Thursday.

He added that Iran’s resistance against the US over the past 30 years is the source of the human rights allegations leveled by the Western countries, particularly the US, against the Islamic Republic.

Iran is being accused of not observing human rights, while it has been holding one election every year on average since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, he added.

However, the Judiciary chief stated, there is no word on human rights violations in Bahrain where people are fighting for their right to vote.

On Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast criticized the politicized and double-standard approach of the US to the issue of human rights, saying that the US is one of the main “violators of the most basic principles of human rights and international law.”

“It would be better for the US government to account for its own human rights performance

instead of continuing with its wrong and repetitious behavior of accusing other countries,” he said.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/02/301431/us-rights-report-aims-to-pressure-iran/>

- **Principlists to field joint candidate in presidential election**

TEHRAN, May 2 (MNA) – Ali Akbar Velayati, who is a member of the principlist Coalition of Three and planning to contest the 2013 presidential election, said on Wednesday that principlists have reached a consensus on fielding a joint candidate in the upcoming presidential election.

The nominated candidate should have legitimacy, popular appeal and good qualification, he told students at the Tarbiat Modarres University in Tehran.

Velayati is a member of the principlist Coalition of Three, along with Tehran Mayor Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf, and Iranian lawmaker Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel.

Also on Wednesday, another presidential hopeful Mohammad Reza Bahonar told the Mehr News Agency that the Coalition of Five

has decided to reach a consensus on which one of the coalition's members should register for the presidential race.

It is ideal that all principlist groups as well as independent candidates forge a single coalition, the deputy Majlis speaker added.

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 Hassan Aboutorabi-Fard are the other members of the Coalition of Five.

Hopefuls can register from May 7 to May 11 for the Islamic Republic's 11th presidential election, which will be held on June 14.

<http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1821105>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **'US upgrades bunker buster to thwart Israel strike on Iran'**

'Wall Street Journal' reports that US has updated Massive Ordnance Penetrator bomb

to enable strike on underground Iranian uranium enrichment facility; move a bid to convince Israel not to unilaterally strike Iran.

The US has upgraded its biggest bunker buster bomb specifically to enable the destruction of Iran's underground Fordow uranium enrichment plant near the city of Qom, The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday.

According to the report, the Pentagon sees the move as critical to convincing Israel that the US will indeed prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons and possesses weaponry to do so that Israel does not have.

The Journal quoted diplomats as saying that US officials had showed video footage to their Israeli counterparts of an earlier version of the bunker buster in action and explained the advanced features which have been added.

The video displays the bomb hitting the ground near its target and setting off a massive underground explosion, sources told the Journal.

The bunker buster, known as the Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP), is 30,000 pounds and has been improved with "adjusted fuses to maximize its burrowing power, upgraded

guidance systems to improve its precision and high-tech equipment intended to allow it to evade Iranian air defenses in order to reach and destroy the Fordow nuclear enrichment complex," according to the Journal.

"Hopefully we never have to use it, but if we had to, it would work." the Journal quoted a senior US official as saying.

The report added that the existence of a bomb that has the capability of destroying the underground facility from the air could also give the West extra bargaining power in nuclear negotiations with the Iranians.

The Journal quoted US officials as saying the improved MOP will serve to convince Israel to hold off on unilaterally attacking Iran and give Washington more time to diplomatically neutralize the Iranian nuclear threat.

According to the report, US officials, including Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, have told their Israeli counterparts in recent weeks that Washington will explore military options against Iran's nuclear program following Iran's presidential election in June.

"The election is a milestone to determine whether or not Iranian intentions will shift," the Journal quoted a US official as saying.

<http://www.jpost.com/Iranian-Threat/News/US-upgrades-bunker-buster-to-thwart-Israel-strike-on-Iran-311953>

- **Settlers protest razing of 'Evyatar' outpost**

Outpost built in honor of terror victim demolished; settler leader says IDF violated deal to allow outpost during mourning period.

Settlers plan to protest the IDF's demolition early Friday morning of their newly created outpost built in memory of Evyatar Borovsky, 31, who was stabbed to death at the Tapuah junction on Tuesday.

The nearby Yitzhar settlement where Borovsky lived, said it was severing its ties with the IDF.

At 1:30 p.m. the Samaria Regional Council intends to hold an afternoon prayer service, Minchah, at the junction, after which they will march to a nearby hilltop, where on Wednesday they had built a new outpost named Evyatar.

Samaria Regional Council head Gershon Mesika had placed a large white tent at the

site, and moved its office there for the seven-day mourning period.

Inside the tent were a table, a refrigerator, a fan, a coffee table and some beaten up sofas.

Separately, the council had also constructed a one room wooden structure for a meeting room, as well as placed porta-potties near by.

Mesika said he had hoped to obtain permission to build a new settlement there and had hoped people would move there until such authorization was received.

In the interim, however, he said he had worked out an agreement with the IDF to allow the tent and the one room meeting house, to remain until the end of the mourning period on Monday and possibly through out the month.

But at 4 a.m. Friday, he said, the IDF violated that agreement when it sent the Civil Administration and the Border Police to destroy the two structures.

A small group of settlers were sleeping at the site, when the security forces arrived.

Avi Ro'eh who heads the Council of Jewish Communities of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, said he took the breach of this agreement, as well as the demolition of the outpost, very seriously.

"This kind of action is emotionally painful for the family and the settlers," he said.

"This lack of sensitivity on the part of decision makers who destroyed the place during shiva (the mourning period) cries out to the heaven, particularly in light of the agreement to leave [the outpost] in place until the end of shiva," he said.

In a show of solidarity with Mesika, Ro'eh had held a number of meetings at the outpost on Thursday.

Mesika blamed the IDF's head of Central Command, Brig.-Gen. Nitzan Alon for the "cowardly actions" in the middle of the night at Evyatar.

He accused Alon of strengthening terror by taking down roadblocks and relying on Palestinian Authority security services.

"The same person who has not succeeded in defending Jews and who is afraid to confront

the PA, is acting as a hero at the expense of Jews in mourning.”

MK Orit Struck (Bayit Yehudi) said, “Evyatar’s demolition last night is a response of contempt to the just request to strengthen settlement in the area as the appropriate Zionist response to the murder.”

She called on Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon to publicly state that he accepts this principle and then to act on it.

Struck was the only parliamentarian who visited the site in a show of support this week.

<http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Settlers-protest-razing-of-outpost-honoring-Borovsky-311958>

- **Hamas arrests Salafists in Gaza**

GAZA CITY (AFP) -- Hamas has arrested several Salafists, the Interior Ministry in Gaza said on Thursday, two days after Israel carried out an air strike on a militant in the enclave.

"The internal security apparatus has arrested fanatics calling themselves Salafists, for security and criminal reasons. There were no

arrests made for ideological or political reasons," a ministry statement said.

"Four of those arrested were taken in on suspicion of stealing rockets belonging to Hamas, and two others for causing an unspecified explosion that resulted in "human and material damage," it added, without giving a total number.

The Mujahedeen Shura Council Salafist group, one of whose members was killed in the air strike on Gaza City on Tuesday, said the jihadists were being detained for ideological reasons.

Salafists in Gaza -- who are considered more hardline than the Islamist Hamas -- have challenged the movement both over confrontations with Israel and the practice of Islamic rule, prompting it to crack down on their militant activities.

The MSC implicitly denied stealing any rockets.

Israel's air force targeted Haitham al-Mishal as he rode his motorcycle in western Gaza City on Tuesday, it said in a statement.

Israel said Mishal was involved in an April 17 rocket attack launched from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, adjoining Gaza, which struck the Israeli Red Sea resort of Eilat causing no casualties.

The MSC has claimed a number of rocket attacks in the past few months, all except that of April 17 being launched from the Gaza Strip.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=591696>

- **Fatah official: Too early to talk about land swaps**



BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Land swaps should be a result of negotiations with Israel rather than an "advance payment" given by Arab states on behalf of the Palestinians, a member of Fatah's Central Committee said Thursday.

"Our stance (as Palestinians) is very clear. We want a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and 138 states have voted in favor of that," said Muhammad Ishtayya.

If there are changes to the borders, land swaps must be on an equal basis, Ishtayya told Ma'an. "If we give one centimeter, we must take one centimeter in return.

"Practically, we realize that lands occupied before 1949 are Palestinian lands and that Israel will try to talk about settlement blocs. The way Israel interprets the Arab attitude is very dangerous as the Israelis will try to understand that this attitude allows them to talk about annexing settlement blocs as if they were part of the Arab Peace Initiative.

"This is all unacceptable to us because we view all settlement activities as illegal and a real obstacle to peace."

"I don't believe advance payments are of any help now," he added, questioning what Israel had offered in return for the proposed land swaps. "We want Israel to offer something and the Arabs do not need to give offers."

He added: "I don't think the Arab Peace Initiative should be amended, because if this case is open, it would be difficult to close it by any means."

Ishtayya highlighted that Israel had always rejected the Arab Peace Initiative.

"The only new attitude was that Tzipi Livni welcomed the new Arab attitude. The Palestinian side hasn't been looking forward to that attitude, but to a sovereign state based on the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital."

Livni, Israel's lead peace negotiator, praised the concession by the Arab League that Israel and Palestine could trade land in a bid to move the peace process forward.

"This is very good news," she told army radio on Tuesday. "It's definitely an important step - I welcome it."

At a meeting in Washington on Monday, US Secretary of State John Kerry met with top Arab League officials to discuss the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, a Saudi proposal which would see 22 Arab countries normalizing ties with Israel in return for a withdrawal from lands it occupied during the 1967 Six Day War.

Arab League representatives said for the first time they would accept the concept of land swaps in the context of an Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines.

Speaking after the talks, Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim, who led the delegation, agreed that any deal should be based on a two-state solution with the borders defined by the lines which existed before June 4, 1967.

But he also expressed support for a proposal by US President Barack Obama for a "comparable and mutual agreed minor swap of the land" between Israelis and Palestinians to reflect the realities of the burgeoning communities on the ground.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=591548>

- **Israel Must End Occupation, says European Parliament Delegation**

RAMALLAH, May 2, 2013 (WAFA) – A European Parliament (EP) delegation called on the European Union Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton and Member States to insist that Israel ends to the illegal policies preventing a resumption of negotiations to

end the occupation, said an EP press release Thursday.

The delegation from EP's Delegation for Relations with the Palestinian Legislative Council conducted a six-day visit to East Jerusalem and the West Bank that started on April 27, taking in the "Freedom and Dignity" conference in Ramallah on the subject of Palestinian prisoners and people.

EP passed a resolution on March 14, 2013 expressing concern about the conditions under which prisoners are being held in Israeli prisons and called for a fact-finding mission to "assess the current situation."

It concluded that the prisoners' issue "is inextricably linked to the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the region."

The delegation stated, after witnessing how Palestinians are denied basic rights and freedoms, that Palestinians' freedom has been crushed by the occupation.

The delegation listed a number of Israeli violations relating to freedom of movement, freedom to live without harassment, freedom to develop homes and land, freedom to live

peacefully, and freedom to walk and drive on the same streets as Israelis.

They also referred to violations relating to freedom of governors, mayors and the business community to develop the economic sustainability of their towns and villages.

The delegation expressed concern that such actions are part of a strategic plan by the Israelis to force Palestinians off their land and remove their residency rights, particularly in the Jerusalem area.

The plan along with the Separation Wall, said the release, has resulted in the agreed boundary based on the 1967 borders being pushed back even further, effectively annexing large tracts of Palestinian lands as agreed by the Oslo Accords in 1993.

The delegation praised Palestinians commitment to non-violent resistance in pursuit of their right to self-determination and statehood, affirming that they still need the political will and financial support of the international community.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22283>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

• Protests by Jobless Tunisians Threaten Phosphate Industry

The Tunisian phosphate industry, a pillar of the nation's economy, has been crippled by ongoing protests that have slowed or halted production in the area around the city of Gafsa.



Unemployed job-seekers have prevented access to phosphate production facilities in Om Laarayes and Rudayyif, preventing them from operating and dramatically slashing revenues of the state-controlled phosphate production company.

"These anarchic protests will make Tunisia lose several international markets and put an end to the activities of the Gafsa Chemical Group," said President Moncef Marzouki at a Labor Day ceremony yesterday. He asserted that the crisis would cost Tunisia 2 billion dinars a year

in lost revenue, according to state news agency TAP.

"It is a slow suicide," Marzouki said.

Phosphate extraction dominates the economy of Gafsa, but the region has struggled economically in recent years.

Gafsa has a history of uprisings and demonstrations. In 2008, it was home to a series of strikes and unrest in which at least three people died, dozens were hurt, and hundreds arrested. This is considered by some to be the beginning of the revolution that ousted former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011.

"Our activities and production are paralyzed," said Ali Houchati of the Gafsa Phosphate Company, a public enterprise managing the extraction of phosphate. He added that if the problems continue, the company will go bankrupt by the end of the year.

The labor issues have had a very negative effect on the company, according to Houchati. Production dropped 70 percent after the revolution, he said, falling from eight million metric tons in 2010 to 2.6

million in 2012. In Om Laarayes, one of the four regions in which phosphate is extracted, there has been no production at all since unrest began in 2011. In the Redeif region, only a small amount is being produced.

Houchati emphasized that the labor unrest was not a strike. He said that unemployed people were preventing employees from working, but that the workers themselves were not refusing to do their jobs.

Ali Abdallah, a union leader in Gafsa, said that while the protests of unemployed workers are a problem, current employees in the phosphate industry have demands as well, and are seeking a wage increase from the government.

There are also broader concerns about workplace safety and security. Abdallah told Tunisia Live that the company lacks adequate safety equipment. He also criticized it for failing to prevent the unemployed protestors from surrounding company facilities and preventing workers from entering the premises.

A negotiation session to discuss these issues was held last week between union members and representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Industry, according to Abdallah, but no agreement was reached.

Houchati says that the company has been in lengthy discussions with the workers, but that they have gone nowhere.

The company has recruited over 2,500 new employees since February of this year, Houchati said, and 3,000 workers formerly hired by contracting firms have been made full employees, giving them greater rights.

The company disputes allegations of unsafe conditions. Safety is adequate, Houchati said, and it was only in the past when dangerous underground mines were used that workplace safety was a problem. Now phosphate extraction is done in surface mines, he said, and it is rare that any kind of deadly accident occurs. If an accident happens, he said, it is due to a worker not paying attention.

Responding to broader security concerns regarding the unemployed workers

blocking company sites, he said that the company was looking into security solutions, and hopes to see the police intervene.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/05/02/protests-by-jobless-tunisians-threaten-phosphate-industry/>

- **Search for Terrorists Continues Near Algerian Border**

Chambi Mountain. Photo credit: Nabucodonosor.

The search for a group of militants continued today in the dense forest of Chambi Mountain near the Algerian border. Land mine clearance operations are also underway.

Nine members of Tunisian security forces have recently been injured in land mine explosions while pursuing the suspects in Kasserine Governorate.

Mine clearance using advanced equipment started yesterday at noon, reported Tunisian state news agency TAP.

These operations may take a long time due to the complexity of the terrain, which stretches over an area of 100 square kilometers, 70 square kilometers of which is composed of forest, Ministry of Interior spokesman Mokhtar Ben Nasr told TAP.

The suspects come from Tunisia and Algeria and the group in Chambi Mountain has no more than 15 members, Minister of Interior Lofti Ben Jeddou told Mosaique FM yesterday. He said there is another group of around 11 suspects hiding in the nearby area of Bou Chebka Mountain.

There were no reported exchanges of gunfire during the search operations. Ben Jeddou denied rumors that he gave orders not to fire on the militant groups, and said he considered such claims an attempt to create social disorder.

“We have the competence to be able to eradicate the terrorists,” Ben Jeddou told Mosaique FM. “This is sedition. This is sedition. I do not believe that the army and national guard forces have gone to the summit of the mountain just to play with the terrorists. This a dirty joke that must not be repeated.”

According to TAP, four of the injured security forces were transferred to Tunis for continued care.

Families of the injured criticized the government, saying there was a delay in assisting the wounded after the explosions.

When Prime Minister Ali Laraayedh visited the injured forces in the Military Hospital in Tunis yesterday, he was criticized by the officers' families for not providing proper security and equipment for the dangerous work.

Laraayedh denied these charges and said the Ministry of Interior is working to enhance the quality of its equipment.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/05/02/search-for-terrorists-continues-near-algerian-border/>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Senior Pentagon official in Lebanon, affirms support for Army**

BEIRUT: A senior United States Pentagon official visited Lebanon Thursday where he

met with Gen. Jean Kahwagi and underscored Washington's continuing joint efforts in strengthening the capacity of the Lebanese Army.

According to a U.S. embassy statement, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Combating Terrorism William F. Wechsler met with Kahwagi and other senior Lebanese military officials.

During his meetings, Wechsler emphasized the Pentagon's "continuing joint effort to strengthen the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces, recognizing its importance, as Lebanon's sole legitimate defense force, in securing Lebanon's borders and defending the sovereignty and independence of the state."

The Army received last year a delivery of six helicopters and spare parts while in January the army received 200 Armored Personnel Carriers.

"[Wechsler] further emphasized the strong and sustained military cooperation between the two countries as well as U.S. support for Lebanon's initiatives to

implement its obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701,” the embassy said.

He also discussed the political and security situation in Lebanon and other regional issues.

The U.S. official also congratulated Kahwagi on the Lebanese Special Forces’ Marine Commandos’ and Mukafaha’s participation in the ongoing cooperative defense exercise Eagle Resolve 2013 in Qatar. A number of Arab countries as well as the United Kingdom, France and the U.S. are taking part in the drill.

“Wechsler highlighted the professional and highly skilled contribution of Lebanese forces in vessel boarding, search, and seizure exercises and a mock air assault raid,” the statement added.

According to the Lebanese Army, Kahwagi and Wechsler discussed bilateral relations particularly cooperation in counterterrorism and U.S. aid to the Army in the security and humanitarian fields.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/May-02/215788-senior-pentagon->

[official-in-lebanon-affirms-support-for-army.ashx#axzz2S8r2FWb9](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/May-02/215788-senior-pentagon-official-in-lebanon-affirms-support-for-army.ashx#axzz2S8r2FWb9)

- **Tribal leaders call for calm in Maan**

AMMAN — Leaders from the Hweitat tribe on Thursday urged for calm to be restored in their areas after three days of rioting triggered by acts of violence earlier this week at Maan’s Al Hussein Bin Talal University that left four dead.

According to various sources, a tribal delegation from various parts of the country visited the Hweitat tribe to assess the situation in the governorate. The visiting delegation secured the Hweitat’s consent to stop acts of rioting and reopen any closed roads.

In return, the tribe requested that the authorities free those detained during the riots and do their best to apprehend those who caused the fatalities at the university.

A security source described the situation in the governorate as “excellent and considerably calm”, despite some reports of road closures and protests near the village of Qweira, 50km north of Aqaba.

The source described these incidents as “minor”.

Since the unrest broke out at the university on Monday, armed men, the majority of whom belong to the Hweitat tribe, swarmed the streets and closed the major roads, demanding the release of detainees involved in the violence at Al Hussein Bin Talal University, which lies 220km south of Amman.

“The situation in Maan has returned to normal,” the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to restrictions on talking to the press, told The Jordan Times.

Despite several attempts by The Jordan Times, the Public Security Department (PSD) media office was not available to confirm the Maan police report.

At the university, four people died of gunshot wounds while 25 were injured after an armed fight broke out on Monday between two groups of students from Maan, and the bedouins living in the district’s villages and small towns,

prompting the university administration to suspend classes until Sunday.

Following the incident, the worst in a series of campus violence episodes that have plagued the country over the past years, the PSD issued a statement saying that the fight erupted between students. They received off-campus backup from their relatives, who brought in machineguns and other weapons. At least 22 persons were later arrested for possession of guns as police launched a probe into the incident.

Police used tear gas to separate the protesters and the Maan police directorate requested support from the Gendarmerie Forces and nearby security units to help control the situation in Al Hussein District on Tuesday.

Omar Al Jazi, who belongs to Hweitat tribe, told The Jordan Times that notables and tribal leaders from Maan met on Thursday and urged calm and reason.

On Wednesday, Hweitat leaders signed a statement that warned authorities of escalation if the detainees from the tribe were not released and if the killers of their

sons and relatives were not handed over to them.

“We are one family, living in a law-governed state. In the history of Maan, there has never been a distinction or division between the people of the city of Maan and the people of the Hweitat tribe,” Jazi said.

<http://jordantimes.com/tribal-leaders-call-for-calm-in-maan>

6. SYRIA

- **Iran stresses opposition to foreign interference in Syria**

Iran’s Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has reiterated the Islamic Republic’s opposition to foreign interference in Syria, urging a domestic solution to the ongoing turmoil in the Arab country.



“We protest the interference of outsiders in Syria as well as the dispatch of mercenaries into the country and we consider this as meddling in the affairs of another state,” Salehi said Thursday.

He added that sending weapons into Syria was also a mark of “clear interference” in the country’s domestic affairs.

“We believe that the opposition needs to sit [at the negotiation table with the government] as soon as possible to end the bloodshed through an understanding; as 50 to 100 defenseless people are being killed across Syria every day due to the obstinacy of a group of people who have cast questions over the identity of the true opposition,” the top Iranian diplomat added.

He said that the true opposition should help end violence in the country and seek an all-Syrian solution to the crisis.

The Syrian government says the chaos that began in the country over two years ago is being orchestrated from outside. Many people, including large numbers of Syrian army and security personnel, have been killed in the turmoil.

Damascus also says the West and its regional allies including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey are supporting the militants and there are reports that a large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

Iran has repeatedly condemned any foreign interference in Syria and denounced certain countries' support for militants carrying out terrorist activities in the Arab country.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/03/301546/iran-slams-foreign-meddling-in-syria/>

- **Palestinian refugees from Syria struggle for recognition**

As Syria descends into humanitarian disaster its population of Palestinian refugees is increasingly overlooked; thousands have fled to unwelcoming Egypt where history and politics conspire against them

Fatemah El-Taweel, 31, left war torn Syria where she was born and raised for Egypt. Yet when she attempted to send her three

children to school here she met with an unexpected response.



“A Palestinian, and you want to enroll your children for education here?” asked an employee of the ministry of education whose shocked face made it clear he thought her request audacious. “I told him yes, I do,” says Fatemah. “Just like Syrian refugees who are given these rights in Egypt.”

A presidential decree issued last September grants exceptional rights to Syrian refugees in Egypt, including access to government schools. It did not, however, make any mention of Palestinians who had fled Syria..

There are an estimated 525,000 Palestinians in Syria. Following the creation of Israel in 1948 and, in the aftermath of the 1967 war Israel's occupation of what remained of Palestine, ethnically cleansed Palestinians sought

refuge in neighbouring Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

In Syria they enjoyed equal rights with the host country's citizens, a privilege denied by most Arab countries.

Now they are subject to the same atrocities.

Under the threat of missiles, bombardment from tanks and trigger-happy snipers Fatemah's family fled to Egypt last December. They have since been joined by 1,900 families, an estimated 10,000 Palestinians who moved from Syria to Egypt to escape the conflict.

Unrecognized refugees

None are given residency permits. The Palestinian embassy doesn't follow their cases, monitor their arrival or seek to register them.

The luckiest receive short term tourist visas. Scores are turned away at Cairo airport. If they are between the age of 18 and 40 and traveling alone they are sent back to Damascus, returned to the life threatening situation they had sought to

escape but faced with the added burden of the suspicion of the Syrian authorities towards asylum seekers rejected by Egypt.

Denied refugee rights Syrian Palestinians must grapple with a bureaucracy that either doesn't recognize them or lacks the flexibility to do so and negotiate a decades long mentality that considers them a threat to national security.

Very few managed to flee with their savings. Most didn't have time to take anything. Lacking any support in a country they barely know, they are left to battle for healthcare, education and housing. Those who did manage to bring money find it soon runs out.

The constant threat of deportation is unsettling. They face an uncertain future in the absence of any institutional support.

Last week hundreds of Palestinian-Syrian refugees began a sit-in at the Palestinian Embassy in Cairo, demanding practical solutions for the dire problems they face.

"I'm fighting and struggling to be recognized as a refugee," Abdeljabar Bilal,

a 42-year-old Palestinian lawyer who moved to Cairo from Syria last October with his family, told Ahram. “I’m not a tourist.”

They are demanding equal status with Syrian refugees in Egypt, who not only have educational and health rights but the option of registration with the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, which provides financial assistance, educational grants, food coupons, protection from deportation, health care and counseling. But this can only happen if Egypt – the host country – gives UNCHR permission to work with Syrian-Palestinians.

Lost in technicalities

According to a UNHCR source who spoke on condition of anonymity, the commission has repeatedly applied for the necessary permission from the ministry of foreign affairs only to be turned down.

The ministry says it’s doing its best to find a solution for Syrian Palestinians in Egypt. “If we didn’t want them to enter Egypt we could have prevented them from doing so,” a ministry official said to Ahram. “We are letting them in because we

understand that they are individuals fleeing from war.”

The situation, she adds, is very “complicated.” There are no quick or easy solutions.

To balance – or compensate – Palestinians for the creation of Israel on occupied Palestinian land in 1948 the UN allowed several resolutions protecting Palestinian rights, including the right of all displaced Palestinians to return to their homeland.

To emphasize the uniqueness of their case (Palestine remains the only occupied country in the world) the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was created in 1949 specifically to provide relief and jobs for Palestinian refugees.

In Egypt, unlike Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank where refugee camps were built especially for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA only operates a liaison office.

The level and the nature of relief provided by UNRWA elsewhere cannot be replicated in Egypt without a change in its

mandate here. And that requires both Egypt's approval and a vote by the UN General Assembly. Yet Cairo's position is that only UNRWA, and not the UNHCR, is authorized to address the problems facing Palestinian refugees coming from Syria.

According to a foreign ministry official involved in the issue, Egypt is discussing the possibility of re-channeling part of UNRWA's Syria budget to Palestinian refugees in Egypt. This way the agency maintains its liaison mandate in Egypt.

But this is unlikely to offer much of a solution given UNRWA's already stretched budget. Any nominal financial assistance that might be offered will be a far cry from the services provided by UNRWA in its areas of operation which include education, health, social services, protection, micro finance and infrastructure development.

Identity and security

While Egypt's foreign ministry is at the forefront of dealing with the refugees it doesn't have a monopoly over decisions that seek to address the Syrian-Palestinians' dilemma.

There are the security bodies, the ministry of interior and the intelligence services, and the ministry of social affairs, which according to one Egyptian diplomat all have a say.

Officially, Egypt is maintaining its commitment to preserve Palestinian identity so long as there is Israeli occupation, preventing the "erosion" of that identity by refusing to allow the refugees to be registered by UNHCR which does not distinguish Palestinians from the rest of the world's refugees.

The most significant difference between other refugees and Palestinians, as per UN resolution 194, is that descendants of Palestinians keep their refugee status, giving them the right to return to their homeland.

But technically, registering with UNHCR would not strip Palestinian refugees of their inalienable rights to their homeland. And given the limitations of what UNRWA's liaison office can do in Egypt, temporary registration with UNHCR would offer the fastest and most practical, albeit

partial, solution to the problems facing Syrian Palestinians in Egypt.

Abdeljabar Bilal, the refugee lawyer, points out that UNHCR would provide a yellow card for refugees which protects them from deportation. “This isn’t about wanting to be provided with some food and means to live but about gaining some respite from the constant fear that any security body in Egypt can decide on a whim to deport me,” he says.

Critics argue that Egypt’s logic of preserving the Palestinian identity is being abused to justify political, racist and security motivated practices against refugees.

Peace agreement with Isreal

Under Gamal Abdel-Nasser’s rule (1956-1970) Palestinians were granted equal rights with Egyptians.

This changed drastically when his successor Anwar El-Sadat (1970-1981) signed the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement in 1979. Sadat’s government reneged on Palestinian rights and changed

the course of the Arab-Israeli conflict for good.

As official Egypt normalized relations with Israel it broke ranks with the rest of the Arab world, including Palestinians who lost their privileges in Egypt. Part of Sadat’s defense mechanism was to launch an anti-Palestinian campaign in the media which accused them of abandoning or selling their land to Israelis, and of involving Egypt in costly wars.

When the Palestinians decided to pursue a peace process with Israel and created the Palestinian Authority relations with Egypt improved but the benefits enjoyed under Nasser were never restored. The Palestinian file became the prerogative of the intelligence and security services in Egypt which, say critics, continued to approach the issue with suspicion and often open hostility.

Many commentators question the genuineness of Egypt’s position in preserving Palestinian identity while also cooperating and normalizing with Israel on various levels, including security.

Syria, for example, pursued a different tack, issuing refugee travel identity cards for Palestinians so as not to grant them citizenship and risk dissolving their identity but ensuring they enjoyed full citizen rights, including conscription in the army and access to senior state jobs.

The status of Palestinians in Egypt, in contrast, is extremely volatile. Their temporary resident permits are constantly threatened and the right to travel freely is restricted. Egypt has developed a far from welcoming reputation for Palestinians. The sad fact is that those who fled here from Syria have done so because they had no other choice.

'Don't kill us twice'

Mahmoud El-Shehabi, 46, who was born in Syria's El-Yarmouk refugee camp to which his father moved after fleeing his Palestinian hometown of Lubiya, Tiberias, in 1948, recalls his life before the armed conflict.

He graduated with a university degree in applied chemistry and became a successful construction contractor. He owned property and a farm but was

forced to stop working as early as 2011 when the situation in Syria became dangerous. In summer 2012 he took his family to the Lebanese capital Beirut thinking they'd be safer there.

They faced open hostility from day one in Lebanon when an immigration officer who demanded his papers glanced at them only to snap, "what's this trash?"

"I had never left Syria before and it was painful and humiliating to be in this situation," he told Ahram as he squatted on the dusty pavement facing the Palestinian Embassy in Cairo with hundreds of other Syrian Palestinians.

Palestinian children and their parents held placards which read "Don't kill us twice," "All embassies are for the service of their people except the Palestinian embassy," and "Where are human rights?"

Beirut, buzzing with pro-Bashar Al-Assad elements, monitored refugees from Syria, including Palestinians who were viewed with suspicion which made feel unsafe. After a month of tension he took his family and moved back to Syria which was getting even more dangerous.

One day a missile crashed into his neighbour's house. It took four days to recover the bodies from beneath the rubble.

"He was holding his son in the kitchen where they died. It was then that I decided I couldn't stay in Syria any longer," said El-Shehabi.

He chose to come to Cairo, calculating it was a relatively inexpensive city where he could afford to support his family. Those calculations, though, proved far from accurate.

As the war in Syria raged ever more viciously he found he had to enroll his four children in a private school after failing to get official permits to register them in public schools.

He wasn't making money in Egypt and in order to get a residency permit he had to provide proof his children went to school. It cost him a fortune but his family got a one-year permit with a stamp "not to be renewed."

El-Shehabi is hoping to find luck with a small butchers shop which he is opening with partners and the assistance of an Egyptian philanthropist.

"I appreciate the help some of us are getting from Egyptians but where is our embassy? Is it even aware of the refugee crisis? Why isn't it doing anything for us or speaking on our behalf with the authorities?"

It's the frustrated question on everybody's lips at the sit-in. Protesters accuse the embassy of indifference, bullying and incompetence. After ignoring the sit in on the first day Palestinian ambassador Barakat El-Farra visited the protesters and promised to find solutions with the Egyptian foreign ministry and PA president Mahmoud Abass.

"Does Abass know about the Palestinian refugees in Syria? He's never mentioned them before," quipped one protester. Although the promises were met with skepticism, the protesters agreed to suspend the sit-in for ten days to give the Egyptian and Palestinian authorities a chance to act on their words. If no practical solutions are offered the plan is

to resume and escalate the sit next Saturday.

It's been a week since the suspension and Abdeljabar Bilal says no progress has been made.

"They think we'll give up and this will go away but it won't," he told Ahram. "All I have with me is \$400. Once it runs out I'll have no option but to continue protesting in the street with my wife and six children. I'm not going anywhere."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/70622/Egypt/Politics-/Palestinian-refugees-from-Syria-struggle-for-recog.aspx>

- **Hezbollah organizes funeral for fighter killed in Syria**

Hezbollah organized on Friday a funeral march for one of its fighters identified as Ahed Saade who died in battle, the National News Agency reported.

During the funeral, Loyalty to the Resistance bloc leader MP Mohammad Raad said that the enemies of Hezbollah

wanted to "cut [its supply lines] and target Lebanon."

He also accused his party's enemies of "having a problem with the Sunnis, Shiites, Christians and even Salafis."

"They do not have a political agenda, they are only tools and pawns of the western conspiratorial project which aims at weakening the region," he added.

The Lebanese political scene is split between pro-Syrian regime parties affiliated with the March 8 alliance – spearheaded by Hezbollah – and western-backed forces associated with the March 14 coalition. The Lebanese cabinet has repeatedly underlined its official stance of disassociation from the Syrian crisis.

Hezbollah has been reportedly fighting on the side of the Syrian regime against rebels in the Homs province and outside Damascus, with news outlets in the past weeks reporting that a number of party members had been killed in fighting in Syria.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/hezbollah-organizes-funeral-for-fighter-killed-in-syria>

- **Syria opposition denounces Banias "massacre"**

The Syrian opposition on Friday denounced a "large-scale massacre" by regime forces and militiamen in a Sunni village in the northwest after a watchdog said at least 50 people, mostly civilians, were killed.

The Syrian National Coalition called in a statement for international action, citing witness reports of civilians being stabbed to death in Bayda, a Sunni village outside the port of Banias.

"The Coalition calls on the Arab League and the United Nations to act rapidly to save the civilians of Bayda, Banias and other villages across Syria," it said, accusing the regime of "war crimes and genocide".

"Several sources in the village say at least 50 people were killed in summary executions and shelling in Bayda village," a southern suburb of the Alawite-majority

city, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights chief Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP on Thursday.

He was speaking after fierce clashes erupted in the area. The official SANA news agency said troops killed "terrorists" -- the regime term for insurgents -- and seized arms in an operation targeting rebels.

"Some were summarily executed, shot to death, stabbed or set on fire," said a statement from the Observatory, which relies on a network of activists and medics on the ground for its information.

"Dozens of civilians from Bayda have gone missing, and we don't know whether they have been arrested, killed or fled," said Abdel Rahman.

"Many villagers have fled to Sunni districts in southern Banias, as there is no refuge for them in Alawite areas," he added.

The Banias region is predominantly Alawite, an offshoot of Shiite Islam and the sect of President Bashar al-Assad, while the insurgents battling to topple his regime are mainly Sunni Muslims.

The region's three main coastal cities of Banias, Latakia and Tartus and their surrounding areas form the "Alawite heartland" where analysts say Assad could seek refuge if his regime falls.

"The regime will not allow the presence of combatants in this area," Abdel Rahman said, referring to rebel forces.

A Coalition statement on Thursday said the soldiers and militiamen carried out "ugly crimes, including summary executions... to seek revenge... because the regime hasn't forgiven Banias and Bayda for standing alongside Daraa... at the start of the Syrian revolution."

Banias, along with Daraa in the south, the cradle of the uprising, saw some of the first demonstrations against the regime in March 2011.

The United Nations says that at least 70,000 people have been killed in the conflict that is now in its third year.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syria-opposition-denounces-banias-massacre>

- **US considering arms for Syria rebels**

The United States said on Thursday it was taking a fresh look at whether to arm Syria's rebels as the Damascus regime pressed an assault on opposition forces in the embattled city of Homs.

After having rejected the idea previously, President Barack Obama's deputies were weighing the option of providing weapons to Syria's outgunned opposition, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told reporters.

Asked whether the US government was rethinking its opposition to arming the rebels, Hagel replied with a firm "Yes."

But Hagel said no decision had been reached and declined to offer his own view on the matter, saying he was "in favor of exploring options and seeing what is the best option in coordination with our international partners."

Asked about Hagel's comments later, Obama said they represented the view he has expressed for "months."

“As we’ve seen evidence of further bloodshed, potential use of chemical weapons inside of Syria, what I’ve said is that we’re going to look at all options,” the president told a press conference in Mexico.

But, Obama added, “we want to make sure that we look before we leap and that what we’re doing is actually helpful to the situation, as opposed to making it more deadly or more complex.”

Hagel’s predecessor, Leon Panetta, who stepped down in February, had told lawmakers that he and the US military’s top officer, General Martin Dempsey, had recommended arming the rebels but were overruled.

Speculation has mounted that the administration could reverse its opposition to arming the rebels after officials said last week that American spy agencies now believe the Syrian regime may have used chemical weapons on a small scale.

Hagel’s comments came at a joint press conference with his British counterpart Philip Hammond, who said Britain had not

ruled out arming the rebels or other military options.

But Hammond said his government had to abide by a European Union ban on sending weapons to the opposition, adding that Britain would “look at the situation” when the ban expires in a few weeks.

Both men said their governments wanted to see a political solution to the two-year-old conflict, but the diplomatic effort appeared on the verge of another setback with signs that peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi was poised to quit.

The permanent Security Council members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — have all been urging Brahimi to stay in the post he took up in August after former UN leader Kofi Annan quit, diplomats said.

Brahimi’s expected departure reflects frustration with deadlocked international efforts to end the civil war, which the United Nations estimates has killed well over 70,000 people.

In Syria, President Bashar Al Assad’s forces appeared to be closing in on rebels holed up in a key area of the battered city of Homs, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based watchdog.

“The Syrian army, supported by backup forces and expert officers from Iran and Hezbollah, has taken control of large parts of the Wadi Al Sayeh district” in Homs, the group said in a statement.

The neighbourhood is halfway between the Khaldiyeh district and the Old City, two rebel-held areas that have been besieged by the army for nearly a year.

Seizing Wadi Al Sayeh would enable the army to cut off links between the two areas and possibly trigger sectarian revenge attacks, said the group, which relies on activists and medics on the ground for its information.

Obama has been reluctant to intervene in the war but faces mounting criticism that he has allowed the Assad regime to cross his own declared “red line” on using chemical weapons.

The US president said this week intelligence agencies were still trying to determine exactly who had fired chemical agents on the battlefield.

At the Pentagon, the British defense secretary said that the more time passes, the more difficult it will be to verify suspicions that Damascus unleashed chemical agents.

“I don’t think you need to be a technical expert to know that after any use of a chemical agent, there will be a degradation over time of the evidence that can be collected,” Hammond said.

Britain wants to obtain proof that would be acceptable in a court, as that would hopefully have “a deterrent effect,” and make clear the regime would be held accountable, he said.

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2013/May/middleeast_May25.xml§ion=middleeast

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Livni, Kerry meet in bid to renew peace talks**

Meeting follows Arab League proposal to accept adjustments to 1967 lines; PM restates support for referendum on peace talks.

In a further indication of stirrings in the long-stagnant Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process, Justice Minister Tzipi Livni met Thursday in Washington with US Secretary of State John Kerry, and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said for the second time in a week that he supports a public referendum on any agreement with the Palestinians.

Yitzhak Molcho, Netanyahu's envoy on the Palestinian issue, accompanied Livni to her meeting with Kerry, where they discussed the peace process as well as regional developments, particularly Syria.

The meeting came three days after an Arab League delegation met with Kerry and US Vice President Joe Biden. Kerry said the delegation came to relaunch the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for

a two-state solution based on the pre-1967 lines, with east Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.

That initiative also calls for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue based on UN Resolution 194, interpreted in the Arab world as enshrining a Palestinian right of return.

Kerry expressed hope that renewed US engagement would soon lead to a "substantial initiative" toward achieving a two-state solution.

Kerry emphasized the importance of creating an environment conducive to the resumption of talks and called on Israel to take positive steps to achieve this.

The secretary of state further urged Israel to rescind the announcement of building settlements in E-1. He also reiterated concern over the situation of Palestinian prisoners and praised the recent announcement that Israel would release several hunger striking prisoners.

On Monday, in an unexpected announcement, Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim

al-Thani said the Arab League would accept an agreement that did not call for a full withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines but included “mild” land swaps.

While Livni immediately reacted positively to the Qatari announcement, Netanyahu has not yet publicly responded.

Livni has been charged with heading Israel’s team negotiating with the Palestinian when the talks are renewed.

Kerry has been busy ever since US President Barack Obama visited Israel in March trying to move the sides back to the negotiating table. The meeting with Livni, her first abroad in her new capacity, was arranged last week – one government official said – prior to the Qatari prime minister’s announcement.

Another official said Molcho has visited Washington “frequently” over the past few weeks. The official said there is close coordination between Netanyahu and the Obama administration on the new diplomatic initiative.

Kerry is expected to return to the Middle East shortly for further talks with

Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Israeli officials said. No date has yet been given for that visit.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu added to the impression that talks with the Palestinians may start again soon by saying on Thursday he was interested in a referendum on any future agreement with the Palestinians.

He made a similar statement earlier this week at a Likud Beytenu faction meeting.

At that meeting, Yisrael Beytenu head Avigdor Liberman opposed the referendum idea, which is being promoted by Finance Minister Yair Lapid (Yesh Atid) and Economy and Trade Minister Naftali Bennett (Bayit Yehudi). Livni also came out against the referendum idea.

Speaking before a meeting with visiting Swiss Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter, Netanyahu said that one of the things Israel could learn from the Swiss was their use of referendum votes on major issues.

Netanyahu, rebuffing criticism that the elections to the Knesset represent the

only referendum needed, said he was not asking for a public vote on “every issue” but, rather, just on a possible agreement with the Palestinians.

One government official said Netanyahu – mindful of the Oslo Accords, which passed by a single vote in the Knesset – believes if you are going to take a decision that will contain extremely difficult steps, it will necessitate “very special national legitimacy,” the type that can be granted only through a referendum.

While the official said that the sides were a very long way off from an agreement that might necessitate a referendum, “there are intensive and serious efforts under way to restart the peace talks.”

The very talk of a referendum, the official hinted, may give Netanyahu the political space needed to conduct negotiations, since the public will not have to be concerned that something is being “cooked up” behind its back.

In an interview with Channel 10 on Wednesday, former prime minister Ehud Olmert discussed the importance of taking

immediate action in response to the recent Arab League peace overtures.

“I think we cannot, under any condition, pass up on any possibility that will lead to a return to peace talks,” Olmert said. “It’s a historic opportunity that the Knesset cannot afford to miss.”

Olmert called on Netanyahu to “lead Israel to peace talks and stop looking for excuses.”

<http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/In-bid-to-restart-talks-Livni-Kerry-to-meet-in-Washington-311853>

- **Japan, UAE sign nuclear agreement in Dubai**

Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have inked a nuclear cooperation agreement during a visit by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The cooperation deal was signed in Dubai, in the presence of Abe and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum on Thursday, the state-run WAM news agency said.

Abe, who is on a regional tour aimed at selling Japanese nuclear technologies, has highlighted his country's cooperation with its partners in the Middle East. His tour began in Saudi Arabia.

The Japanese premier arrived in the UAE late on Wednesday to participate in a Japan-UAE Business Forum as the Persian Gulf country is Tokyo's eighth largest world economic partner.

"Japan can contribute to UAE energy supplies by means of nuclear energy conservation and renewable energy," Abe said at the forum according to translation from Japanese.

In mid-July 2012, Abu Dhabi announced that it would start constructing two of four nuclear power plants in partnership with a South Korean consortium. The four plants are scheduled to be operational by 2020.

In September 2012, the Persian Gulf country signed a nuclear deal with Canada that allowed Ottawa to supply uranium to atomic power reactors in the UAE.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/02/301486/uae-signs-nuclear-deal-with-japan/>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• 118 Killed, 377 Injured in 29 Bomb Blasts across Pakistan during April

TEHRAN (FNA)- At least 118 people were killed and 377 others got injured in 29 bomb blasts as the militants raised the number of attacks at the political rallies and offices of parties across Pakistan during the month of April, official statistics said.



Out of the 29 bomb attacks, six were of suicide nature that ripped through different areas of Pakistan, targeting different targets, killed 48 persons and injured 162 others.

After the Pakistani government announced the schedule for the general

elections on May 11, the banned militant outfit Tehrik-i- Taliban Pakistan (TTP) warned the public to keep themselves away from the political gatherings of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), ANP and MQM, the allies of Pakistan's previous government, Xinhua reported.

During the month of April, at least 14 political rallies, gatherings and offices of different political parties came under bomb attacks that killed 62 people and injured 233 others.

The worst one of these attacks took place on April 16 when a suicide bomber targeted two political leaders of Awami National Party (ANP) during a rally for election campaign in the country's Northwestern metropolitan of Peshawar. Both the leaders remained unhurt in the explosion that killed 18 others including four policemen while injuring 49 others.

Pakistan's Northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was the worst hit province with 12 attacks followed by six blasts each in Sindh and Baluchistan but the country's most populated Eastern province of Punjab, which contains 60 percent of the country's population,

remained unhurt as there was no incident of terrorism occurred during the specific period.

Official statistics revealed that the terrorists carried out 29 bomb attacks at 29 targets during April, killing 88 civilians as well as 26 personnel from security forces and four policemen.

The Pakistani Army's 20 servicemen, four persons of Ranger and four policemen lost their lives while two members of Frontier Constabulary were killed in the attacks.

Militants conducted six direct attacks on security forces during the month. The worst one of them occurred on April 16 when a suicide bomber targeted a convoy of Pakistan army in the Northwestern restive tribal region of North Waziristan, killing nine soldiers besides injuring eight others.

One incident that raised many concerns for security forces and intelligence agencies of the country was the female suicide attack at a hospital in the Northwestern tribal region of Bajaur Agency that killed four besides injuring the same number of persons.

The majority of the bomb blasts were conducted with improvised explosive device (IED) by planting it on roadsides or fixing it in cars and motorcycles.

Most of the attacks were claimed by the TTP who recently once again threatened to speed up their attacks at the security personnel, police and public rallies of the political parties, preparing for the country's general elections to be held on May 11.

Pakistan's local media Thursday, quoting some officials of secret agencies, feared that militants might start another wave of bomb attack at the political parties as the country is one week away from its general elections to elect the new government.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107166752>

- **2nd anniversary of Bin Laden's death marked**

BEIJING, May 2 (Xinhuanet) -- The killing of Osama Bin Laden two years ago marked the end of an era for the United States. But Pakistan suffered tragic losses through

terrorism during the decade-long hunt for the al-Qaeda leader. Our correspondent Danial Khan takes a look at how the security situation has improved in the last two years and how the Pakistan-US relationship has moved forward.

Two years since US Special Forces claimed to have killed Osama bin Laden, the town where he was allegedly found remains in the limelight.

A big question mark lurks over the garrison city of Abbotabad in northern Pakistan, how did the world number one terrorist, nestle in a compound, at a stone's throw from the Pakistan military academy?

While US Navy Seals look at it as one of their most distinguished achievements, locals in Abbotabad still have doubts about it. "I live next to the house where they are saying Osama was living. I've lived here for over 20 years. I have never seen anyone who looked like Osama, it is a big lie." "I believe that Osama bin Laden was never in Abbotabad, he was not in Pakistan, if he was killed, then where is his body? It was an American stage show to insult Pakistan."

Since the search began for Osama Bin Laden, a deadly trend of homegrown terrorist attacks surfaced in Pakistan.

The Pak-US relationship hit rock bottom after American forces killed 24 Pakistani soldiers at a military check post along Pak-afghan border.

Anti-American protests exacerbated on the streets of Pakistan. Many believe Pakistan became a victim of terror attacks, post 9/11, when it joined the US war on terror. Over 40,000 Pakistani civilians and soldiers lost their lives to terrorism, the economy lost \$68 billion.

The deteriorating security situation has been intensified by US drone attacks in the north of the country. Allegedly used to target militants, they have attracted widespread condemnation across Pakistan for causing collateral damage.

As the world marks the second death anniversary of Osama Bin Laden, Pakistan remains tense ahead of the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2014, fearing it will bring more trouble to the region.

In less than two weeks, Pakistan goes for general elections. Terrorists have already targeted major liberal political parties. Observers predict this current wave of terrorism may lead to a political turmoil that means terrorism in Pakistan has not ended with the end of Osama Bin Laden.

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

- **Pakistan election candidate shot dead**

A candidate running for Pakistan's national assembly at historic polls next week was shot dead on Friday along with his three-year-old son in Karachi, police said.

It is the first time that a national assembly candidate has been killed in Pakistan's election campaign. Campaigning has been marred by Taliban threats and attacks, which have killed 62 people since April 11.

Saddiq Zaman Khattak was a candidate for the Awami National Party (ANP), the leading secular party in Pakistan's ethnic Pastun northwest. A senior party leader said he had received threats.

“He was returning from a mosque after saying his prayers with his three-year-old son when gunmen on a motorbike opened fire. Both were killed,” police spokesman Imran Shaukat said.

Senior ANP leader Bashir Jan confirmed the attack and the deaths.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but the Taleban has directly threatened ANP and the two other main parties in the outgoing government.

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/international/2013/May/international_May98.xml§ion=international

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