



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Proces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

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Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dışı Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



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6 May 2013

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ORSAM

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
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STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

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1. IRAQ

- **Othman urges the central government to speed up implementing legitimate demands of the demonstrators**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The independent MP, of the Kurdistan Alliance, Mahmoud Othman called on the federal government to speed implementing the legitimate demands of the demonstrators that are consistent with the Constitution, and not to use violence against them, and open a direct dialogue to resolve the current crisis," noting that " implementing these demands by the government will prevent the lurking and beneficiaries to exploit these events to their favor. "

He called, in a statement to (NINA), the governments of the region and the Centre to speed up forming bodies and special committees to implement what was agreed upon in Baghdad between al-Maliki and Barzani, stressing the need to resolve the outstanding problems as soon as possible and implement the written agreement between the two parties. "

Othman denied U.S. or Iranian pressures on the governments of the center and the province led to the recent agreement

between the parties, noting that "there are efforts by the U.S. and Iran toward the convergence of views between the Governments of the region and the center, but these efforts were not pressures towards a solution, as the existing problems between the Governments of the center and the region are an internal affair of Iraq and the two parties do not accept interventions ".

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

- **MP warns of internal fighting in the protests governorates**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Wahda al-Jumaili warned the protests provinces of external schema to hit and tear their sit-ins and unity.

Jumaili said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "There are foreign agendas working in various ways to create a kind of discord and dissent among protests provinces and trying to ignite internal fighting between them by a range of options, which almost be accepted in a province and rejected in other provinces . "

Jumaili called on the protesters in all sit-in squares to be united and confront any project aimed to tear their unity and ignite the internal fighting,"

It is mentioned that the Imam of Samarra Friday pray, Sheikh Mohamed Taha Hamdon offered four options to get out of crisis, the first option is to replace Maliki, the second is to divide Iraq into three mini-states not provinces, third to form Sunni region, which is bad option because it weakens Iraq, four to confront the central government .

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

- **Maliki's coalition candidate in Basra split**

Shafaq News / State of law coalition in Basra province announced, on Monday, the split of its candidate, Zahra al- Bijari and joining "Basra First" coalition bringing the number of members to 18 out of 19 members, as expressed its surprise from the split after she gave final guarantees since the beginning.

The Independent Higher Electoral Commission announced, on Saturday, the final results of the provincial elections, as State of Law

coalition led by Nuri al-Maliki in Basra province was ranked the first with 16 seats, while Mwatn coalition led by Ammar al-Hakim got 6 seats and Ahrar coalition led by Moqtada al-Sadr got three seats only.

"The coalition and other forces allied with it have a majority to form the local government in Basra," The spokesman of state of law coalition , Salem al-Taqi at a press conference in Basra and attended by "Shafaq News".

"We announce officially today the formation of state of law coalition and the political forces allied with it," he added.

State of law coalition in Basra announced last Wednesday allying with other winning seven blocs in the local elections to form a majority government in the province, while included a dissident candidate from al-Iraqiya United Alliance.

It is noted that specialists and political analysts say that the close results in the provincial elections is not different from the results of previous elections in the closeness in the number of seats making it important to search for coalitions among each other to form the local governments.

http://www.shafaq.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6011:maliki-s-coalition-candidate-in-basra-split-&catid=39:politics&Itemid=53

- **Marjaa Yacoubi talks about satanic projects for Iraq**

Shafaq News / The religious Shiite Marjaa, Mohammed al-Yacoubi warned on Sunday from plans and projects described as “Satanic” aims to tear Iraq and the Arab region and divide it into states and territories, calling on Iraqis and Arabs to confront and be prepared for all possibilities.

These warnings reflect real concerns in Iraq from worsening sectarian tension on the background of the events and the recent attacks in the country and raised concerns in Iraq of a return to sectarian strife.

“Day after day , plans and projects prepared for Islamic and Arabic countries became more clear within the Greater Middle East project which aim to tear unity and weaken the states ,” Al- Yacoubi said at a news conference in his office in Najaf, attended by “Shafaq News”.

He added that plans aims “ to make the Zionist entity the only dominant force in the

region to continue to control it after it crushing peoples paper has burned and control wealth through dictatorial regimes that adopts oppression , cruelty and repression policy “.

“They used to implement this plan many ways as military force and the petro-dollar countries’ funds to circumvent the movement of peoples and confiscate their revolutions which was called Arab Spring to subdue their will and started to control them through the traitor regimes in the region”.

The ongoing civil war in Syria between the armed opposition led by armed Sunni majority and the regime of President Bashar al-Assad who is an Allawi getting support from Iran and Shiite forces in Iraq and the region also affected the region.

The Sunni tribes in western Iraq stood along the Syrian opposition and accused Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki of supporting Assad’s regime which deepened Iraq's sectarian division and threatened to ignite a civil war after tens of thousands of Iraqis were killed in sectarian fighting in 2006 and 2007.

“One of the dirtiest, most dangerous and squalid means to ignite a sectarian war

between Muslims is provoking the religious feelings and emotions by despicable ways , even monsters can not do it , most recently they exhumed martyr Sahaabi's bin Udai grave in Damascus on Thursday and the transferred his remains to an unknown destination”.

“We want the Iraqi people to be patient, as what is going on is intended to fuel this diabolical plan since the solution occupation in 2003 through the bombing of the Imam al-Askari shrine in 2006 and a fierce sectarian war that followed its bombing and the scenario continues until the events taking place in several of our provinces for several months,” Yacoubi added.

There has been an uptick in violence lately in Iraq and the persistent tensions have stoked widespread fears that the simmering hostilities, which raged during the Iraq War, could morph into a civil war.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/politics/6010-breaking-news-marjaa-yacoubi-talks-about-satanic-projects-for-iraq-.html>

- **JFO: Press freedom is the worst in Iraq**

Shafaq News / Journalistic freedoms Organization (JFO) considered that freedom of press in the country in the past year is the worst since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003.

JFO said in a report briefed by “Shafaq News” that “the Iraqi government initiated 2012 with strict measures against the Iraqi media”.

“The government has used military and security forces to limit the work of journalists, especially against foreign journalists, most of who are deprived from entering Iraq and prevent others from covering the protests that took place in some cities”.

The report spoke of “processes horrible limitation ways used against journalists,” noting that “the executive authorities and military forces limit strongly the movement of journalists and roaming in Iraqi cities, the movement of any journalist or media team requires approvals issued by the military and security leaders”.

The report pointed to the decision of Communications and Media Commission governing the work of television and radio to suspend the work permits of ten satellite channels, including “Al-Jazeera “ Qatari TV

channel because of “inciting violence and sectarianism” after the events of Hawija in April, which killed 50 people and broke into the sit-in square anti-prime minister.

However, the report also pointed to a marked recovery “of what has become known as new media through the emergence of a new generation of bloggers in the social networking sites could sometimes direct the Iraqi public opinion about social and political and religious issues may be banned to be discussed for public debate”.

It is noteworthy that Iraq is witnessing since 2003 daily acts of violence recently ranked 150 on the list of the organization of “Reporters Without Borders” for the freedom of the press.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/6002-ifo-press-freedom-is-the-worst-in-iraq-.html>

- **Iraq to buy 18 more Lockheed F-16 fighters**

Lockheed Martin Aeronautics in Fort Worth will keep building F-16s for at least four more years, thanks to an \$830 million contract announced late Tuesday to supply 18 of the highly successful jet fighters to Iraq.

It is the second group of F-16s for Iraq, which ordered 18 in December 2011. At that time the Pentagon had said it planned another batch for Iraq but had not said when that might happen.

The orders are part of Iraq's efforts to rebuild its air force a decade after the U.S. invasion of the country to topple Saddam Hussein. The purchase price includes support equipment and electronic warfare systems.

Lockheed spokesman Ken Ross said the latest order should keep the Fort Worth F-16 production line busy through mid-2017. As of March 31, Lockheed had said it had 40 unfilled F-16 orders, which the company said previously was enough to keep the program busy into 2015.

The 2017 estimate doesn't include the potential impact of selling 25 F-16s to the United Arab Emirates, a pending deal that Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel discussed with the Persian Gulf state's leaders last week. Foreign military sales are negotiated between the federal government and the foreign buyer before they are placed with the contractor.

Ross said about 200 production workers currently work on the F-16 line. The company

no longer provides a total head count that would have included engineers and other technical personnel on the F-16 program, which last year was combined with the company's F-22 program.

Iraq's order is the latest in a continuing string of orders for the feisty aircraft, which saw its 4,500th delivery last year.

The first F-16 rolled off the Fort Worth production line in 1978. About half are flown by U.S. forces, and about half by more than two dozen other nations.

Just days after the 2011 order for Iraq, Oman ordered a dozen F-16s. And in October 2012, Taiwan placed an order worth up to \$1.85 billion to upgrade its aging fleet of 145 F-16s.

http://www.pukmedia.com/EN/EN_Direje.aspx?Jimare=4531

- **Kurdistan reveals Barzani - Maliki seven-point agreement**

Shafaq News / The Presidency of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) revealed the details of the seven points in the text of the agreement concluded by the President of KRG , Nechirvan Barzani with the federal Prime

Minister , Nuri al-Maliki in Baghdad recently so that everyone would know the fact of the subject”.

“Some media organizations and satellite channels in Kurdistan region talked about the points since awhile contained in the agreement signed by the Nechirvan Barzani and Nuri al-Maliki in inaccurate way for particular purposes ,”a statement of the presidency of the regional government reported for “Shafaq News”.

The statement said that “in order that everyone knows the fact and take a look at the entire text of the Convention as received exactly, we include the full text of the Convention as it is ...

First: to prepare a special draft law (to compensate victims of Anfal attacks, chemical weapons and mass graves) as the federal government will allocate an appropriate amount to help refugees and displaced people who live in the region.

Second: forming a supreme security committee for security cooperation.

Third: forming a committee of the two parties (Baghdad, Erbil) to investigate the details of

the joint security administration in the disputed areas by special mechanisms, managed by operations leaders, including Dijla Operations Command.

Fourth: joint action to draft a law to set the administrative border of the provinces as provided by the Presidency to the parliament, as well as a law to cancel (Revolutionary command council's decisions), which was submitted by the Cabinet.

Fifth: forming a joint committee to investigate judiciary, customs, travel and border crossings problem, and the same in the federal and regional governments.

Sixth: requesting the parliament to reconsider the Federal Budget Law for 2013 and its annexes.

Seventh: forming a technical committee of the two sides to agree on a draft law of oil and gas and the distribution of resources law.

KRG president visited at the head of a high-level delegation on Saturday Baghdad and met with Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, Parliament Speaker, a number of heads of political parties and political blocs in Baghdad, in order to calm the crisis between Erbil and Baghdad since

deteriorating that led to the withdrawal of ministers and Kurdish MPs in Baghdad and head to Erbil to discuss the situation with the Kurdish leaders to take a unified position.

Following the visit and the apparently positive results of Kurdistan, it was decided for ministers and Kurdish MPs to resume participating in the federal parliament and government.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/politics/5994-kurdistan-reveals-barzani-maliki-seven-point-agreement-.html>

- **Iraq unity will thwart enemy plots: Iran FM**

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has urged all Iraqi political groups to remain united in order to safeguard the interests of the Iraqi nation against enemy plots.

Salehi made the remarks in a meeting with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's spouse, Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, who is a member of the political bureau of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), in Tehran on Sunday.

The Iranian foreign minister pointed to the enemy conspiracies to undermine stability, security and development in the region; and called on different political factions in Iraq to band together and remains vigilant to thwart the plots.

It is the policy of Iran to support Iraq's territorial integrity and all-out political and economic development, Salehi underscored.

Denouncing the recent Israeli military aggression against Syria and the ongoing acts of terror committed by foreign-backed militants against innocent civilians in the Arab country, Salehi called for closer interaction among key regional states to help defuse the unrest in the Arab county.

The Syrian state television reported on Sunday that Israel had attacked the Jamraya Research Center, located northwest of Damascus. A number of people were reportedly killed and wounded in the attack, which caused widespread destruction. The center had been targeted by another Israeli airstrike back in January.

The Iranian foreign minister also inquired after the health of Jalal Talabani, who suffered a

stroke in December 17, 20, wishing him a rapid recovery.

Salehi further praised Talibani for his key role in protecting the interests of the Iraqi people in the most complicated circumstances.

For her part, Ibrahim Ahmed underscored that Iran and Iraq significantly contribute to regional stability, security and development.

She further expressed gratitude to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for supporting Iraq.

Also on Sunday, in a meeting with Ibrahim Ahmed, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili called for constructive dialog among the Iraqi groups to settle the country's political crises.

Jalili said Iraq had managed to overcome all the challenges facing the country thanks to the participation of all groups and tribes.

For her part, Ibrahim Ahmed presented a report on the latest developments in Iraq and called for the further expansion of Tehran-Baghdad ties in all areas.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/06/302074/united-iraq-can-thwart-enemy-plots-iran/>

- **Iraqi troops kill 14 militants, arrest 10 others in Mosul**



At least 14 armed militants have been killed in clashes with Iraqi troops in the northern city of Mosul, amid a fresh spate of violence in the country.

The clashes erupted on Saturday when Iraqi troops were conducting search operations in the area.

Iraqi police said they also arrested 10 people who were wanted on charges of terrorism.

On Friday, nine Iraqi police were killed and seven others were injured in clashes with armed militants in Mosul.

Earlier in the day, seven people were also killed after a car bomb exploded outside a Sunni mosque in Rashidiyah, north of Baghdad, as worshippers left the mosque following the Friday Prayers. Thirteen people were also injured in the attack.

On Thursday, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) said that April 2013 was Iraq's deadliest month since June 2008, with a total of 712 people killed and 1,633 wounded in bomb attacks and other forms of violence.

Almost 600 of the victims are reported to be civilians and the rest were members of Iraqi security forces.

The mission also said that Baghdad was the worst affected governorate with a total of 211 killed and 486 injured

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/04/301765/iraqi-troops-kill-14-militants-in-mosul/>

- **Iraqi PM's coalition leads in local vote**

Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law bloc wins the most seats in local elections in seven of 12 provinces.

Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki's coalition came top in provincial elections two weeks ago, results released on Saturday showed, but failed to win a majority in any district, meaning it will need alliances to hold onto senior provincial posts.

Maliki's State of Law won the most seats in seven out of 12 provinces, in a vote that was the biggest test of Iraqi democracy since U.S. troops pulled out in December 2011.

Iraqi politics are deeply split along sectarian lines, with Maliki's power-sharing government mired in crisis over how to share power among Shi'ites, Sunni Muslims and ethnic Kurds who run their own autonomous region in the north.

"Ahead of the 2014 elections, the results signal to the blocs that pursuing a majoritarian government approach is difficult to bear fruit," said Ahmed Ali, an Iraq analyst at the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War.

"Coalition building remains a main characteristic of forming governments in Iraq."

Iraqiya, a secular but Sunni-dominated bloc that posed a serious challenge to the Shi'ite Maliki in 2010 parliamentary elections, won no more than three seats in any province, according to figures released by Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission.

Months of Sunni unrest have come to a head since security forces raided a protest camp on April 23, three days after the provincial elections. Clashes swiftly spread to other Sunni areas, pushing the monthly civilian death count to 712, the highest since 2009, according to the United Nations.

Civil war in Syria is fanning Sunni-Shi'ite rivalry across the Middle East, exacerbating tensions in Iraq. Under late dictator Saddam Hussein, the minority Sunnis were politically dominant, but now they complain of being marginalised.

Maliki's State of Law received the most votes in the capital Baghdad, where it took 20 of the 58 available seats.

Voting in two Sunni-majority provinces was put off until July due to concerns about security, a delay criticised by the United States. The cabinet said the date could be postponed again unless the situation improved.

The Kurdistan region has its own timetable for provincial elections in its three governorates.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/05/2013551726278874.html>

2. IRAN

- **Senior Commander Rejects Israeli Claims about Targeting Iranian Missiles in Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A senior Iranian military commander strongly dismissed as "psychological operation" the reports by the western and Israeli media on the destruction of an Iranian missile cargo for Hezbollah during the recent Israeli air raid on Syria, stressing that the anti-Israel resistance front in region doesn't need Iran's weapon aids.



Western and Israeli media quoted unknown American officials as claiming that the airstrike that Israeli warplanes carried out in Syria

overnight on Thursday was directed at a shipment of advanced surface-to-surface missiles from Iran that Israel believed was intended for Hezbollah.

An American official told the New York Times that the targeted shipment consisted of Iranian-made Fateh-110s, a mobile, accurate, solid-fueled missile that has the range to strike Tel Aviv and much of Israel from Southern Lebanon.

In reply, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Brigadier General Seyed Massoud Jazayeri told Al Alam TV network that the allegations are part of an anti-Iran propaganda campaign.

"Basically speaking, the Syrian government does not need Iran's weapon assistance. These types of reports mostly serve psychological and propaganda campaign," Jazayeri said, adding that the enemies of Syria are trying to link the ongoing resistance in Syria with other countries.

He praised the capability of the anti-Israeli resistance movements in the region, and added, "Fortunately, the Resistance movement has become mature enough to defend itself very well against any kind of

aggression. What Hamas (Palestinian resistance movement) employed to defend itself or (the Lebanese) Hezbollah (movement) military capabilities are totally home-made."
<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107167642>

- **Ahmadinejad: Iranian Nation to Overcome Sanctions in 4 Months**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad played down the effects of the western sanctions against Tehran, and said the Iranian people will win over embargos within the next four months.

"Today, they have imposed the heaviest sanctions against the Iranian nation to prevent its speedy move and they imagine that they can impede the Iranian nation('s progress) by such desperate moves," Ahmadinejad said, addressing a large group of people in Orumiye city, Northwestern Iran, on Sunday.

"They should know that the Iranian nation will overcome all sanctions ... in the next 3 to 4 months and will foil the plots of ill-wishers," he added.

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions and the western embargos for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

Tehran has dismissed West's demands as politically tainted and illogical, stressing that sanctions and pressures merely consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

Tehran has repeatedly said that it considers its nuclear case closed as it has come clean of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s

questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107167448>

- **US Politician Opposes Sanctions against Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- President of the American Council on Foreign Relations Richard Haass voiced his opposition to the US-led western sanctions against Iran, and underlined the necessity for finding a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the stalemate between Tehran and the West over the former's nuclear program.



Haass made the remarks earlier this week in the ABC TV's Good Morning America program hosted by George Stephanopoulos.

"I support concentrated diplomatic efforts and I oppose sanctions against Iran," the president of the US Council on Foreign Relations said.

He noted that he also opposes using military option against Iran's nuclear sites and facilities, reiterating that a diplomatic solution is the best solution under the current circumstances.

Washington and its western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

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sanctions and pressures merely consolidate
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The Islamic Republic says that it considers its
nuclear case closed as it has come clean of
IAEA's questions and suspicions about its past
nuclear activities.

Political observers believe that the United
States has remained at loggerheads with Iran
mainly over the independent and home-
grown nature of Tehran's nuclear technology,
which gives the Islamic Republic the potential
to turn into a world power and a role model
for the other third-world countries.

Washington has laid much pressure on Iran to
make it give up the most sensitive and
advanced part of the technology, which is
uranium enrichment, a process used for
producing nuclear fuel for power plants.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107167316>

- **Iran to see high voter turnout in
upcoming presidential poll: Surveys**

Iran is expected to see a high voter turnout in
the upcoming presidential and local councils

elections, surveys conducted in a number of
Iranian universities have revealed.

University professors are unanimous that
Iranians have been encouraged to vote in the
June elections in which reformists, Principlists
and independents would vie for the
presidency and councils.

“We predict a high turnout. People know what
they want. They will vote for the one who’s fit
to run the country for the next four years,”
university lecturer, Abbas Abbas-Zadeh, told
Press TV.

Mahmoud Shahbari, also a lecturer, noted
that the upcoming presidential election is
sensitive because the enemies of the Islamic
Republic are sparing no efforts to bring about
voter apathy.

“Voter turnout will be higher. This election is
far more important than the previous ones,”
said Professor Mohammad Rouhi.

More than 20 political figures have expressed
interest in competing in the Islamic Republic’s
upcoming presidential election. Hopefuls can
register from May 7 to 11.

The local councils elections are scheduled to be held on June 14, concurrent with Iran's 11th presidential election.

Hopefuls must be vetted by Iran's Guardian Council for qualifications, after which the names of the qualified candidates will be announced on May 18.

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

The city and village Islamic councils are local establishments that are elected by public vote in all cities and villages across Iran. Council members in each city or village are elected for a four-year term.

The councils are tasked with helping the country's social, economic, cultural and educational advancement by encouraging public cooperation.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/05/301970/iran-to-see-high-voter-turnout/>

- **Iranian Parliament's Sunni Fraction Deplores Sacrilege of Islamic Sanctities**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian Parliament's Sunni Fraction in a statement on Sunday strongly condemned the desecration of the shrine of two prominent Shiite figures in Syria and Jordan by Wahhabi extremists.



The statement of the parliament's Sunni fraction came after Wahhabi extremists desecrated the shrines of two highly-revered Shiite figures in Syria and Jordan earlier this week.

The Wahhabis attacked the mausoleum of Ja'far al-Tayyar, a close companion of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and the brother of Shiite Islam's first Imam, and torched his grave in Karak province in Southern Jordan on Saturday.

The desecration of al-Tayyar's grave came only a few days after the Wahhabi-backed Nusra Front attacked the mausoleum of Hojr ibn Oday in the Damascus suburb of Adra and exhumed his grave taking his remains to an unknown location. Hojr was a close

companion of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and also a companion of Imam Ali (PBUH).

Meantime, Vice-Speaker of the parliament Mohammad Hassan Aboutorabi-Fard in an open session of the parliament on Sunday condemned the Wahhabi moves in desecration of Shiite sanctities, saying that "Hojr ibn Oday had an outstanding status among all Islamic sects and in the Muslim World which is quite known to everyone".

The sacrilege of Islamic sanctities has aroused intense feelings in Muslim lands, specially in Shiite communities.

In Yemen, leader of the Houthi Movement Seyed Abdelmalik Al-Houthi in a statement on Saturday condemned the desecration of Hojr's shrine.

"This action which has been done in line with the Zionists' criminal plots seeks to increase religious intolerances," the leader of Yemen's Houthi Movement said.

Al-Houthi described the desecration of Hojr as an immoral and inhumane action.

The Nusra Front, affiliated to the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization, has taken up the

responsibility for the desecration of Oday's grave.

In Iran, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian also strongly condemned the desecration of the shrine of a prominent Shiite figure in Syria by Wahhabi extremists.

Amir Abdollahian said that the perpetrators of such ugly acts are affiliated to the Zionist regime who have conducted similar attempts at holy Muslim sites in the occupied territories

The Iranian deputy foreign minister warned the masterminds of such inhumane acts that they will receive a response that will make them sorry for what they have done.

Also, large groups of Iranian seminary students and teachers staged protest gatherings in Tehran and Qom on Saturday to strongly condemn the Wahhabi extremists' insult to Shiite Islam.

Seminary students and teachers convened at the shrine of Hazrat Abdolazim Hassani in Southern Tehran on Saturday reading a message of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, who condemned the sacrilegious act.

The protesters also chanted slogans against the perpetrators and their Wahhabi supporters. They also issued a statement condemning the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA) for conducting such shameful acts.

In a similar move in Qom, the seminary students and teachers gathered in the city's Feyzieh seminary school today and condemned desecration of Hojr ibn Oday.

They read the messages of Grand Ayatollahs Golpayegani and Makarem Shirazi who condemned the desecration of Hojr ibn Oday's shrine.

Reports from Iraq also said that similar moves had been done by Shiite seminaries in the holy city of Najaf.

Earlier this week, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki also condemned the desecration of the grave of Hojr by foreign-backed terrorists.

In a statement issued by his office, Maliki described the attack as a "mean act" that targeted the unity among Muslims.

Hojr was a staunch supporter of the first Shiite Imam Ali (PBUH) and led the army of Muslims to victory in several crucial battles. He and his

sons finally fell victim to their loyalty to Imam Ali (PBUH) and were murdered at the order of the Umayyad Caliph Muawiyah in the year 660 CE.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107167370>

- **Senior Diplomat Rebuffs Claims about Iran Pressuring Egypt on Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Tehran's envoy to Cairo rejected certain Arab media claims that Iran has pressurized Egypt to give up its hostile stance against Bashar al-Assad government by threats to release an audiotape which reveals Palestinian and Lebanese resistance groups have assisted Muslim Brotherhood in toppling Hosni Mubarak's regime.

"The news is not correct and is completely fabricated," Head of Iran's Interests Section in Cairo Mojtaba Amani said in an interview with al-Mihvar news channel on Monday.

A Kuwaiti daily recently claimed that during the last month visit to Tehran by Egyptian President's Senior Advisor in Foreign Relations Essam el-Haddad, Iranian officials had threatened to release an audiotape which

proves that Hamas and Hezbollah movements have helped Egyptian Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun (Muslim Brotherhood) party topple Mubarak's regime and gain victory in the January 25 revolution in Egypt.

Amani dismissed the claims, and said, "The goal of such reports is damaging the Egyptian-Iranian cooperation on Syria; a cooperation which serves the stability of the region."

He further mentioned that Egypt's position on Syria has not changed.

Tehran and Cairo have increased their cooperation on Syria by forming a quadrilateral contact group attended by Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Last month, a senior Iranian diplomat announced that Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are slated to hold a meeting on Syria in the very near future in a bid to discuss and help soothe the crisis in the Muslim country.

"Egyptian authorities will announce the date of the quadrilateral meeting between Tehran, Cairo, Riyadh and Ankara," Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian said in April.

The Iranian deputy foreign minister pointed to the mediating role of Iran and Egypt in the Syrian crisis, and said, "Egyptian President Mohammad Mursi's initiative for the settlement of the crisis (in Syria) was discussed during my recent visit to Cairo.

Following a quadrilateral ministerial meeting on Syria in Cairo in September, 2012, Salehi had said that members of the Contact Group on Syria share identical views about finding a solution to the current crisis in Syria.

"The common ground between us is more than our differences," he said at a joint press conference with his Turkish and Egyptian counterparts.

The Iranian minister emphasized that there must be a Syrian solution and not one imposed from the outside.

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

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

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

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

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

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

increased after a decision by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf states to provide millions of dollars in funding each month.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107167666>

- **Iran, India Keen to Expand Bilateral Ties**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid in a meeting explored avenues for the further expansion of bilateral ties and mutual cooperation.

During the meeting, Larijani stressed the significance of continued consultations between Tehran and New Delhi on regional and international issues.

"Tehran and New Delhi should boost reciprocal trade relations, and pave the way for closer cooperation between Iranian and Indian private sector," Larijani added.

"The hurdles to promotion of relations between the private sectors of both countries should be removed in a bid to pump up the volume of mutual economic transactions and

tap into Iran and India's great potential to serve the interests of both nations," Larijani pointed out on Saturday.

He said the two nations have numerous "common bonds" which they should utilize to further promote mutual cooperation on political, economic and cultural arenas.

Khurshid, for his part, said holding a meeting of the Iran-India Joint Economic Commission is an opportunity to draw on both countries' economic potential.

Holding such meetings, he said, will help explore new opportunities for expansion of mutual economic and political cooperation.

Khurshid arrived in Tehran on Friday to discuss bilateral ties and mutual cooperation with senior Iranian officials.

The Indian external affairs minister embarked on a three-day visit to Iran to attend the 17th Joint Iran-India Commission.

Khurshid is the co-chairperson of the Joint Commission along with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi.

The 16th Session of the Joint India-Iran Commission was held in New Delhi on July 8-9, 2010. The 30-member delegation of Iran led by Iranian Economy Minister Seyed Shamseddin Hosseini participated in that meeting.

India and Iran have been holding discussions at regular intervals on issues related to economic cooperation under the joint commission mechanism, which was established in July 1983.

The meeting of the Joint India-Iran Commission provided an opportunity to review bilateral economic and cultural cooperation.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107167264>

- **Iranian FM Warns Israel Not to Play with Fire**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi condemned Israel's Sunday attack on a research center in the outskirts of Damascus, and said Tel Aviv is playing with fire.

"Israel is playing with fire," Salehi warned in a meeting with Turkmen Foreign Minister Rasit Meredow in Tehran on Monday.

His remarks came after Israeli rockets struck a military research center on the outskirts of the Syrian capital, Damascus, on Sunday. The blasts occurred a day after an Israeli official said his regime had carried out an air strike targeting a consignment of missiles in Syria a few days earlier. The research centre hit on Sunday was also targeted by Israel in January.

There was no immediate comment from Israeli officials on Sunday's explosions but Israeli media have confirmed the regime's involvement in the attack.

Also during the Monday meeting, Salehi cautioned about the dangerous consequences of reinvigorating extremist groups in the region, and blasted certain regional and western states for supporting them which, he said, will spread extremism across the region and the world.

Meredow, for his part, warned that extremists have targeted the region, and said, "They aim to undermine regional security; therefore, we should cooperate in fighting this phenomenon."

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

The US and its western and regional allies have long sought to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his ruling system. Media reports said that the Syrian rebels and terrorist groups have received significantly more and better weapons in recent weeks, a crime paid for by the Persian Gulf Arab states and coordinated by the United States.

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credibility and command-and-control infrastructure.

Opposition activists who several months ago said the rebels were running out of ammunition said in May that the flow of weapons - most bought on the black market in neighboring countries or from elements of the Syrian military in the past - has significantly increased after a decision by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Persian Gulf states to provide millions of dollars in funding each month.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107167676>

- **Hegemons oppose nations with potential to go global: Ahmadinejad**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has described Iran-India relations as friendly and deep-rooted, saying the two nations have common views on a range of historical and cultural issues.

“Under the current global circumstances, we have a duty to insist on the maintenance and further enhancement of mutual ties,” President Ahmadinejad said during a meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid in Tehran on Saturday.

“The global ruling system has reached a political, cultural, and economic stalemate, and the equations of power will fundamentally change in favor of justice, peace, and friendship,” Ahmadinejad stated.

Human beings need a system in which relations between nations are based on justice and friendship, he added.

“Humanity needs a world in which all nations enjoy the right opportunities to make progress,” he noted.

Commenting on the pressure the hegemonic powers exert on independent and justice-seeking nations, he said, “The more they ratchet up the pressure, the stronger we will get.”

The domineering powers are seeking to weaken nations that have the potential to ‘go global,’ such as Iran and India, and that’s why they are pressuring the two nations, Ahmadinejad observed.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ahmadinejad said Iran considers India’s progress as its own.

Khurshid said New Delhi knows that the economic and political pressure the enemy is putting on Iran will not sap the will of Iranians.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/107417-hegemony-oppose-nations-with-potential-to-go-global-ahmadinejad>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel preparing to launch another war against Gaza: Report**

The Israeli army is reportedly preparing to launch another all-out war against the besieged Gaza Strip in a bid to eliminate Hamas resistance movement.



According to Israeli Walla website, the Israeli army is preparing to launch the Operation Pillar of Defense II against Gaza to stop rocket attacks from the Palestinian territory despite a significant decrease in their number.

The Israeli website said since the Israeli regime does not have confidence in the current peace in the southern part of Israel, it wants to launch another military offensive in Gaza to destroy Hamas military infrastructure.

It also added that the Israeli army will deploy more troops in the future war to prevent Hamas response.

Walla said Israel is determined to attack Gaza again since the democratically-elected government of Gaza has not changed its anti-Israeli stance and refuses to end resistance against Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands.

Israel launched the so-called "Operation Pillar of Defense I" against Gaza in November 2012. Over 160 Palestinians, including women and children, were killed and about 1,200 others were injured and more than 1,500 targets were hit across the Palestinian enclave during the eight-day war.

In retaliation, Palestinian resistance fighters fired rockets and missiles into Israeli cities, killing at least five Israelis. The offensive ended after Egypt brokered a truce between Hamas and Israel.

According to a Hamas spokesman, Israel's eight-day aggression against the Gaza Strip caused more than USD1.2 billion in direct and indirect damages.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/05/301983/israel-preparing-for-another-gaza-war/>

- **Israeli forces clash with Palestinian protesters in West Bank**

Israeli forces have clashed with Palestinian demonstrators protesting against the expropriation of Palestinian land by Israel in the occupied West Bank.

Scores of Palestinians took to the streets in the villages of Kfar Kaddum, near Nablus, and Deir Jarir, northeast of Ramallah, on Friday to express their anger over confiscation of their land by Tel Aviv regime and the expansion of settler units.

Israeli troops fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the protesters. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Palestinians hold weekly anti-Israeli demonstrations to demand an end to the occupation of their land.

Last week, hundreds of Palestinians marched in Deir Jarir village to protest against settler violence after settlers from the nearby settlement of Ofra torched around ten cars in the village, pelted village youth with stones and planted an Israeli flag on a derelict church.

Tension has been rising in the region lately as Israelis have stepped up seizing Palestinian land in order to build more settlements.

Nine Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank since the beginning of the year.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/03/301646/israeli-forces-clash-with-palestinians/>

- **Israel allows children to visit Gaza prisoners**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Israel allowed children from Gaza to visit their relatives in Israeli prison for the first time in weeks, an International Committee for the Red Cross official said Monday.

Nasser al-Najjar told Ma'an that 61 families from the Gaza Strip, including seven children

headed to the Beit Hanoun pedestrian crossing into Israel ahead of their visit to relatives in the Nafha prison.

"The Israeli side allows children under the age of 8 to visit their relatives in jail," he added.

Al-Najjar said the ICRC welcomed the move and expressed hope for continued reform to allow Gaza detainees prisoner visits.

Last Monday Israel put a halt to prison visits for Palestinians prisoners from Gaza in response to rocket fire from the coastal enclave, the Palestinian Authority liaison office said.

In March, Israeli authorities informed the ICRC that residents of Gaza would not be allowed to visit their relatives jailed in Israel for three weeks due to Jewish holidays.

Israel banned visits to all prisoners from Gaza in 2007 to pressure Hamas to release Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who was freed in Oct. 2011.

In July, Israel agreed to resume family visits for Gaza prisoners as part of a deal to end a mass month-long hunger strike in Israeli jails.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=592600>

- **Leader-less Jerusalemites look to Fayyad**



Palestinian residents of Jerusalem have been frustrated for years as they are caught between Israel's unilateral decision to annex East Jerusalem and the inability of the Ramallah-based Palestinian leadership to help them.

Positive homegrown leadership in Jerusalem has not found a way forward due in part to the absence of any mechanism for electoral politics. Ever since the passing away of Faisal Husseini, no leader or leadership structure has emerged for the city Palestinians say will become their eventual capital.

The leadership vacuum has not gone unnoticed by many, often by individuals

seeking personal gain. While no single person or entity has emerged, scores of de facto groups and gatherings have emerged, often around social groups or neighborhoods. Some of these groups have done positive acts to advance their local communities, but others have made personal fortunes. The absence of the rule of law and a culture of voluntary national cooperation has played into the hands of these groups that have at times terrorized the population.

Decades old entities have not done much better as the absence of leadership has resulted in the creation of fiefdoms run by autocratic individuals who often seek Arab and international funding and rule their organizations on the basis of their ability to raise funds and pay salaries.

Institutional corruption has skyrocketed because of the contradictions that exist in Jerusalem. On the one hand, Israel, which effectively rules the areas of East Jerusalem, is ambivalent about the state of Palestinians in the city. On the other hand, the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah and Gaza might be more caring, but is unable to implement any policy because of Israel's repression of any activities stemming from the Palestinian leadership.

The same contradiction also exists in terms of simple rule of law issues. If a Jerusalemite is wronged by another Jerusalemite or by a Palestinian institution he or she has little recourse. The prevailing atmosphere makes it politically incorrect to sue a fellow Palestinian or a Jerusalem institute at Israeli courts.

Thus they are left with trying to plead their case with the Ramallah leadership. In Ramallah, there is a sense of apathy and exhaustion because of the many unresolved cases that come to them. Even if the Palestinian leadership rules in favor of a particular person, they are unable to execute that decision as they have been barred from having physical presence in the city.

For some time in the 1980s, the Orient House — re-opened and revived by Faisal Hussein — acted as a local government hub where the population could address their grievances and cases were resolved mostly on his power and charisma. The Israeli closure of Orient House and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as Hussein's unexpected death from an asthma attack in Kuwait, have literally orphaned the 300,000 Palestinians of Jerusalem.

The most recent agreement between the PLO and Jordan regarding the holy places in Jerusalem, has revived the hopes of Jerusalemites of a possible formula that will allow a respected party such as Jordan to help the city's orphaned Palestinians.

Jordan, however, has power mostly in the form of the Awqaf Department, which still operates in Jerusalem and is largely involved in issues related with Al Aqsa Mosque and the Islamic waqf institutions (mostly schools) and properties. However, the Islamic waqf which is not an elected group (just like all others including the churches and charities) has not witnessed any new blood for years. Having been in power for so long leads to a lack of accountability for city officials. Some Jerusalemites were hoping that the Royal Court rather than the city take a more direct role in enacting the issues agreed to between the King and President Abbas.

Jerusalem governance issues always tend to come back to the local scene. With Palestinians refusing to participate in the municipal elections for the so-called unified city, few opportunities exist to unite and focus the populace.

The recent resignation of Salam Fayyad as prime minister has revived hope among some Jerusalemites that the highly respected Palestinian manager — who lives in the city and whose wife is a Jerusalemite — can help the people of Jerusalem design a governance system that can address the inhabitants' many grievances and draw up plans for the growth and prosperity of the city as a central part of the Palestinian national strategy.

When confronted with the idea, Fayyad expressed willingness to help out as long as there is a legitimate request from Jerusalem residents for him to do so.

With the city suffering without a leader for decades, and with a well-respected leader becoming jobless within weeks, some feel that this could be a marriage made in heaven.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=592084>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt's Morsi reminisces on Gaza ceasefire, speaks of post-revolution 'dilemma'**

President Mohamed Morsi says any government would struggle with Egypt's

political and economy troubles caused by Mubarak's legacy

In interview with Canadian newspaper The Globe and Mail, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi has recounted details from behind the scenes of the Israel-Gaza ceasefire agreement of last November, which Egypt had a prominent role in brokering.

“We withdrew the Egyptian ambassador [to Israel] immediately, and that was intended to be a signal to say, ‘Let’s de-escalate. Let’s make sure things don’t progress to outright conflict,’” Morsi reflected. “Also, sending the Prime Minister of Egypt [into Gaza], with Egypt’s weight in the region, was to send a signal that this conflict must end and it must not escalate,” he continued.

Morsi told the Canadian newspaper in the interview published Saturday that the ceasefire was the product of a mutual opportunity grasped with US President Barack Obama.

Some 170 Palestinians, mostly civilians, and six Israelis, including two soldiers, were killed during the offensive that Israel

launched with the declared aim of curbing cross-border rocket fire.

“I saw an opportunity for the Palestinians and President Obama saw an opportunity with respect to the Israeli side,” Morsi said. “And we found when we looked at both sides that there were some shared demands, so we made a decision to work on ... the ceasefire: to come to a point where the aggression stops, where the firing stops,” Morsi said.

The Egyptian president told the newspaper that during the Israeli attacks on Gaza, considered the largest since Operation Cast Lead in late 2008, he had reached out to “maybe 40 presidents, kings and princes,” along with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who had flown to Egypt in the wake of the conflict.

“She insisted on not leaving my office until we finished the process,” Morsi said. “I remember that. At least three hours, maybe more.”

Egypt's post-revolution 'chicken and egg' dilemma

Morsi also went on to address Egypt's state of affairs since the 2011 uprising, describing it as a dilemma of balancing economic and political development.

"It is a question of chicken and egg, trying to develop economically while getting used to democracy," Morsi told his interviewer.

He added: "Egypt will have strong democratic institutions and a developed economy in the future. Overcoming the Mubarak legacy, including corruption and the yawning gap between rich and poor, would be difficult for any government."

Egypt has seen a series of violent anti-government protests since the second anniversary of the 25 January uprising. Since, the deadlock between Islamist parties and the presidency on the one hand, and liberal opposition on the other, came to its peak.

The latter accuses the Muslim Brotherhood, from which the president hails, of treading a path to dictatorship by not responding to the opposition's longstanding demands of replacing the Cabinet and amending the constitution.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/70741/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-Morsi-remisces-on-Gaza-ceasefire,-speaks-.aspx>

- **Close but not together: Egypt and Iran seek Syria political exit**

Cairo and Tehran are working on a peace deal for Syria 'to the liking of Al-Assad,' but this will not mean normalisation of relations between them

Regional and Western diplomats in Cairo have told Ahram Online that Cairo and Tehran are both working on a blueprint for a peace plan for Syria that could be "swallowed" by Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad.

The plan that is being discussed is essentially inspired by the Geneva parameters that were drafted by Lakhdar Brahimi, former UN-Arab League envoy, which allow for a gradual transformation of power "under Al-Assad" and would not force Al-Assad to step down.

What brings Cairo, where resides the highest Sunni entity Al-Azhar, and Tehran, the capital of Middle Eastern Shiism, together is one basic fear: foreign military action against Syria.

Egyptian and Iranian diplomats are terse in their remarks, even off the record. However, both agree there is this “growing pressure in Washington to get [US President Barack] Obama to give the go ahead,” for limited but forceful military intervention to end the intransigence of the Al-Assad regime after two years of civil war with the opposition.

“There is a growing pressure on Obama. One could say that yes it somehow started in Israel, but there are other players in the region that could benefit from a quick end to the Al-Assad regime,” commented an Egyptian diplomat.

He added: “From our point of view, this is not something that we could agree to — no matter what disagreements we have with Al-Assad's regime. We are firmly opposed to any military intervention against Syria.”

According to this diplomat, this was not necessarily the case within the Egyptian regime a few months ago, but it has evolved to be so. “Now we all agree that it is only through a political deal that this Syria matter can be fixed,” he said.

Meanwhile, an Iranian diplomat shared only a few words: “Tehran will do everything it can to serve the interests of the Syrian people and of course a war is not in the interest of our dear Syrian brothers.”

The deal that is currently being discussed in Cairo, Terhan, Moscow — yet another Al-Assad ally — and of course Washington involves a gradual halt to all forms of hostilities with the presence of an Arab-international monitoring mechanism, and eventually a call for early presidential elections.

“Al-Assad had wanted to leave only in 2014 when his term in office ends. We are not at all far from this date and if we take into consideration the steps required to start and solidify a ceasefire in Syria and then start a process for presidential elections, then we are practically talking

early 2014,” suggested another Egyptian diplomat.

Meanwhile, Cairo-based Western diplomats said that the preparations for a possible "military move" or "military choice" against Al-Assad, “if he chooses to use weapons of mass destruction against his people,” are underway, albeit at a slow pace and with the consent of some of Syria’s neighbours, especially Turkey and Jordan.

“We hope we are not going to get to that point, but this depends on his friends (Iran and Russia) to convince him that he cannot resist for long,” said a Cairo-based European diplomat.

According to the Iranian diplomat, Al-Assad had already given up on an earlier plan to run for the 2014 presidential elections. “I don’t think he thinks he will run for another term in office,” the Iranian diplomat said.

On another front, Cairo and Tehran do not seem keen to use this opportunity of joint regional diplomacy to restore full diplomatic ties between them. This seems to be particularly so with Cairo, which has

been previously open to ideas of working with Tehran and of counting on different forms of Iranian economic assistance in return for flexibility but not normalisation.

Concerned government sources in Cairo say that the coming months might witness a considerable step up in the volume of Iranian tourists to Egypt, especially to Egyptian Red Sea and Mediterranean resorts. Cairo is also potentially willing to work with Tehran on some multilateral matters as it has done before in relation to the declaration of the Middle East as a weapons of mass destruction free zone.

“Normalisation is going to happen, but it will take a bit of time to streamline a few matters,” said an Egyptian government source.

Security seems to be the key issue for both Cairo and Tehran. Cairo is particularly concerned about what its officials qualify as “bad Iranian influence” on radical Muslim militant “pockets” in Sinai and Gaza.

“They are giving us a headache and they are annoying Hamas in Gaza,” according to a security source in Egypt.

Tehran, for its part, is not comfortable with the “unhelpful” pressure that Cairo is exerting over the Sunni leadership in Iraq to obstruct a possible deal between the Iran-allied ruling Shia government in Baghdad and Sunni communities — even under the umbrella of the Arab League.

Sources on both sides said that these issues were among many matters examined during a recent high-level presidential team visit to the Iranian capital.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/70698/Egypt/Politics-/Close-but-not-together-Egypt-and-Iran-see-Syria-p.aspx>

- **Tunisians react to Mohamed Hassan visit**

Shouts of "Allahu Akbar" greeted Egyptian cleric Mohamed Hassan upon his arrival in Tunis on Tuesday (April 30th).

The Wahhabi cleric was met at the airport by senior leaders from Ennahda, including

Sheikh Habib Ellouz, described by opponents as the party hawk.

This latest visit by a radical foreign preacher prompted strong responses from all sides.

Attorney Leila Ben Debba drew attention at Tunis-Carthage Airport by calling for the Egyptian sheikh to be denied entry. Airport security agents had to intervene to protect her from being harmed.

Nasereddine ben Hadid, a Tunisian media figure, later wrote on his Facebook page that he saw El Menzah Olympic Stadium overflowing with fans of the sheikh who came to hear him speak.

Ben Hadid advised secularists to "move beyond ridicule and insults".

As for Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia, they criticised the visit and said in a statement on Tuesday that Sheikh Hassan was a heretic by virtue of his actions, specifically his urging Egyptians to vote.

They described his actions as "contrary to the law of God". The statement added that attending the sermons of Sheikh

Hassan in Tunis was "a heresy, and praying behind him is null".

For her part, Mayla Khekid told Magharebia that she was surprised by the exaggerated attention of the authorities to Sheikh Hassan. She mentioned providing him with luxury cars and hosting him in luxury hotels "at a time when our young soldiers and security officials are having bloody clashes with extremists".

"How did our green and safe Tunisia reach this level?" she wondered. "Tunisia, which used to export qualified people and scientists, is today the largest exporter of terrorists.... Tunisia the safe used to worry about firecrackers during football games and is now waking up to the sounds of explosions while our eyes are filled with the blood of our loyal soldiers."

Writer Saleh Souissi told Magharebia that he was not disturbed by such visits: "What worries me is the silence of the ruling Ennahda Party with regard to what is happening in Tunisia in terms of the spread of terrorism everywhere. This terror appears in all its forms and manifestations from exploiting religion to exploiting the topic of Arabisation to the

excesses of Tunisian citizens in the name of freedom."

"I don't think we will find solutions to the issues of development and unemployment in the sermons of Sheikh Hassan," remarked Dalanda Laaribi, a human rights activist. "We won't find the solution for our falling behind in science and technology. I wish these expenses were run for important issues relevant to the daily lives of citizens."

Meanwhile, student Tarek Mziou told Magharebia that he saw no harm in the visit. "They raised hell because of a sheikh who came to give us sincere sermons and honest counselling," he said.

As for Ferid Beji, orator in Manouba Mosque and president of the Zitouna Association of the Prophetic Tradition, he said in a televised programme broadcast on Tuesday night that he fears such visits, which he said disseminate thinking that was foreign to moderate Islam.

http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/a/wi/features/2013/05/03/feature-01

- **Egypt denies restoring full diplomatic ties with Syria**

When Egypt withdrew its ambassador from Damascus it downgraded its diplomatic ties with Syria, but the embassy remained open, officials say

Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has denied recent media reports that Egypt's acting ambassador in Syria has returned to Damascus, thus re-establishing diplomatic relations between Egypt and Syria.

"When Egypt withdrew Ambassador Shawqi Ismail (in February 2012) from Damascus, the acting ambassador (Alaa Abdel-Aziz) remained in place," Nazih El-Naggary, deputy spokesperson at the ministry, told Ahram Online.

"Egypt downgraded the level of its diplomatic mission in Syria, thereby sending a message on our government's position on the acts of [Syria's ruling regime]," he said. "However, we did not shut down our embassy in Damascus."

El-Naggary attributed recent media reports claiming that Abdel Aziz "has returned" to the fact that the acting

ambassador was in Egypt recently, but returned to Damascus.

"[The Egyptian embassy] is needed as it allows us to communicate with Egyptians in Syria and gives us insight on what's happening there," he said.

"However, there is no change in Egypt's official position on Syria's [ruling Bashar El-Assad] regime," El-Naggary emphasised.

"We support the Syrian people fulfilling their aspirations ... and we prefer a political solution to the Syrian crisis," he said.

Unclear media reports had been circulating after Al-Jarida, the Kuwaiti newspaper, published a report Saturday saying that Iran has been exerting pressure on the Egyptian government to renew relations with Al-Assad's regime, which led "to the return of the Egyptian acting ambassador" to Damascus.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/70681/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-denies-restoring-full-diplomatic-ties-with-S.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Lebanon condemns Israeli aggression against Syria**

Lebanese President Michel Sleiman has condemned Israel's recent act of aggression against Syria.



A statement released by Lebanon's presidential office on Sunday read, "Sleiman strongly condemned Israel's aggression on Syrian sites [which it carried out] by violating Lebanese airspace to carry out these attacks."

"This act is not unusual for a mutual enemy [such as Israel] whose policy is based on aggression that takes advantage of the circumstances Syria is going through to carry out its aggression just as it used to do in Lebanon during its days of crisis."

On Sunday, Syria said the Israeli regime had carried out an airstrike targeting a research center in a suburb of Damascus, following heavy losses of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups at the hands of the Syrian army. According to Syrian media reports, Israeli rockets struck the Jamraya research center.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Miqati vehemently condemned the Israeli airstrike, saying they "underscored once again Israel's aggressive intentions."

"[The attacks] fall within the series of continuous aerial violations to Lebanon's sovereignty and its threats against Lebanon," Miqati stated.

Syria's Foreign Ministry has sent letters to the United Nations and its Security Council stating that Israel's aggression shows the links between Tel Aviv and terrorist groups operating in Syria including the al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front.

Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoabi told reporters in Damascus on Sunday that Syria had the right and the duty to defend its people by all available

means and it would not give in to Israeli acts of aggression.

The Israeli attacks on Syria have made the Middle East more dangerous, the Syrian information minister said.

The Sunday Israeli aggression was Tel Aviv's second strike on Syria in three days.

The Jamraya facility was also targeted in an Israeli airstrike in January.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/06/302060/lebanon-raps-israeli-aggression-on-syria/>

- **Jordanians protest university violence, call for solutions**

AMMAN — Hundreds of Jordanians took to the streets across the country on Friday to protest against a rise in university violence that has claimed four lives in the past week.

In a series of rallies in Amman, Tafileh, Zarqa, Jerash and Salt, several hundred pro-reform activists called on authorities to bring an end to the rising number of tribal-clashes on university campuses,

which they described as “the shame of Jordan”, eyewitnesses said.

Protesters urged officials to unveil the root causes of the spike in university violence, accusing the government of failing to “shoulder its responsibilities” by ensuring security and safety at universities.

They condemned riots at Al Hussein Bin Talal University in Maan, in which tribal clashes last week quickly devolved into a firefight that left four dead, including two university students and a faculty member.

Demonstrators, led by leftist and independent activists, also called for an end to corruption, according to eyewitnesses.

In a Zarqa rally, 22km east of Amman, demonstrators accused officials of condoning widespread corruption, chanting, “Officials have stolen our homeland.”

Meanwhile, activists in Jerash, 48km north of Amman, and Karak, 140km south of the capital, protested against the alleged US military presence in the country, warning

Washington against using Jordan as a base for potential international intervention in Syria.

During the rallies, participants chanted, “No to US troops on Jordanian soil”, and “Jordan is not a state of America,” eyewitnesses said.

Friday marked the second straight week of protests against potential US military involvement in Syria and the third since Washington unveiled that it is set to dispatch 200 military specialists to Jordan.

Jordanian officials say the dispatch is part of ongoing “routine” military cooperation between Amman and Washington, while US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel indicated that the forces aim to support Jordan in the Syrian crisis.

<http://jordantimes.com/jordanians-protest-university-violence-call-for-solutions>

- **‘Jordan’s media gained from Arab Spring, but more is needed’**

AMMAN — As Jordan joined the international community in marking the

20th World Press Freedom Day, annually celebrated on May 3, observers said on Saturday that media freedoms have improved in the Kingdom in the wake of the Arab Spring.

After more than two years since Arab Spring protests erupted in the region, media activists said it gave a boost to the freedom of the press and made journalists more courageous in tackling issues that used to be taboo in the past.

In interviews with The Jordan Times, the experts noted that the main challenge currently facing the sector is the lack of organisation in online media.

Nabil Sharif, former media minister, said several changes to the Press and Publications Law have contributed to enhancing the media environment and enabling journalists to work under less pressure from the authorities.

“The new form of online media, which has great influence on public opinion, has seen some flaws due to the lack of professionalism. While we call for streamlining this important sector, it is vital that the initiative should come from

the sector's stakeholders and not be imposed from outside," he stressed, citing recent amendments to the Press and Publications Law, which he said imposed more restriction on online media.

In that regard, Sharif argued that the Jordan Press Association needs to take into account the need to include the online media under its umbrella.

Editor-in-Chief of Al Arab Al Yawm Nabil Ghishan believes that press freedom in the country has improved due to regional developments and the revolution in the media technology.

But despite the developments, Ghishan said online media needs to be regulated.

"Most news websites are small in size in terms of financial and administrative potential and unless we see more investments in this sector, its ability to enhance its professionalism will remain limited," he noted.

Nidal Mansour, president of the Centre for Defending the Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ), acknowledged that one of the main gains of the Arab Spring, as far as the

media is concerned, is that journalists broke the barrier of fear while reporting on local developments.

However, he added, this posed a challenge to journalists in terms of credibility and balanced reporting.

Mansour acknowledged some developments in the status of press freedoms, yet he believes that what has been achieved so far is still below aspirations.

"We keep hearing promises from authorities to support freedom of the press, but on the ground we see almost nothing changing. It is true that assaults against journalists have significantly declined but other types of violations of press freedom have increased," he said.

In a report issued on Saturday, the New York-based Human Rights Watch said since early 2011, the government has repeatedly pledged to move the country towards a rights-respecting democracy, but changes on the ground remain to be seen.

The NGO said prosecutors filed charges against Mwafaq Mahadin, 59, and Sufyan Tal, 74, in February 2010 and the authorities have continued to pursue their prosecution despite two separate court rulings that cleared the defendants of all wrongdoing.

The government last year amended the Press and Publications Law, stirring criticism by media activists.

The law requires local news websites to register and obtain licences from the Press and Publications Department, while registration fees were lowered from JD10,000 to JD1,000. More than 80 news websites, out of over 475, have already registered.

The government can block and refer to court any news website that does not register.

Moreover, the legislation holds online media publishers responsible for the comments on their websites, prohibits them from publishing comments not relevant to the article to which they are attached and requires all comments be archived for at least six months.

<http://jordantimes.com/jordans-media-gained-from-arab-spring-but-more-is-needed>

- **Mikati, Salam stress need for disassociation**

BEIRUT: Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam stressed over the weekend the need for Lebanon to maintain its self-disassociation policy toward developments in neighboring Syria.

“Both Mikati and Salam stressed the need to uphold the self-disassociation policy toward the internal conflicts Syria is witnessing and not to get involved in [the Syria crisis] in order to maintain the stability, security and safety of Lebanon,” a statement from Mikati’s office said.

Both leaders’ call for distancing Lebanon from the crisis in Syria came as media reports said Israel carried out two aerial strikes over the past couple of days.

The attacks were reportedly launched from Lebanese airspace which Israel jets violate on almost a daily basis.

The reported Israeli attacks against Syria drew wide condemnation over the weekend from several Lebanese officials.

President Michel Sleiman strongly condemned the strike and its use of Lebanon's airspace to carry out such an "aggression."

Mikati also denounced the strikes Sunday, saying they "underscored once again Israel's aggressive intentions."

Israel's activities over Lebanon have intensified recently, with 18 warplanes flying over various Lebanese regions from Thursday to Saturday night.

With no official confirmation from Israel on the recent aerial bombardment, it was unclear what the Jewish state had struck.

Caretaker Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour, Head of the Lebanese Democratic Party, Talal Arslan and the Amal Movement also condemned the airstrike.

Mikati also contacted Salam Sunday evening for talks on the latest political and security developments as well as the Cabinet formation process.

The caretaker prime minister renewed his call on Lebanese parties "to facilitate Salam's mission, especially in these crucial circumstances which require the collaboration and solidarity of all groups in the interest of Lebanon and its people."

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/May-06/216118-mikati-salam-stress-need-for-disassociation.ashx#axzz2SVPrtUSr>

6. SYRIA

- **Iran ready to train Syrian army: Iran cmdr.**



Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces Brigadier General Ahmad-Reza

Pourdastan says Iran is ready to train the Syrian army should Damascus require assistance.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday, Pourdastan added that the Syrian army has gained experience during years of conflict with the occupying regime of Israel, and has the ability to defend itself with no need for foreign assistance.

"As a Muslim and friendly country, we stand by Syria and if there is need for training, we will provide them with necessary training," the senior Iranian commander asserted.

He, however, emphasized that Iran would not have "active involvement in their operations."

Pourdastan's remarks came as the Syrian state television reported on Sunday that Israel has carried out an airstrike against the Jamraya Research Center, located northwest of the capital, Damascus. The center had been targeted by another Israeli airstrike back in January.

The Sunday attack came shortly after Tel Aviv confirmed that its warplanes had hit another target in Syria on Friday.

The unrest in Syria began over two years ago, and many people, including large numbers of Syrian soldiers and security personnel have so far lost their lives. The Syrian government says that the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country.

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad said in April that the situation in the country was improving as the army enjoys popular support in the fight against terrorism.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/05/301939/iran-ready-to-train-syria-army-cmdr/>

- **Hamas condemns Israel for aggression against Syria**



The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has slammed the Israeli regime for its recent act of aggression against Syria, calling for an end to the turmoil in the country.

In a statement released on Sunday, Hamas denounced the “Zionist aggression on Syria,” calling it a continuation of Israel’s “policy of terror.”

On Sunday, Syria said the Israeli regime had carried out an airstrike targeting a research center in a suburb of Damascus, following heavy losses of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups at the hands of the Syrian army. According to Syrian media reports, Israeli rockets struck the Jamraya research center.

The Jamraya facility was also targeted in an Israeli airstrike in January.

Senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Zahar has called on Arabs to unite against the Israeli aggression against Syria.

Syria’s Foreign Ministry has sent letters to the United Nations and its Security Council stating that Israel’s aggression shows the links between Tel Aviv and terrorist groups

operating in Syria including the al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front.

Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoabi told reporters in Damascus on Sunday that Syria had the right and the duty to defend its people by all available means and it would not give in to Israeli acts of aggression.

The Israeli attacks on Syria have made the Middle East more dangerous, the Syrian information minister said.

The Sunday Israeli aggression was Tel Aviv’s second strike on Syria in three days.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/06/302070/hamas-condemns-israel-for-syria-attack/>

- **Tel Aviv will suffer again over attack on Syria: Syrian deputy FM**

The Syrian deputy foreign minister says the Tel Aviv regime will ‘suffer again’ for its recent military aggression on Syria.

On Sunday, Syria said the Israeli regime had carried out an airstrike targeting a research center in a suburb of Damascus,

following heavy losses of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups at the hands of the Syrian army. According to Syrian media reports, Israeli rockets struck the Jamraya research center.

In an exclusive interview with the CNN on Sunday, Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Miqdad said, “When they attack, this is a declaration of war. This is not something that is (new).”

“We dealt with this on several occasions, and we retaliated the way we wanted, and the retaliation was always painful to Israel, and they will suffer again,” the Syrian deputy foreign minister stated.

Syria’s Foreign Ministry has sent letters to the United Nations and its Security Council stating that Israel’s aggression shows the links between Tel Aviv and terrorist groups operating in Syria including the al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front.

Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoabi told reporters in Damascus on Sunday that Syria had the right and the duty to defend its people by all available means and it would not give in to Israeli acts of aggression.

The Israeli attacks on Syria have made the Middle East more dangerous, the Syrian information minister said.

The Sunday Israeli aggression was Tel Aviv’s second strike on Syria in three days.

The Jamraya facility was also targeted in an Israeli airstrike in January.

The Syrian government says the chaos that erupted in the country over two years ago is being orchestrated from outside.

The anti-Syria countries including Turkey and several Arab states in the region have taken a silent stance toward Tel Aviv’s acts of aggression against Syria.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/06/302052/israel-will-pay-for-attack-on-syria/>

- **Foreign-backed militants kill 20 Syrians in Aleppo**

Foreign-sponsored militants in Syria have carried out more deadly attacks in the northwestern governorate of Aleppo.

On Sunday, the militants fired rockets and artillery shells in the towns of Kafr Nabl and Zahra, killing 20 Syrians and injuring many others.

The dead included many women and children.

The militants fighting government forces have carried out similar attacks in recent months.

Meanwhile, there are reports of successful advances by the Syrian army.

The military has managed to regain control of several strategic towns and locations over the past few days.

A large number of insurgents have reportedly been killed in the clashes with the army.

The Syria crisis began in March 2011, and many people, including large numbers of soldiers and security personnel, have been killed in the violence.

The Syrian government says that the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a

very large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

In an interview recently broadcast on Turkish television, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said that if the militants take power in Syria, they could destabilize the entire Middle East region for decades.

“If the unrest in Syria leads to the partitioning of the country, or if the terrorist forces take control... the situation will inevitably spill over into neighboring countries and create a domino effect throughout the Middle East and beyond,” he added.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/05/302010/militants-kill-20-syrians-in-aleppo/>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **‘Armed Forces’ progress is part of UAE’s development’**

General Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE

Armed Forces, has stressed that the development and modernisation plans that the Armed Forces is working on implementing is part of the march of comprehensive development being made by the UAE under the leadership of the President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

On the occasion of the celebration of the Anniversary of the Unification of the UAE Armed Forces, General Shaikh Mohammed said that May 6 was a paradigm shift, which will remain a witness to the depth of the strategic vision for our founding fathers as well as proof of our strong will and determination, which is a milestone for nation-building and achievements.

General Shaikh Mohamed issued a statement to 'Dira'a Al Watan' magazine on the 37th anniversary of the Unification of the UAE Armed Forces and the following is the full text of the statement:

"Today we celebrate the 37th anniversary of the unification of the UAE Armed Forces which had and will be a symbol of loyalty, belonging and union, as well as a milestone to enhance the national identity

and an industry of men and pride of the nation and citizens. The Unification of our Armed Forces in May, 1976, under one central leadership, one flag, and one slogan was a historical decision so as to become a milestone for the security of our country and its stability and a key support to preserve the progress of development and modernization in our dear country.

"The Unification of our Armed Forces is considered as one of the achievements that expressed deeply on the will of unity, the strategic vision, that came from the efforts of the founding leader, our late father Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and his brothers who were leaders of the UAE at that time and became a national institution over the years, a unique model, reflecting the meaning of belonging, loyalty and unity, cohesion and strength of the social fabric and components of our national culture and ancient civilisation .

"The 6th of May will be a source to benefit from its lessons in our life and to remind our new generation of the efforts of loyal men who offered great sacrifices for the building of our country's institutions and the Unification of our Armed Forces,

which advanced to levels where we are proud of technical progress and training.

“When we recollect this day, we may be proud of what has been achieved over the past thirty-seven years and we have also the right to encourage men of our Armed Forces who have made tremendous contributions to the Federal development march through the efforts of this prestigious institution and its honourable national roles and its contributions in supporting security and stability in brotherly countries, besides preserving peace, security and stability and provide support along with humanitarian relief in various regions of the world under the umbrella of the United Nations to be an example through excellence in carrying out these tasks.

“Ideals and role models in our Armed Forces are of the noblest respective roles of modern armies, as members of our Armed Forces offer through their duties a bright image and a real model for the youth of the UAE and for such moral and humanitarian causes that has characterised our society.

“The development and modernisation plans that the Armed Forces is working on its implementation is a part of the process of comprehensive development being made by the UAE under the leadership of the President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

“Our achievements of development need a shield that protects and preserves them in order to achieve the desired goals through modernisation and development plans, both at the level of scientific training of individuals in the forms required by modern military science or the supply of armament systems and combat equipment to keep pace with the latest technology of the world’s defense industries.

Thirty-seven years ago, the unification of the Armed Forces occupied the top priority of planning and efforts, bearing in mind that people are our greatest asset and our best investment for the future, and believe that the gains that we have made —and continue to make— were primarily designed to achieve the aspirations of our dear country.

“This day is also an occasion to renew the covenant and loyalty to our wise leadership, led by His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, that to remain loyal soldiers, to protect the soil of this country, its sky and waters, and preserve the foundations of our nation united, working hard to keep our Armed Forces as a shield to protect the homeland as well as a symbol of national cohesion and the performance of duty, to carry out its responsibilities and remain supportive of brothers and helpful to friends and realise that belonging to this prestigious national institution remains always an honour, a duty and a right for all citizens.

“In conclusion, I am honoured in my name and on behalf of the Armed Forces to congratulate the President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and his brother His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, and to their brothers, Their Highnesses Supreme Council Members and Rulers of the Emirates. I also congratulate the people of the UAE on this glorious day,

praying to Allah to preserve our state, to remain always as a symbol of pride and progress, development and prosperity.”

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/inside.asp?xfile=/data/nationgeneral/2013/May/nationgeneral_May93.xml§ion=nationgeneral

- **Qatari delegation survives Somalia car bomb**

Eight Somalis were killed in the bomb targeting the interior minister’s car

Mogadishu: A car bomb hit a convoy of cars carrying Qatari officials through the centre of Somalia’s capital Mogadishu on Sunday, killing at least eight Somalis, officials said.

The visiting delegation of Qataris, who were travelling in the Somali interior minister’s bullet-proof vehicle, were “safe”, a security officer said, without going into further detail. The minister was not in the car at the time.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the blast but it bore the hallmarks of Al

Qaida-linked rebels who have kept up a campaign of guerrilla-style attacks since the army and peacekeepers pushed them out of bases in the city.

The blast tore through the busy ‘Kilometre 4’ road junction in the centre of Mogadishu’s commercial and

Gunfire rang out immediately after the explosion as the convoy’s security guards fired into the air to disperse onlookers.

Qatar has been forging closer political ties with Somalia in recent years as it seeks to expand its influence in the Horn of Africa region.

“The car bomb targeted delegates from Qatar. They are safe,” Hassan Othman, a security official, said, adding that the minister’s car was damaged in the blast.

The chairman of Mogadishu’s Hodan district, where the blast occurred, told reporters at the scene eight people had been killed and five wounded, most of them civilians.

Sunday’s bomb was a stark reminder of two decades of civil strife in a country where the central government depends

heavily on a 17,600-strong African Union peacekeeping force for its survival.

While there has been a significant improvement in the coastal capital since African Union peacekeepers drove the Islamist Al Shabaab group out of the city in 2011, the attack showed the relative ease with which the militants can still strike.

Some of Mogadishu’s major roads were closed last week after security officials received a tip-off about an imminent attack, but were re-opened on Saturday.

The state of Somalia’s security forces will top the agenda at a conference in London on May 7. Britain and Somalia are hoping to use the event to drum up more international support at a time when Al Shabaab are weakened as a fighting force but can still inflict devastating strikes.

Civil war after the fall of dictator Mohammad Saeed Barre in 1991 left Somalia without effective central government and awash with weapons. The turmoil opened the doors for piracy to flourish in the Gulf of Aden and deeper into the Indian Ocean.

<http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/qat-ari-delegation-survives-somalia-car-bomb-1.1179375>

- **Saudis stage anti-regime demonstration in Qatif**



Saudi people have staged a fresh anti-regime demonstration in the town of Qatif in Eastern Province, calling for the freedom of political detainees held in the kingdom's prisons, Press TV reports.

Defying the Saudi regime's ban on public gatherings, scores of people took to the streets on Friday to express solidarity with the prisoners.

The demonstrators shouted slogans against the Al Saud ruling family and denounced the suppression of protests in the oil-rich province.

On Thursday, protesters also held a similar rally organized by the Saudi Liberal Youth Movement against the brutal acts of the security forces in al-Awamiyah village of Eastern Province.

The Thursday protest came after Saudi security forces shot and arrested two anti-government activists in al-Awamiyah on Monday.

Activists say a large number of the political prisoners are being held by the Al Saud regime without trial or legitimate charges.

There have been numerous demonstrations in the oil-rich Eastern Province since February 2011, with protestors primarily calling for political reform and an end to widespread discrimination.

Anti-government protests intensified, however, since November 2011, when security forces opened fire on protestors in Qatif, killing five people and leaving scores more injured.

In October 2012, Amnesty International called on Saudi authorities to stop using excessive force against the protestors.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/05/04/301711/saudis-stage-antiregime-demonstration/>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Karzai wants CIA to continue funding Afghan presidential palace**

Afghan president Hamid Karzai has urged head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to continue its financial aid to Afghan presidential palace.

While speaking during a press conference on Saturday, president Karzai said CIA has been providing financial aid to Afghan presidential palace since the formation of the transitional government after the fall of the Taliban regime.

Without elaborating further regarding the exact amount of money received from CIA, president Karzai confirmed that the head of the CIA has vowed to continue its financial aid to Afghan presidential palace.

He said, "I discussed the issue with head of the CIA in my office this morning and urged him not to cut the funds due to recent media reports since we need the funds to continue, and head of the CIA has assured that the funds will not be halted."

President Karzai also admitted that CIA has been providing funds to Afghan presidential palace since the formation of the transitional government.

Karzai said that the funds are spent through the national security council and some portion of the funds are handed over to political elders while some parts of the funds are spent for the treatment of patients, construction of hostels and arrangement of scholarships for the students abroad.

The New York Times for the first time reported that millions of Dollars have been funded to Afghan presidential palace during the past ten years however a number of the Afghan lawmakers oppose CIA's fund to Afghan presidential palace and urged that the funds should be spent through designated institutions.

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

- **Eight NATO Troops Killed In Afghanistan**

Eight NATO soldiers, including seven Americans and one German, have been killed in three separate incidents in one of the deadliest days for Western troops in Afghanistan for months.

Officials from the Western military alliance said in the worst of the incidents, five U.S. troops were killed when they were hit by a roadside bomb in southern Kandahar Province.

Two more American soldiers were killed in western Farah Province, when an Afghan National Army soldier fired on them in a suspected "insider attack."

The Taliban, which vowed a spate of insider attacks when it launched its spring offensive a week ago, claimed responsibility for the killing.

Finally, a German special forces soldier was killed in northern Baghlan Province after insurgents opened fire on an Afghan-led military operation. A second German soldier was injured.

Speaking in Berlin, German Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere said the fatality marks the first combat death of a member of Germany's 1,000-strong special forces in Afghanistan.

"After a long time, I must once again inform the German public that yesterday a German soldier was killed in Afghanistan," he said. "A further comrade was injured. It is a painful and bitter news which has shocked us all."

Germany is the third-largest contributor of foreign troops in Afghanistan, with some 4,000 soldiers in the country.

The string of attacks come as NATO prepares to withdraw its 100,000 foreign troops deployed across Afghanistan by the end of next year.

The Western pullout continues to raise questions about the readiness of Afghan troops to assume full responsibility for maintaining security.

De Maiziere described the spate of attacks in grim terms.

"Yesterday, seven comrades from ISAF countries were also killed in other parts of Afghanistan. We also mourn these soldiers and are thinking of their families," he said. "It was a bitter, bloody day in Afghanistan, and we will never forget it."

The Associated Press is reporting that the May 4 attacks mark the third time in the past year that seven Americans have been killed in a single day in the Afghan war.

With reporting by AP, dpa, Reuters, and AFP

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

- **9 NATO soldiers die in single day in Afghan militancy, violent incidents**

KABUL, May 5 (Xinhua) -- The Taliban-linked militancy and violent incidents claimed the lives of nine soldiers from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in a single day on Saturday, turning the day into the bloodiest one since January this year for the alliance stationed in the conflict-ridden country, ISAF statements confirmed.

According to the military alliance fighting terrorism in Afghanistan, the deadly one happened in the restive southern region where Taliban militants are more active than in other areas.

"Five International Security Assistance Force service members died following an Improvised Explosive Device attack in southern Afghanistan Saturday," ISAF confirmed in a statement released here on Saturday.

However, it did not identify the nationalities of the victims and the exact place of the incident, saying it is ISAF policy to defer casualty identification procedures to the relevant national authorities.

In talks with Xinhua, spokesman of Kandahar provincial administration Jawed Faisal said, "The soldiers were on patrol in Maiwand district this afternoon when a roadside bomb struck a military vehicle killing five service members on the spot."

However, a local official, on the condition of anonymity, said the deadly blast took place in Sarkari Kariz area of Maiwand

district at 01:00 p.m. local time Saturday and all the victims are Americans.

The NATO-led multinational peacekeeping force in separate statements released on Saturday and Sunday have also confirmed loss of four more service members in isolated incidents elsewhere in the country.

"Two International Security Assistance Force service members were killed when an Afghan National Army soldier turned his weapon against ISAF service members in western Afghanistan Saturday," ISAF said in a statement released Sunday morning, saying the incident is currently under investigation.

Moreover, two more foreign soldiers were killed Saturday in two separate insurgent attacks in the relatively peaceful northern region of Afghanistan, ISAF confirmed in its statements.

Taliban-linked activities have increased since the launching of the so-called spring offensive codenamed "Khalid Bin Waleed" in April 28.

Since January this year, according to icasualties, a website tracking U.S.-led coalition's fatalities in the war on terror, 50 service members with the NATO-led ISAF -- 41 of them Americans -- have been killed in Afghanistan.

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

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

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