

Turkey and Israel have substantially overcome problems

Hurriyet Daily News, 09.05.2014



Compensation talks between Turkey and Israel have reached “a certain level” and “problems have been substantially overcome,” Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu said, referring to negotiations between the two countries over the Mavi Marmara incident in which nine Turks died in 2010.

“Our colleagues are continuing the talks. I’d like to underline that we have seen positive developments,” he said on May 8, during a press conference with Tanzanian Foreign Minister. Citing Turkey’s preconditions for normalization of relations with Israel, he mentioned “lifting restrictions on the whole of Palestine, including Gaza.”

He also added: an apology for the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident, and compensation for the victims of the incident. “The apology has been received, and the compensation talks have reached a certain level,” Davutoglu said, declining to comment on the exact amount of money that the Israeli government will pay to the families. The parties will announce the details of the agreement when the process is finalized, he added. “We hope (the issue) will be solved as soon as possible within the principle framework that Turkey outlined,” Davutoglu said. Turkey and Israel launched compensation talks for the Mavi Marmara victims after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued an official apology for the incident.

Opposition draws closer to picking common presidential candidate

Today’s Zaman, 07.05.2014



The opposition parties are sending signals that they may agree on a common candidate for August’s presidential race in the hope of defeating the Justice and Development Party’s strong candidate. The most recent signal for a common candidate came from the Nationalist Movement Party leader.

Devlet Bahceli said at the party’s parliamentary group meeting on Wednesday that his party may cooperate with the opposition “for one time only” in the upcoming presidential election. According to Bahceli, the AK Party is working to manipulate people’s perception that its candidate will certainly win the vote in August.



Also responding to questions from journalists after the group meeting, Bahçeli emphasized that the candidate for the presidency should meet the demands of the Turkish people such as embracing all parts of society and not dragging the country into political crisis in the election process, as well as uniting all the people. Bahçeli stressed that the presidential election should not be turned into a process that will polarize society and create tensions within it, as it has done up until now. The AK Party has not officially announced its candidate, but it is well known to everyone that the party will choose Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as its presidential nominee. “We are going through a fragile period. ... I will visit every one (political party). I will go to the Republican People’s Party (CHP), the Felicity Party (SP) and the Grand Unity Party (BBP). But this is not enough. I will visit civil society groups, faith groups and anyone else who may contribute to this process. I will tell them to have someone who embraces common values for the country elected as the new president,” said Bahçeli.

Haluk Koc, the deputy chairman and spokesman of the CHP, reviewed Bahçeli’s proposal to determine a common candidate in the upcoming presidential election, saying that everyone should agree on the qualifications of a possible candidate. As the CHP Central Executive Board (MYK) meeting was continuing, Koc held a news conference and commented on Bahçeli’s call to political parties to agree on a common name. Koc emphasized that the qualifications of the candidate should be discussed instead of a name, adding: “If you ask about the qualifications, the candidate should not polarize society and he/she should adopt a stance to unite the people. At the same time, the candidate should observe the rule of law and democratic principles. First of all, there should not be any accusations about the candidate, as well as his/her inner circle, associates or son. He/she should embrace the whole of Turkey. When a name is declared, everyone should be able to say that the candidate is ‘my president’.”

When asked about when the CHP would announce its own candidate, Koc responded that “according to legal procedure, candidates will be declared between May 29 and June 3. We are continuing our discussions with all parties related with the matter. If a candidate is named in accordance with our criteria, then we will not refrain from announcing it.” The opposition parties believe that Erdoğan will not become a proper president due to graft allegations leveled against him in the aftermath of a major police operation which was launched on Dec. 17 of last year. There are claims that the prime minister and several of his family members are implicated in corruption and bribery. According to the opposition, Erdoğan, putting aside for a moment becoming a candidate for the position of president, should resign as prime minister until he is cleared of the accusations against him in the media.

The MHP leader also thinks Erdoğan should not be elected president because of his polarizing discourse and attitude. “Unfortunately Turkey has become polarized because of the AK Party. We do not want people to be polarized. For this reason, we do not want a man who polarizes society to become the president,” he stated, and expressed confidence that a candidate to be nominated for the presidency by his party will beat Erdoğan in August. According to Bahçeli the MHP will announce its candidate in 10 or 15 days. “Our nominee will be a surprising name,” he said, adding that the candidate will be a nationalist and conservative figure who embraces moral values but did not further elaborate Bahçeli’s remarks on Tuesday signal a U-turn from the MHP leader’s earlier stance on picking a common presidential candidate with the main opposition CHP. In early April Bahçeli dismissed the possibility of cooperation with the CHP in the presidential election. “We will not nominate a common candidate with the main opposition party.”



We will nominate our own candidate,” he stated. Today’s Zaman asked the CHP about the “olive branch” extended by the MHP leader over a common candidate. The CHP’s parliamentary group deputy chairman, Gürsel Tekin, said his party welcomes Bahceli’s proposal. “We attach importance to Bahceli’s statement that a presidential candidate on whom everyone agrees must be nominated. A call for a common candidate at a time when democracy and freedoms are crushed underfoot is of high value. It would be wise for the political parties to exchange ideas on a candidate whom 76 million citizens (of Turkey) would support,” he noted. Tekin added that the opposition should agree on a candidate who is sensitive about rights and freedoms as well as the values of the society and the republic.

Turkey will, for the first time, elect a president by popular vote in this presidential race. The candidate who receives more than half of the votes in the first round of the election, which will be held on Aug. 10, will be elected president. If no candidate manages to obtain more than 50 percent of the vote in the first round, then the two candidates with the most votes in the first round will compete in a run-off. The candidate who receives the most votes in the run-off will be elected president and serve a five-year term. After Bahceli’s remarks signaling that he would seek the support of nongovernmental organizations, as well as the opposition parties, in determining a common candidate as president, the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) chairman, Rıza Nur Meral, said the organization welcomed Bahceli’s statements on the issue.

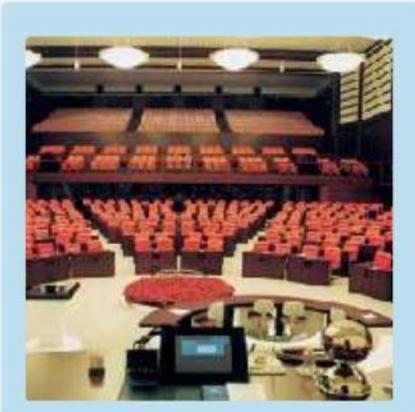
Meral stressed that the next president should be reliable, honest and respectful of the separation of powers, adding: “The possible candidate should also be fully versed in democratic principles and be consistent in his/her speech and relations with others. Accordingly, the candidate must be open to dialogue while taking a decision.” Over the weekend, CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu met with Deniz Baykal, the party’s former leader and currently a deputy, in Parliament to discuss the party’s potential candidate for the presidential election. Baykal asked Kılıçdaroğlu to pick a common candidate with the MHP and the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP).

The CHP will hold a meeting in Parliament in the days to come and it will hand out surveys to its deputies, asking who the party should name as a candidate for the presidential election. CHP parliamentary group deputy chairman Engin Altay said his party will not close the door to the MHP over its proposal for a common presidential candidate, but the CHP will probably nominate its own candidate for the presidential election in August. Also on Tuesday, Bahceli said Prime Minister Erdoğan would not be a proper candidate for president because of the rumors about him being involved in corruption and bribery. “Can a man whose veins are filled with bribery become a president? The prime minister should give up his aspirations to be elected president. He should appear before a judge over claims of corruption,” he stated.

Bahceli’s remarks came as he addressed MHP deputies in Parliament. The MHP leader also said Erdoğan will not be elected president. “The roads to take him to Cankaya (presidential palace) are blocked. The Turkish people will not give the opportunity to become president to a man who is involved in bribery and corruption,” he added. BBP leader Mustafa Destici said his party’s doors are wide open to the MHP to discuss a potential common candidate for the approaching presidential election. “We will sit down and discuss with them (MHP officials) this issue which closely concerns the interests of our country,” he stated. Destici also welcomed a statement by the MHP leader that they will seek the opinions of the civil society groups about the potential candidate.

Turkish parliament commission to probe alleged corruption

Hürriyet Daily News, 30.03.2014



Turkish lawmakers on Monday voted to set up a commission to investigate alleged corruption by former ministers, but critics warned the ruling party would use its parliamentary majority to dictate the outcome. The government of Erdogan has been dogged by graft allegations for months after scores of people - including government officials and the sons of three then-ministers - were detained by police in December.

Erdogan has rejected accusations of wrongdoing, framing the graft probe as an attempt to unseat him by members of the police and judiciary loyal to his and now bitter rival, U.S.-based Islamic cleric, Gulen.

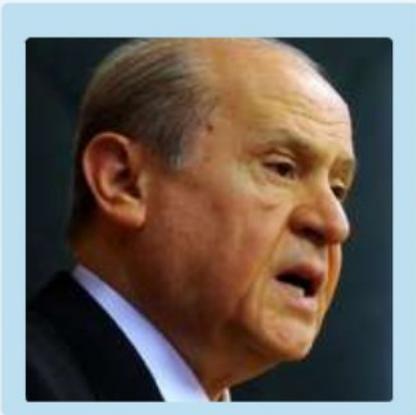
During a lengthy parliamentary debate, members of the ruling AK Party said parliament would get to the bottom of allegations, including that government officials accepted bribes and had links with a criminal ring smuggling gold into Iran. "We are in no doubt about ourselves. Let everything be investigated, let all dimensions become clear. No one can cover up these allegations. Whatever needs to be done is being done legally," senior AK lawmaker Nurettin Canikli said of the commission, which could take up to four months.

The former ministers of economy, interior and urbanization resigned after the scandal broke, and the European Union Affairs Minister Egemen Bagis lost his post in a reshuffle. All four have denied wrongdoing. During Monday's debate, Bagis again denied the charges and suggested that Gulen's followers had concocted the charges. "I was the target of a systematic accusations by a desperate organization willing to do anything to achieve its goals." The allegations take the form of a 300-page police file, which was originally presented to parliament in March by the opposition in a failed bid to have potentially incendiary details brought to light under parliamentary privilege in the run-up to a crucial local election. The delay in debating the issue has taken much of the political sting out of the scandal, particularly as Erdogan's AK Party went on to score a big victory at those polls.

An official from the leading opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) said a parliamentary commission was not sufficient and accused the government of attempting to bury the charges. "This issue will definitely be brought to the Supreme Court some day. The corruption will not be covered up," CHP lawmaker Akif Hamzacebi said before the motion was passed. The opposition accused the government of censoring the debate after coverage was suspended by state television TRT, which normally airs parliamentary sessions but said it would instead broadcast a sports program during the slot. A CHP lawmaker recorded the often raucous debate on a handheld device to stream it via a website. Since December, Erdogan has responded to the scandal by purging the police and judiciary, reassigning thousands of officers and hundreds of judges and prosecutors, and bringing investigations to a virtual standstill. Prosecutors last week threw out cases against 60 suspects, including the son of one of the ex-ministers.

Opposition MHP leader defines PM Erdogan as ‘national security threat’

Today's Zaman, 07.05.2014



The leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, has said that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan represents a national security threat to Turkey. “If this problem (Erdogan) is not taken care of, our existence as a nation, national identity, unitary (state) structure ... our country and our glorious flag will be made to crumble,” Bahçeli said at his party’s parliamentary group meeting on Wednesday.

Arguing that Erdogan has been acting irresponsibly on the country’s security problems, Bahçeli said: “The prime minister is ... a problem, (and) irresponsible.”

He continued: “He is a lifeline to separatism (a threat posed by the terrorist Kurdish Workers’ Party, or PKK) at the Prime Ministry, is the separatist chorus’s main supporter in the government.” The MHP leader, who strongly believes the country’s national security is under serious threat from terrorism, government corruption and the civil war in Syria, criticized the National Security Council (MGK) for ignoring the dangers, which Bahçeli said was apparent in the MGK’s statement released after its meeting last week. The MGK, which meets every other month, said in a statement following its April 30 meeting that it had discussed “structures” threatening national security and the measures being taken against them. Accusing the MGK of concerning itself only with a phantasmal “parallel structure” -- a term the government uses to describe the Hizmet movement inspired by Turkish Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen -- Bahçeli said, “According to the MGK, there are no problems (in Turkey) other than some minor problems and the parallel ghost.”

Following a graft probe that went public at the end of last year, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) claimed, without providing any evidence, that the Hizmet movement was behind the probe, which they called an attempt to overthrow the government. The MHP leader’s description of the parallel structure as a “ghost” is apt; although the government has persistently accused the Hizmet movement of being involved in a plot to oust the government, it has failed so far to identify a single suspect in the alleged plot. In his speech, Bahçeli underlined that corruption deserves to be treated as a national security issue and criticized the MGK, saying, “I wonder, when will a courageous person stand up in the 15-member National Security Council to speak out and shout that corruption is one of the biggest enemies of national security, the national conscience and the existence of the nation.” The MHP leader also harshly criticized the MGK for having failed to mention, in its statement, the terrorism threat posed by the PKK. “Who would believe, trust MGK statements in which there is not a single word about (the threat of) terrorism, no reference made to the separatist threat (or) to the PKK?” Bahçeli said. Erdogan and the AK Party government, he said, have managed to remain in power so far by ensuring the security not of the Turkish nation, but of the PKK, al-Qaeda, those who are hostile to the Turkish nation, thieves and smugglers, Bahçeli said.

Turkey builds wall in token effort to secure border with Syria

Reuters, 05.05.2014



Turkey has started building a new wall along a fragment of its southeastern border with Syria as it struggles against smuggling, illegal migration and the threat from al Qaeda fighters among Syria's rebel ranks.

Slabs of concrete have sprung up in recent days, snaking for just over one kilometer over the rolling hills of Hatay province, dotted with villages that have thrived on an illicit cross-border trade. Turkey has kept an open-border policy throughout Syria's civil war and has vowed to maintain it, providing a lifeline to rebels battling President Assad by allowing supplies in and refugees out.

But the policy has had its costs. Smuggling has thrived, and a growing number of Syrians forced by the war to eke out a living where they can, swell the ranks of those trying to cross back and forth outside the official border posts. That has compounded the challenge of securing the 900-km (560-mile) border for Turkey's authorities, already accused of doing too little to stop foreign jihadists from entering Syria and posing an even bigger risk to the wider region. Car bombs in the Turkish town of Reyhanli killed dozens almost a year ago and there has been more violence since then. The International Crisis Group estimates that more than 75 Turkish citizens have been killed in fighting that has spilled over the frontier. "Turks are reminded of the security risks by deadly car bombs and armed incidents on their territory, especially as northern Syria remains an unpredictable no-man's land," the think-tank said in a report.

Turkey's handling of the Syrian war was said to be the main reason that led to the ruling AK Party's loss of Hatay province in March's local elections. The costs the crisis has imposed on the economy in border areas and fears about Islamist fighters have also alarmed local people. In the face of such a challenge, the wall seems a symbolic gesture, starting in a village called Kusakli, which an official from the district governorate called an active spot for border trespassing, and following the contours for just a over a kilometer. A local customs official said it would be extended to 8 kilometers, although he added: "The total border is 900 kilometers so we're not sure about the effectiveness of the wall."

Local officials did not know how much the wall was costing and said the Turkish armed forces were behind the project, but the military did not comment immediately. Local people doubted the barrier would do much more than deter a few opportunist smugglers, while punishing legitimate refugees. "The big smugglers can't be stopped, they have special arrangements," said one middle-aged man in the border village of Bukulmez, who did not want to be named after confessing to having helped bring refugees over the border illegally. His 30-year-old son had also joined a smuggling gang but was caught, and had spent the last 20 months in detention awaiting trial, he said, sitting on the porch of his crumbling home.



His teenage daughter, who hopes to go to university, said smugglers from the village used to transport a range of goods, even guns, but the trade had moved further along the border after a crackdown by the security forces. “Even a bird can’t pass,” she said, looking towards Syria. It is a lucrative business. Sugar sells for about 50 U.S. cents a kilogram in Syria where it is produced but more than double that in Turkey, those involved in the trade say. Fuel is heavily taxed in Turkey, meaning the black market for illegal gasoline imports from Syria, however crudely refined in makeshift facilities, is thriving, with cash flowing back to rebel-held areas in exchange. “Some people farm, but there’s little else,” said Guven Koseoglu, councilor in the nearby village of Beshaslan, declining to use the term smuggling but acknowledging that goods crossing the border were neither taxed nor officially imported. Hundreds of blue plastic jerry cans are stacked up against walls in the village, a heavy stench of diesel in the air. Gendarmes man checkpoints looking out towards Syria, while two armored personnel carriers stand at the ready.

Turkey started building a similar wall along a fraction of its border further east last October at Nusaybin, a district 10 km (6 miles) north of the Syrian town of Qamishli, where Kurds, rebel units and Arab tribes regularly clashed. But such efforts are drops in the ocean for a country now sheltering more than 700,000 refugees, at least half a million of them outside the camps it began building in mid-2011, little knowing the war would last so long and bring such vast numbers. “One problem is the 100,000-200,000 Syrian refugees whom Turkey is keeping on the other side of the Syrian border,” said the International Crisis Group’s Turkey expert, Hugh Pope. “They still need supplies, or better, shelter inside Turkey, but for this the world needs to do much more in Turkey’s support,” he said.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said last week Turkey had spent \$3.5 billion providing food, shelter and education but had received just \$150 million in assistance from other countries. “There are lots of people who are internally displaced, millions, and there’s almost 200,000 who have died. To do nothing and watch is unacceptable,” he said in an interview with PBS talk show host Charlie Rose. “Where is the United Nations, where is the United States? Where are all these countries?” he said. It is not just smugglers and fighters who try to cross the border avoiding the official checkpoints. At one end of the new wall near Kusakli, a Syrian farmer in a long kaftan said he used to pay 1,000 Syrian pounds (\$6.75) for passage back to Syria. But with security tighter, costs have risen. Now the going rate is 5,000 Syrian pounds via the border village of Hacipasa, a more complicated route involving a change in vehicles. “I have to travel back sometimes,” he said, explaining he had to leave his wife and ten children from time to time, to return to tend to his animals near the Syrian city of Hama.

Thousands flee Syria rebel infighting

Reuters, 04.05.2014



Afghan Fighting between al Qaeda's Syria branch and a splinter group in eastern Syria has forced more than 60,000 people to flee their homes, emptied villages and killed scores of fighters, a monitoring group said.

Fighters from the al Qaeda branch, the Nusra Front, also arrested a rebel commander from a more moderate group and several other insurgent leaders in a southern province, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Infighting among insurgents has undermined the three-year-old rebellion against President Bashar al-Assad and killed thousands of people since the start of the year.

The conflict has pitted hardline Islamists against more moderate insurgents, but disputes over turf and resources have also turned radical factions against one another, most recently in the oil-producing eastern province of Deir al-Zor. The British-based Observatory said the Nusra Front had taken over control of the town of Abreeha from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a former al Qaeda affiliate formally disowned by the group this year. At least 62 fighters had been killed in around four days of clashes in the area, which have emptied Abreeha and the towns of al-Busayrah and al-Zir, whose populations total over 60,000, the Observatory said. The Observatory, an anti-Assad group which monitors violence in Syria through a network of sources, said Islamist fighters had burned houses and a young girl had been killed by mortar fire during the fighting.

ISIL and the Nusra Front have clashed repeatedly over oilfields and strategic positions in Deir al-Zor, a desert province bordering Iraq. Al Qaeda's global leader Ayman al-Zawahri has called ISIL's entry into Syria's civil war a "political disaster" for Islamist militants there and urged the group to redouble its efforts in Iraq instead. In the southern Deraa province, the Nusra Front arrested rebel commander Ahmed al-Neamah late on Saturday, accusing him of delivering the town of Kherbat Ghazalah to government forces, the Observatory said. Neamah would be transferred, along with other detained commanders, to a local sharia, or Islamic law, court, the monitoring group said. It said Neamah had been working to unify local rebel units and had appeared in an online video criticizing "extremists" and saying the Western-backed Free Syrian Army would rule Syria and ensure democracy.

Syria cannot delay removing chemical weapons

Reuters, 04.05.2014



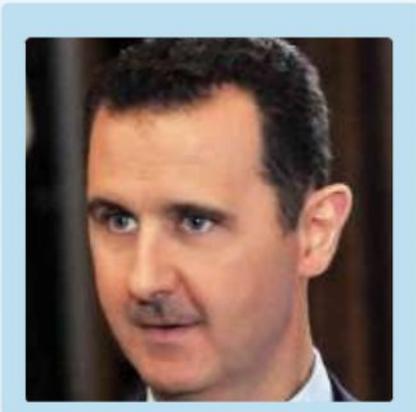
U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said he spoke with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Saturday about the need to ensure that the last declared stockpile of Syria's chemical weapons is removed. "I pressed that we must see the last removal of the 8 percent remaining at a site near Damascus," Kerry told, saying the telephone conversation took place on his flight to Democratic Republic of Congo.

"We agreed that we would work on certain things to try to see if it is possible to accelerate that process with an understanding that the government of Syria cannot delay," he said.

Syria has been removing 1,300 tonnes of chemical weapons under a deal reached last year which averted Western military strikes, after a sarin gas attack on rebel-held suburbs around the Syrian capital in August. But it has missed several deadlines to ship out the toxins - the last of which was April 27 - and has told the international mission overseeing the operation that one remaining chemical site remains difficult to reach because of the fighting. Assad's Western foes suspect him of deliberately dragging out the process, but a rebel advance east of Damascus suggests there are genuine obstacles to getting the chemicals out. Still, Kerry put the onus on the Syrian government to prepare the weapons for removal. "The regime must move immediately to prepare those remaining chemical weapons for removal and we need to meet that removal as fast as possible," he said.

Syria court accepts Assad's presidential nomination bid

Reuters UK, 04.05.2014



A Syrian court said on Sunday it had accepted requests from President Assad and two other candidates to be nominated to run in a presidential election next month. Assad's challengers are unlikely to pose a serious threat to the president in the June 3 vote, which his international opponents and the rebels fighting to overthrow him have dismissed as a farce.

Syria's opposition leaders in exile are barred from standing by a constitutional clause requiring candidates to have lived in the country continuously for 10 years. The constitution also says candidates must have the backing of 35 members of the pro-Assad parliament.

The Supreme Constitutional Court had accepted nomination requests from Assad as well as Hassan Abdallah al-Nouri and lawmaker Maher Abdel-Hafiz Hajjar, court spokesman Majid Khadra said in statements broadcast on state television. He said those whose requests had been rejected had a right to appeal to the court from May 5 until May 7. Authorities have not said how they will hold the vote in a country where six million people have been displaced and large swathes of territory remain outside government control. Another 2.5 million refugees have fled Syria, many smuggling themselves across the frontier to avoid Assad's security forces.

Election commission head Hisham al-Shaar was quoted by Syria's Al-Watan newspaper on Monday as saying Syrians who had left the country illegally would not be eligible to vote. Syria's conflict started over three years ago as a peaceful protest movement calling for reforms but descended into civil war after a government crackdown. The government has lost swathes of territory to rebels, especially in the country's north and east, although it has maintained control over much of Syria's centre and Mediterranean coast.

Syria's Assad calls for aid cooperation without hurting "sovereignty"

New York Times, 04.05.2014



Russian Syria's President Assad has said government agencies should increase cooperation on aid work but it must be done without "compromising national sovereignty", state media reported. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said last month none of the warring parties in Syria was meeting U.N. demands for aid access and demanded the Security Council take action on violations of international law.

Blaming "terrorists" for inflicting suffering on civilians, Assad was quoted by state news agency SANA late on Saturday as saying aid work was a top priority for the government and urged agencies to increase cooperation.

Assad stressed "the importance of delivering aid without delay and continuing field work with all concerned bodies domestically and abroad to ease relief operations without compromising national sovereignty", SANA said. Assad's forces and to a lesser extent the insurgents trying to topple him have been accused of preventing food and medicine from reaching a quarter of a million people in besieged areas, to starve opponents into submission. Syrian authorities often dictate how aid is distributed by U.N. agencies, who are legally obliged to work with national authorities, meaning more supplies go to government-controlled areas, aid workers say. Syria's war poses huge challenges for aid workers. The three-year-old conflict has killed over 150,000 people, forced 2.5 million to flee abroad, and put nine million people inside the country in need of aid and protection.

Al Qaeda's leader says Iraqi branch in Syria must return to fight at home

Reuters U.S., 03.05.2014



Iraqi al Qaeda's entry into Syria's civil war caused "a political disaster" for Islamist militants there, the movement's global leader Ayman al-Zawahri said, urging the faction to redouble its efforts in Iraq instead. Zawahri has repeatedly tried to end infighting between the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and another al Qaeda-aligned group, the Nusra Front.

He said on Friday in a message translated by SITE Monitoring that if ISIL had accepted his decision not to get involved in Syria and had instead worked to "busy itself with Iraq, which needs double its efforts" then it could have avoided the "waterfall of blood" caused by militant infighting.

ISIL militants joined the conflict in Syria last year and unilaterally declared they were taking over the Nusra Front, which had won the admiration of many rebels fighting Syria's President Bashar al-Assad for its battlefield prowess. Zawahri, who has run al Qaeda since Osama bin Laden was killed in April 2011, accused ISIL's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, of "sedition" and said rebel disunity had been handed "on a plate of gold" to Assad, the ultimate target of all Sunni Islamist groups in Syria. Zawahri said Baghdadi should instead redouble his efforts against the Iraqi government, led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki who is a Shi'ite - an Islamic sect regarded by al Qaeda as heretical. Shi'ism is the dominant sect in Iran. He said that toppling Assad would "cause the elimination of more than half of the Iranian power alliance that seeks to establish a Shi'ite state from Afghanistan to south Lebanon". On Wednesday the United States said al Qaeda's core organization in Pakistan, led by Zawahri, had been severely degraded, but that the movement's affiliates in Africa and the Middle East were becoming more autonomous and aggressive.

Iran moves to meet May 15 deadline in U.N. nuclear deal

Reuters U.K., 05.05.2014



U.N. atomic agency officials held talks in Tehran on Monday before visits to two uranium sites, as Iran acts to implement a series of steps aimed at providing transparency on its nuclear research by a mid-May deadline, official Iranian media reported.

Iran and the U.N. IAEA agreed late last year on a step-by-step process to help allay international concerns that Tehran may be developing nuclear weapons capability, a charge the Islamic Republic denies. The IAEA's discussions with Iran are separate from Tehran's negotiations with six world powers on a broader settlement of the decade-old nuclear dispute.

Both sets of talks are broadly aimed at ensuring that it will not develop such arms. Iran wants an end to sanctions that are hurting its oil-dependent economy. After years of an increasingly hostile standoff with the West, last year's election of the pragmatist Hassan Rouhani as Iranian president paved the way for a thaw. As part of seven measures Iran has agreed to take by May 15, IAEA inspectors will on Monday and Tuesday go to the Saghand uranium mine in central Iran and to the Ardakan ore processing plant, official Iranian media said. IAEA access to such sites is considered important, because the uranium they produce, once refined, can be used in both nuclear power plants and, after further processing, nuclear bombs. Iran said in April last year that it had begun operations at Saghand and Ardakan. IAEA reports in 2010 and 2011 only referred to satellite imagery of the sites, saying construction appeared to be continuing at the time. The head of the IAEA delegation, Massimo Aparo, will also discuss with Iranian nuclear officials how the U.N. agency would monitor a planned heavy-water reactor near the town of Arak, also among the seven steps, the IRNA news agency reported.

The West fears the plant could yield plutonium for bombs once it is operational. Iran says it is a research reactor. The future of the Arak site is also a key topic in the talks between Iran and the six powers - the United States, France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia - but diplomats and experts say they believe a compromise on this issue is within reach. Another Iranian news agency, ISNA, said on Sunday that Iran had provided the IAEA with information it had requested about fast-functioning detonators that can be used to help set off an explosive atomic device, another of the agreed measures. Behrouz Kamalvandi, a spokesman for Iran's atomic energy organization, said Iran had "done most of the job in the seven areas" agreed with the IAEA, IRNA said on Monday. There was no comment from the Vienna-based IAEA, which for years has been trying to investigate suspicions that Iran may have carried out research relevant to developing nuclear weapons. Iran says the allegations are baseless. Western diplomats and experts say the measures announced so far have been relatively easy for Iran to agree to. They may become increasingly difficult as the U.N. agency presses for answers to sensitive questions on alleged atomic bomb research.

Iran has briefed U.N. nuclear agency on detonators

World Bulletin, 04.05.2014



The United States said on Tuesday Washington and its allies would stand united in their support of Ukraine, while warning Russia that NATO territory was inviolable and the alliance would defend every piece of it.

“Today Russia seeks to change the security landscape of Eastern and Central Europe,” U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said in a speech in Washington referring to Russia’s occupation of Crimea and the threat it posed to eastern Ukraine. “Whatever path they (Russia) choose, I can guarantee this: the United States and our allies will stand together in support of Ukraine,” Kerry said.

Iran has provided the U.N. nuclear watchdog with information about detonators with possible military applications, under an accord intended to allay concerns about Tehran’s atomic activities, an Iranian news agency said on Sunday. There was no immediate comment from the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which for years has been trying to investigate suspicions that Iran may have researched how to make an atomic bomb. Iran, which is seeking an end to sanctions hurting its oil-dependent economy, denies any such work.

Diplomats in Vienna, where the IAEA is based, last week told Reuters they did not know whether Iran had so far given the U.N. body the requested information about fast-functioning Exploding Bridge Wire (EBW) detonators, which can be used to help set off an atomic explosive device but also has civilian applications. It was one of seven measures Iran agreed three months ago to implement by May 15 under a step-by-step plan for the IAEA to gain more insight into the country’s nuclear work, but the first directly related to the U.N. body’s long-stalled bomb probe. As part of the same cooperation pact, IAEA inspectors are this week expected to visit Iran’s Saghand uranium mine and the Ardakan uranium milling facility.

Refined uranium can have both civilian and military nuclear uses. Iran’s semi-official ISNA news agency said on Sunday that the “EBW report has already been submitted” to the IAEA, as well as updated design information about the planned Arak heavy-water research reactor, which was also among the seven steps. ISNA added: “The implementation of all seven steps agreed with IAEA will be finalized this week.” The IAEA said in a 2011 report that Iran had told the agency that it had developed EBW detonators for civil and conventional military applications. But, “Iran has not explained ... its own need or application for such detonators,” the IAEA report said. Western officials say it is vital for Iran to address IAEA concerns about what it calls possible military dimensions to the country’s nuclear program, as part of efforts to end a decade-old dispute that has raised fears of a new Middle East war.

They say information about detonators would be welcome but that Iran must do more in coming months to clear up concerns about suspected atomic bomb research. The two sides are expected to agree on new measures to be implemented after May 15. "Key will be the next round of (possible military dimensions) topics agreed for discussion," one diplomat in Vienna said, making clear his expectation that the next phase of Iran-IAEA cooperation would include more such issues. Another envoy said work to resolve the concerns should be faster. "More has to come," the diplomat said. The IAEA's talks with Iran are separate from negotiations between Tehran and six world powers, but still closely linked as both sets of negotiations are focused on fears that Tehran may be trying to develop the capability to build nuclear bombs. Iran says its program is entirely peaceful. The powers - the United States, France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia - are aiming to reach a long-term agreement with Iran by late July on scaling back its nuclear program in exchange for an end to international sanctions on Tehran.

IAEA team tours Iran uranium mine, agrees on monitoring reactor

Reuters U.K., 07.05.2014



U.N. inspectors visited a uranium mine in Iran and reached agreement on how to monitor a planned reactor, part of an effort to allay fears about Tehran's nuclear program, Iranian media said on Wednesday. The International Atomic Energy Agency experts were due to go to another nuclear-related site, the Ardakan uranium milling plant, on Wednesday after seeing the Saghand mine in central Iran on Tuesday.

A spokesman for Vienna-based IAEA said the agency did not comment on its inspectors' movements. Western diplomats and analysts say it is important that Iran grants inspectors access to such facilities.

However, they continue, it must do much more to address concern that it has tried to design a nuclear weapon. Iran denies any such activity. The IAEA's discussions with Iran are separate from Tehran's negotiations with six world powers on a broader settlement of the decade-old nuclear dispute, but both sets of talks are aimed at ensuring that it does not develop atomic arms. The United States says Iran's readiness to tackle the IAEA's questions will be central to the success of efforts to reach a long-term diplomatic accord, which Tehran and the powers aim to do by late July. Iran wants an end to sanctions that are hurting its oil-dependent economy. After years of an increasingly hostile standoff with the West, last year's election of the pragmatist Hassan Rouhani as Iranian president paved the way for a thaw. Iran and IAEA agreed in November on a step-by-step process aimed at clearing up allegations that Tehran may be seeking to develop nuclear weapons capability. The Islamic Republic says its nuclear program is a peaceful energy project. The Saghand and Ardakan visits were among seven measures Iran has agreed to take by May 15, following six steps that were implemented during the previous three month-period. The IAEA regularly inspects nuclear sites in Iran, but not uranium mines.

The IAEA and Iran also reached agreement this week on how the U.N. agency would inspect the planned Arak research reactor, Iranian media said - another of the seven steps. The IAEA checks nuclear sites to make sure there is no diversion of material. "Ways of monitoring Arak" were agreed, the official IRNA news agency quoted an unnamed Iranian nuclear official as saying late on Tuesday, without giving details. The West fears the plant could yield plutonium for bombs once it is operational. Iran says it is a research reactor. The future of the Arak site is also a key topic in the talks between Iran and the powers - the United States, France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia - but diplomats and experts say they believe a compromise on this issue is within reach.

Analysts say the measures implemented by Iran so far have been relatively easy. Things may become more difficult as the IAEA presses for answers on more sensitive issues. "The additional access is another good step," said Mark Fitzpatrick, director of the non-proliferation program at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) think-tank. However, "it's an easy step for Iran to take, since there is no suggestion of anything untoward happening there. So I wouldn't say a big hurdle has been overcome," Fitzpatrick said. Once refined, uranium can be used to fuel nuclear power plants, which is Iran's stated aim. But it can also provide material for bombs if processed further.

Iran's ISNA news agency this week said Iran has also submitted information to the IAEA about the development of fast-functioning detonators, which can be used to help set off an explosive atomic device but also have civilian applications. While Western diplomats welcome Iran's cooperation with the IAEA, they hope the next phase of issues to be addressed - which has yet to be agreed - will more directly focus on the IAEA's long-stalled probe into alleged atomic bomb research. The IAEA is expected to give information about its dealings with Iran in its next quarterly report on the country's nuclear program, due later this month.

Israel, U.S. divided over Iranian nuclear enrichment deal

Daily Mail, 07.05.2014



Israel insists Iran be denied uranium enrichment capabilities under a potentially imminent nuclear deal, a demand that risks opening a new Israeli-United States rift, officials said.

The dispute, a major topic for a visit to Jerusalem by U.S. National Security Adviser Susan Rice on Wednesday and Thursday, appeared part of Israeli efforts to weigh in on world powers' difficult talks with Tehran before a July 20 date for a deal. Though not at the table, Israel matters in Western capitals given its fear of a nuclear-armed Iran and threats to attack its arch-foe preemptively if it deem diplomacy a dead end.



A November interim accord easing sanctions on Iran made clear Washington and five other world powers would let it enrich uranium on a reduced scale under a final agreement distancing it from the means to make a bomb. But Israel wants the Iranians to be stripped of all disputed nuclear projects. Highly enriched uranium can fuel nuclear warheads. Iran says it seeks peaceful atomic energy and medical isotopes only. "Are we going to agree on enrichment? No," an Israeli government adviser briefed on Rice's visit told Reuters. "We would be happy to see July 20 pass without a deal," the adviser said, adding that there was worry in Israel that Obama, facing possible gains by Republican rivals in the mid-term U.S. elections of November, might be tempted to accommodate Iran now. This view seems unlikely to go down well with Obama, a second-term Democrat who has sparred in the past with Israel's right-wing Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, over strategies for Iran and peacemaking with the Palestinians.

The adviser described Israel's hard line as sincere but declarative, rather than a prelude to a new Middle East war, and a signal to supporters in the U.S. Congress to keep up pressure on U.S. President Barack Obama not to compromise with Iran. Rice tweeted that she was "looking forward to robust and intensive consultations" in Israel and that the allies' security cooperation "has never been stronger". On Tuesday, White House spokesman Jay Carney said her visit to Israel would not produce any new developments regarding Iran. Russia, which is among the six world powers negotiating with Iran, said parts of the final agreement could be agreed at a scheduled meeting in Vienna next week.

Some Western diplomats and experts privately acknowledge forcing Iran to halt all uranium enrichment activities, as stipulated in U.N. Security Council resolutions, is unrealistic given the scale of the program and resistance from Tehran. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a U.S. official said Rice came to Israel "representing the six powers", adding: "The question of enrichment, how many (uranium purification) centrifuges Iran should keep, is the big one." The U.S. official voiced confidence that a deal with Iran, if achieved, would prevent its heavy water facility at Arak from producing significant amounts of plutonium - another fissile material that could be used for nuclear warheads. While that would be welcomed by the Israelis, their main focus has long been Iran's build-up of uranium stocks which might allow it to refine enough fuel for a bomb in short order.

Israel, widely assumed to have the region's only atomic arsenal, was angered last month when U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry suggested cautious openness to a nuclear deal that would keep Iran 6 to 12 months from the weapons threshold. A former Israeli security official said Tehran would be five years away from the threshold if the demand for a full Iranian nuclear rollback were met. But the Israeli advisor said the government had not presented any such formulation. "I've not seen or heard anything about what our 'acceptable' threshold would be," the adviser said. "But I do know that less than a year would be unacceptable."

US State Department 'not backing any candidate' in Egypt elections

Reuters, 09.05.2014



Israeli and Palestinian leaders were unwilling to make the “gut-wrenching” compromises needed for peace, a top U.S. official said on Thursday, faulting both sides for the collapse of talks last month. Offering his first public account of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry’s failed, nine-month effort to strike a peace deal by April 29, U.S. special envoy Martin Indyk made clear there was blame on both sides.

However, Indyk suggested talks may resume eventually, citing the start-and-stop example of former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s ultimately successful 1975 effort to disengage Egyptian and Israeli forces in the Sinai.

“What was true then is also possibly true today,” Indyk told a conference hosted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy think tank. “In the Middle East, it’s never over.” The central issues to be resolved in the more than six-decade Israeli-Palestinian conflict include borders, security, the fate of Palestinian refugees and the status of Jerusalem. “One problem that revealed itself in these past nine months is that the parties, although showing some flexibility in the negotiations, do not feel the pressing need to make the gut-wrenching compromises necessary to achieve peace,” Indyk said. “It is easier for the Palestinians to sign conventions and appeal to international bodies in their supposed pursuit of justice and their rights, a process which by definition requires no compromise,” he said. “It is easier for Israeli politicians to avoid tension in the governing coalition and for the Israeli people to maintain the current, comfortable status quo.

On April 24, Israel suspended the talks after Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’s unexpected unity pact with the rival Islamist Hamas group, a step that appeared to be the final nail in the coffin of the U.S.-sponsored negotiations. Indyk also described the Palestinian decision to sign the 15 international treaties - in what seemed a gesture of defiance toward Israel, which believes such moves may confer legitimacy on the Palestinians - as “particularly counterproductive. He also detailed Israeli moves to build additional homes for Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank and cited these as among the central factors that undermined the negotiations. During the past nine months, Indyk said Israel had tendered to build 4,800 housing units in areas that Palestinian maps have acknowledged would go to Israel.

However, it also advanced planning for another 8,000 units in other parts of the West Bank where the Palestinians hope to establish a state of their own. This, he suggested, undercut the talks by helping to convince Abbas that he did not have a serious negotiating partner in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The two sides met face-to-face, with the United States sitting in as a largely silent observer, for the first six months after the talks resumed on July 29, Indyk said. In the next phase of about two months, the United States negotiated first with Israel and then with the Palestinians on “bridging proposals” to try to bring them closer together.

Egypt court bans Mubarak-era leaders from running in elections

Al Jazeera, 06.05.2014



An Egyptian court on Tuesday banned the leaders of ex-president Mubarak's party from running in any coming elections but did not list any names, drawing complaints about a lack of clarity that could blunt the move's impact.

Mubarak's National Democratic Party won all elections during rule, mostly by rigging outcomes, marginalizing challengers and suppressing dissidents, but was dissolved in 2011 after the uprisings. But Egypt's democratic transition is gone, critics say, by the banning of the Muslim Brotherhood after the army's ouster of elected Islamist president Mursi and crackdown on Islamist and liberal opposition.

A presidential election to be held this month is widely expected to be won by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, from the same military establishment which has dominated Egyptian politics for six decades. Sisi said in his first televised interview on Monday that the Muslim Brotherhood, which won all five elections since Mubarak's ouster, was "finished" and would cease to exist if he becomes president. In his ruling against Mubarak-era officials, Judge Karim Hazem did not spell out the number, names or titles of those affected, prompting opposition accusations of ambiguity that could end up allowing some candidacies from the old regime. "The ruling was not clear and did not respond to our demand. We want the judiciary to punish those who committed crimes, both political and criminal ones, and not all and everyone," prominent Egyptian activist and lawyer Gamal Eid said.

Tuesday's case was brought to court a few months ago by a liberal lawyer. Judicial sources said the judge was unable to name the officials that the ruling would be applied to and left that task to the elections committee. After the vote for president there is to be a parliamentary election but liberal politicians this could bring back many Mubarak-era politicians due to the weakness of current political parties, most of which were formed after Mubarak's fall. Since Mursi's ouster following mass unrest against the Brotherhood leader's rule, the army-backed government has sought to crush the veteran Islamist movement in operations that have left hundreds dead and put thousands in jail. Top Brotherhood figure Mohamed Badie and 682 Brotherhood members and supporters were sentenced to death last month over the violence that erupted after Mursi was deposed.

Egypt's Sisi says Muslim Brotherhood is finished

U.S.A. Today, 05.05.2014



Egyptian presidential frontrunner Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Monday appeared to rule out reconciliation with the Muslim Brotherhood movement, raising the specter of a prolonged conflict with a group he said was finished.

Sisi, who ousted the Brotherhood's Mohamed Mursi from the presidency last July after mass protests against Mursi's rule, accused the Brotherhood of links to violent militant groups, adding that two plots to assassinate him had been uncovered. "I want to tell you that it is not me that finished (the Brotherhood). You, the Egyptians, are the ones who finished it,"

Sisi said in a joint interview with Egypt's privately owned CBC and ONTV television channels broadcast on Monday. Asked whether the Brotherhood would cease to exist during his presidency, Sisi answered: "Yes. That's right." Sisi is expected to easily win the May 26-27 presidential election. The only other candidate is leftist politician Hamdeen Sabahi, who came third in the 2012 election won by Mursi. Sisi's supporters view him as a decisive figure who can stabilize a country plagued by street protests and political violence since an army-backed popular uprising toppled President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. The Brotherhood, which says it is committed to peaceful activism, has accused Sisi of staging a coup and masterminding the removal of Mursi, Egypt's first freely elected president. Sisi, a head of military intelligence under Mubarak, confirmed rumors that there had been attempts on his life, highlighting the security challenges facing Egypt, a strategic U.S. ally in the heart of the Arab world. Sisi said there were "two attempts to assassinate me. I believe in fate, I am not afraid."

An Islamist militant insurgency has been growing since Mursi's overthrow. Islamist militants have killed several hundred members of the security forces in bombings and shootings. The interior minister survived an attempt on his life in September. The army-backed authorities have outlawed the Brotherhood, which won all the elections after Mubarak's fall. Thousands of its supporters have been arrested and hundreds killed. Top leaders, including Mursi, are on trial. A court sentenced the leader of the Brotherhood, Mohamed Badie, and hundreds of supporters to death last week.

Secular dissidents have also been jailed, leaving little organized opposition to the army-backed government. Although the Brotherhood is under severe pressure, Egypt's oldest and most organized Islamist movement has survived repression under successive rulers from the military, starting with Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954. Sisi has said his campaign would be unconventional - an apparent reference to concerns for his security. So far, there are no announced plans for him to appear in public. Islamists and the Egyptian state are old foes. Militants assassinated President Anwar al-Sadat in 1981 mainly because of his peace treaty with Israel. Mubarak also survived assassination attempts. Sisi said security, stability and development are his priorities for Egypt, a nation of 85 million people who live on 4.5 percent of the country's land.

But he gave no details of his vision for the economy in the interview being broadcast in installments. Egypt's military has mounted several offensives against militants based in the Sinai. But fighters who have established bases in the unruly peninsula near Israel have proven resilient. Hardening accusations against the Brotherhood of militant ties, Sisi said one of its leaders had warned him last July against his course of action, saying fighters would come from Syria, Afghanistan and Libya "to fight the Egyptians and to fight you". His tough line on eradicating militancy may not be enough to ease the concerns of Egyptians.

In a country where protests have helped lead to the removal of two presidents in three years, Sisi may be expected to deliver quick results, especially for the economy, which suffers from a weak currency, high unemployment, a bloated public sector and a widening budget deficit. Sisi also expressed his support for a law criticized by rights groups for imposing tight restrictions on the right to demonstrate. "I say that anything needed for security and stability we will do." He appeared to acknowledge human rights abuses reported by human rights groups during the security campaign. "We must understand that there cannot be a security situation with this depth and confusion that we are seeing, without some violations," he said. "There is law and procedures taken so that this does not happen again."

Bahraini Shi'ite youth risk radicalization as political talks stall

Daily Mail, 04.05.2014



Dozens of black-clad, masked men parade through Bahrain's Shi'ite Muslim villages, some holding petrol bombs and others denounce al Khalifa, the Sunni Muslim monarchy that has ruled the Gulf Arab island since the 18th century. A few masked men jump through a ring of fire and crawl under barbed wire in what looks like a desert training zone.

Hands work at what looks like a home-made bomb. Scenes like these, broadcast in online videos in recent months, might once have been dismissed as a cry for attention by groups from Bahrain's big Shi'ite community seeking to shore up a flagging cause for democratic reform.

But they have coincided with a spread in sometimes lethal home-made bomb attacks, suggesting a growing radicalisation among Shi'ite youth. To be sure, the parades do not match either in size or armed might those of paramilitary Shi'ite militias elsewhere in the Middle East such as Lebanon's Hezbollah or Iraq's Mehdi Army. Nor do the bombs disturb everyday life in most of Bahrain, where explosions tend to target security forces in the mainly Shi'ite villages, far away from the capital. But there are fears that a deadlock in political efforts to solve a three-year-old standoff is deepening frustration among young Shi'ites, with the more hotheaded of them seeming beyond the control of the mainstream al Wafaq opposition movement. "We are fighting for our rights and nobody can stop us.



The youngsters will continue what their fathers, brothers and uncles started," a 21-year-old man who gave his name only as S. A. told Reuters in the Shi'ite village of Janabiya. "Many of us have lost a member of the family; that has become a norm. But we are fighting back and will kill whoever is killing us." The strategically vital kingdom, which hosts the U.S. Fifth Fleet, has wrestled with low-level but persistent civil unrest since a Shi'ite-led uprising was put down in 2011, becoming a front line in a region-wide tussle for influence between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite Iran across the Gulf. Many of the youth in the videos hold the flag of the February 14th Youth Coalition, an internet-based group that has been organizing anti-government protests since security forces quelled mass demonstrations of February-March 2011, inspired by the "Arab Spring".

February 14th, named after the launch date of the 2011 uprising, has been declared a terrorist organization by the authorities along with two little-known groups: Saraya al-Ashtar (Ashtar Brigade) and Saraya al-Muqawama (Resistance Brigade), compounding the atmosphere of confrontation. Demonstrators drawn mainly from the Shi'ite community have kept up small protests almost daily, demanding the Sunni ruling family create a constitutional monarchy. Some of the protests turn violent, with police firing tear gas, stun grenade and birdshot at youth burning tires and throwing rocks, metal rods and petrol bombs at security forces. The violence is mainly in Shi'ite villages well away from Manama where businesses and expatriates are hardly affected. Yet, there is a risk of a deadly attack that could plunge Bahrain into a more brutal cycle of violence. Tension simmers with no solution for the grievances cited by the Shi'ite community, particularly the youth many of whom say they have members of their families either shot by police or in jail. Bahraini Shi'ites complain of political and economic marginalization, an accusation the government denies.

Justin Gengler, a Bahrain expert at Qatar University, says the risk of youth radicalisation is "a predictable consequence". "When a large segment of the population feels that so-called 'representative' institutions are stacked against them, and that no viable avenue of reform exists, then it is not surprising that they would turn to extra-political means of affecting change," he said. "The unrest is contained, it is managed to a great extent," said a Western diplomat, who asked for anonymity. "But there is a sense, I think, that if they don't come to a political solution, it could be a big event that would set it off, and it could develop into sectarian (violence). It is one of the greatest fears." Diplomatic and security sources in Manama cite increasing evidence of Iranian support for some "violent" anti-government groups in Bahrain. They point to a foiled attempt to smuggle explosives and arms, some made in Iran and Syria, into the country by boat last year. "The evidence is irrefutable, the Iranians are involved," said the Western diplomat, who added that groups behind the attacks were getting better in making deadly explosives. Iran has always denied accusations of fuelling the unrest, yet it champions the cause of Bahrain's Shi'ite opposition.

The online videos include footage purportedly of some of the bomb attacks that have killed or wounded policemen in recent months. In one video, masked youths run with petrol bombs which they throw at an armored police vehicle. The car, on fire, drives away and the youth shout "Allah Akbar". Parts of Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's speeches, or songs calling to "answer the call of the Coalition", are sometimes played in the background of other videos. Reuters could not independently verify the videos. Some commentators have pointed out that they could have been made by government loyalists to mobilize support for the authorities. Yet analysts, security and diplomatic sources say the recent spike in the frequency and deadliness of bombing attacks, mainly on policemen, indicate a greater level of experience and training by the attackers than two years ago.

Libya confirms Ahmed Maiteeq as new prime minister

Euronews, 05.05.2014



The head of Libya's parliament has confirmed businessman Ahmed Maiteeq as the country's new prime minister, according to a decree signed by him, one day after a deputy speaker had declared Maiteeq's election invalid.

The divisions in the assembly highlight growing political turmoil in Libya, where the government and parliament are unable to assert their authority in a country awash with arms and militias since the ouster of Gaddafi. Parliament elected Maiteeq on Sunday after voting in parliament but First Deputy Speaker al-Awami initially said the businessman had failed to obtain the necessary quorum.

On Monday, the president of parliament, Nouri Abu Sahmain, confirmed that he had asked Maiteeq to form a new government within two weeks, according to the decree posted on parliament's website. Sahmain wields quasi-presidential powers. Political analysts said Maiteeq would have difficulty in overcoming the political chaos racking the oil-producing nation. Since the civil war that ended Gaddafi's one-man rule, Libya's nascent democracy has struggled, with its parliament paralyzed by rivalries and brigades of heavily armed former rebels challenging the new authorities.

The prime minister's post became vacant after Abdullah al-Thinni resigned last month citing an attack by gunmen on his family just a month into his term as head of the government. Thinni's short-lived tenure followed that of Ali Zeidan who fled the country after he was fired by deputies over his failure to stop attempts by rebels in the volatile east to sell oil independently of Tripoli's government. Libya's parliament, the General National Congress, is deadlocked between Islamists, tribes and nationalists. The country's fledgling army faces challenges from unruly ex-rebels, tribal groups and Islamist militants.

Romania says its bank buffers should soften Russia/Ukraine spillovers

Reuters, 06.05.2014



The Romanian banking system's comfortable solvency and liquidity buffers should help alleviate any problems arising from the exposure of Austrian and French banks to Russia and Ukraine, Central Bank Governor Isarescu said on Monday.

Isarescu said none of the Russian-owned companies in Romania were deemed of "systemic importance," and that there were "negligible exposures of Romanian banks to Russian or Ukrainian entities". "Even a total shutdown in gas imports may be weathered without tangible disruptions, at least until November-December," Isarescu said.

Romania, which neighbors Ukraine to the north, sends only 4.7 percent of its exports to Russia or Ukraine, so even a 10 percent fall in the value of exports to these countries, assuming it was not offset elsewhere, would shave only 0.16 percentage points off Romania's GDP.

EU open to a second Geneva meeting on Ukraine, Van Rompuy says

Kyiv Post, 07.05.2014



The European Union is open to holding more talks with Ukraine, Russia and the United States to try to defuse the crisis in Ukraine, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy said on Wednesday.

"What we are doing is keep(ing) open the track of negotiations and dialogue. We are even open to the idea of a second Geneva meeting. We are open to this idea and will work with colleagues on the possibility of it," European Council President Herman Van Rompuy told at a news conference with the visiting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Switzerland has frozen \$193 million in Ukrainian assets

Chicago Tribune, 04.05.2014

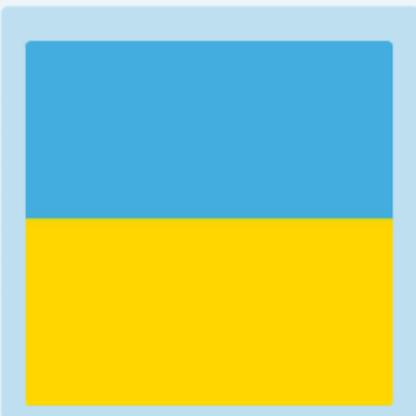


Switzerland's federal prosecutor has frozen 170 million Swiss francs (\$193.34 million) of assets in Swiss bank accounts belonging to former Ukrainian president Yanukovich and people close to him, a Swiss newspaper reported on Sunday.

The Swiss government ordered the freezing of the assets of 20 Ukrainians, including Yanukovich and his son, at the end of February. A Swiss newspaper said Switzerland's federal prosecutor had opened five investigations against individuals suspected of money-laundering and the assets it had frozen in that context were partly identical with those concerned by the government freeze.

Ukraine says Odessa unrest planned and financed from abroad

Kyiv Post, 03.05.2014



Ukraine's security service said on Saturday illegal military groups from Moldova's breakaway region of Transdniestria and Russian groups worked together to foment unrest in the southern port city of Odessa. The unrest, which occurred on May 2 in Odessa and led to clashes and many casualties, was due to foreign interference," a spokeswoman for the SBU security service told a news conference.

Kiev has long accused Russia of supporting uprisings in the south and east of Ukraine, and says pro-Russian forces, just across the border, are helping their masters in Moscow to destabilize the situation.

Russia denies playing any role in Ukraine's uprising, saying Russian-speaking citizens are simply protecting their rights from a pro-Western government. The security spokeswoman also accused former top officials, once part of ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's inner circle, of financing "saboteurs" to foment the unrest. She named Serhiy Arbutov and Oleksander Klymenko. Klymenko, former incomes minister and a close ally of Yanukovich, denied the allegation and called on Kiev to produce evidence. "I will tell you who is responsible: the blame for bloody Friday in Odessa lies entirely with the current government," he wrote on his Facebook page.

Ukraine says operations against rebels continue; ‘we are not stopping’

Kyiv Post, 03.05.2014



Ukraine said military operations against pro-Russian separatists in the industrial east of the country continued at dawn on Saturday near the town of Kramatorsk, vowing it would not stop a bid to dislodge them. Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said Ukrainian forces had seized control of a television tower in Kramatorsk, near the rebel stronghold of Slaviansk, but gave no information on possible casualties.

Slaviansk was the target on Friday of the most significant advance by Ukrainian forces since the start of an armed uprising in the east a month ago, stalled by well-armed separatists who brought down two military helicopters.

“The active phase of the operation continued at dawn,” Avakov wrote on his Facebook page. “We are not stopping.” Overnight, Russian media reported fighting near Kramatorsk, citing hospital sources as saying one person had been killed and nine wounded. That followed the deaths of two helicopter crew in Slaviansk. Separatists said three fighters and two civilians were also killed in the Ukrainian advance on the town.

Russia to deploy new submarines, ships to Black Sea fleet - reports

Reuters, 06.05.2014



Russia will beef up its Black Sea fleet this year with new submarines and warships, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu was quoted as saying on Tuesday, following the annexation of the Crimean peninsula. New air defense and marine infantry units would also be deployed at the fleet’s bases, which include Sevastopol in Crimea.

“New submarines will join the Black Sea fleet, as well as new-generation surface ships, this year. All this requires much attention from us,” Interfax news agency quoted Shoigu as saying. Shoigu said the fleet would receive funding of 86.7 billion rubles (\$2.43 billion) by 2020.

Russia's Lavrov and OSCE's Burkhalter agree on need to fulfill Geneva agreement on Ukraine

Russian News, 03.05.2014



Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the Swiss president Didier Burkhalter "confirmed the need for complete fulfillment of Geneva declaration" on Ukraine, the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement on Saturday. Burkhalter is also presently the chairman of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The statement followed a phone conversation between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the Swiss President Burkhalter on Saturday where they discussed the situation in Ukraine and especially "the rampage of radicals" in Odessa, the statement said.

Pro-Russians in Ukraine's Donetsk to discuss Putin's call on referendum

CNN, 08.05.2014



Pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region said on Wednesday (May 7th) that they would consider Russian President Vladimir Putin's call to postpone a regional referendum on independence at a meeting of their assembly tomorrow, on Friday; May, 9th. "Tomorrow we will discuss that at the people's assembly," Denis Pushilin, a leader of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic told.

"We have the utmost respect for the Russian President Vladimir Putin. If he considers that necessary, we will of course discuss it." Denis Pushilin stated clearly during a speech.

Russia expects progress in Iran nuclear talks next week

Kyiv Post, 06.05.2014



Iran and six world powers could agree parts of a text of an agreement on Tehran's nuclear program when they meet for a new round of negotiations in Vienna next week, Russia's chief negotiator said in comments published on Tuesday. Iran, the U.S., France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia are working to reach a long-term accord on ending the decade-old dispute over Tehran's atomic activities by July 20.

The West suspects Iran may be seeking a nuclear weapons capability. Iran says its program is peaceful. After spelling out their positions in three meetings, senior officials from the countries now plan to start drafting a text of a possible deal.

"As a result of this round, we should at least get some elements of the agreed text and elements of the common text," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told state-run RIA news agency in an interview. He did not give details on what areas the partial agreement might cover. "For now there is no common (text) whatsoever. So if we get such an option, this would be a good result," Ryabkov, Russia's chief negotiator in the talks, said ahead of the meeting that is expected to begin on May 13 and may last for about four days.

Analysts say there is a political will on both sides to reach an agreement but that it will still be very difficult to overcome key differences, especially on the permissible scope of Iran's uranium enrichment program. Refined uranium can be used to fuel nuclear power plants, Iran's stated aim, but can also provide material for atomic bombs if processed further, which the West fears may be Tehran's ultimate aim. The powers want a deal that would significantly scale back Iran's nuclear program so that it would not be able to build a bomb any time soon. Iran wants an end to international sanctions that have severely hurt its oil-dependent economy. It has ruled out closing any of its nuclear facilities, which it says are part of a peaceful atomic energy project.

Moscow kicks off annual military parade amid Ukraine crisis

AFP, 09.05.2014



Russian troops on May 9 marched in Red Square to mark 69 years since victory in World War II in a show of military might amid tensions in Ukraine following Moscow's annexation of Crimea. More than 11,000 people took part in the annual Victory Day parade which began with the massed troops marching as President Putin watched from the stands.

Putin praised the strength of Russia's patriotism. "This is a holiday when all-conquering patriotic force triumphs, when we all feel especially strongly what it means to be true to the Motherland and how important it is to be able to stand up for its interests," Putin said to shouts of "Hurrah!"

The parade took on particular significance as Russia is locked in a standoff with the West over its support for separatists in Ukraine and following its annexation of Crimea where Russia's Black Sea fleet is based in Sevastopol. Putin was reportedly to fly directly from Moscow to take part in celebrations in Sevastopol, liberated from the Nazis 70 years ago, although this was not confirmed by the Kremlin. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said it would be a "pity" if Putin were to "use" the commemorations to make his first visit to Crimea since annexation. The parade began with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu standing up in a specially designed car to inspect the massed troops, including marines from the Black Sea fleet based in Crimea, followed by a display of military hardware. The Moscow parade put on view around 150 items of military hardware including for the first time new Tor-M2U air defence missile system, the powerful Chrysanthemum-S anti-tank missile system and Typhoon armoured vehicles.

A total of 69 aircraft were to zoom 200 metres above Moscow rooftops including Tupolev TU-160 bomber jets. Russia and other ex-Soviet countries mark Nazi surrender a day later than Western countries celebrated VE Day due to the time difference. The Soviet Union lost an estimated 30 million people during World War II. Russia has accused the new Kiev leadership of support for a wartime guerilla fighter who collaborated with the Nazis, Stepan Bandera, and regularly refers to pro-Russian separatists as fighting "neo-Nazis" and "fascists." "In Europe, militant nationalism is rearing its head again, the same that led to the appearance of Nazi ideology," Putin warned May 8 in a speech to leaders of other ex-Soviet states.

China aims to boost military relations with Iran

World Bulletin, 05.05.2014



People's Republic of China wants deeper defense ties with Iran, Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan told his Iranian counterpart on Monday, according to Chinese state media, as Beijing moves to cement already close ties with a major oil supplier.

Chinese Defense Minister Chang told to the Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan that the development of bilateral relations has “remained positive and steady, featuring frequent high level exchanges and deepened the political mutual trust”, as quoted by the Chinese official Xinhua news agency.

Chang is “confident that the friendly relations between the two countries as well as the armed forces will be reinforced” due to “increased mutual visits and personnel training cooperation between the armed forces”, Xinhua added. Dehqan “voiced the hope that the two countries will continue to play a positive role in safeguarding regional peace and stability”, the agency said. It gave no other details. China has exported arms to Iran, and last month expressed anger after Washington laid charges against a Chinese businessman accused of allegedly procuring missile parts for Iran.

China and Iran have close energy and trade ties, and Beijing has repeatedly resisted U.S.-led demands to impose tougher economic sanctions on Iran to curb its nuclear ambitions. However, differences have arisen between China and Iran in the development of Iran's oil and gas resources. Last month, Iran terminated China National Petroleum Corp's (CNPC) contract to develop the Azadegan oilfield after the Chinese energy giant ignored repeated appeals to work on it.

China premier says Sino-Africa disputes just ‘growing pains’

Reuters, 04.05.2014



Disputes arising over China’s investment projects in Africa are just “growing pains” in a burgeoning relationship that saw their trade top \$200 billion last year, Premier Li Keqiang said on Sunday ahead of a tour of the continent. Li, speaking before a trip to Ethiopia, Nigeria, Angola and Kenya, said Chinese firms in Africa needed to abide by local laws as well as also take responsibility to protect the local interests.

He said the Chinese government was willing to sit down with African countries to resolve any issues that arose between the two sides, but said these were “isolated” cases in a relationship based on equality and mutual benefit.

“I wish to assure our African friends in all seriousness that China will never pursue a colonialist path like some countries did, or allow colonialism, which belongs to the past, to reappear in Africa,” the official news agency Xinhua quoted Li as saying. Chinese enterprises have spent heavily on infrastructure, mining and energy projects in Africa as the country seeks to expand its access to supplies of vital commodities such as oil and copper. But in some cases, Chinese firms have been accused of treating local staff unfairly. Oil workers at two China-invested projects in Chad and Niger went on strike in March in protest against unequal pay.

In 2009, China overtook the United States as Africa’s biggest trading partner, and Xinhua said more than 2,500 Chinese firms operate on the continent. Bilateral trade between China and African countries reached \$210 billion in 2013, but Beijing has been accused of holding back the continent’s economic development by focusing on the pursuit of raw materials rather than the creation of local jobs and markets. Angola, on Li’s itinerary this week, has become one of China’s biggest oil suppliers, with crude deliveries rising 9.9 percent to 10.66 million tons in the first quarter of 2014, second only to Saudi Arabia.

China blames U.S. for stoking tensions in South China Sea

The Financial Times, 09.05.2014



China's foreign ministry blamed the United States on Friday for stoking tensions in the disputed South China Sea by encouraging countries to engage in dangerous behavior, following an uptick in tensions between China and both the Philippines and Vietnam.

China accused Vietnam of intentionally colliding with its ships in the South China Sea after Vietnam asserted that Chinese vessels used water cannon and rammed eight of its vessels at the weekend near an oil rig. The United States has called China's deployment of the rig "provocative and unhelpful" to regional security, urging restraint on all sides.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying repeated that the waters the rig was operating in, around the Paracel Islands, were Chinese territory and that no other country had the right to interfere. "It must be pointed out that the recent series of irresponsible and wrong comments from the United States which neglect the facts about the relevant waters have encouraged certain countries' dangerous and provocative behavior," Hua told a daily news briefing. "We urge the United States to act in accordance with maintaining the broader picture of regional peace and security, and act and speak cautiously on the relevant issue, stop making irresponsible remarks and do more to maintain regional peace and stability," she added.

Tensions are also brewing in another part of the sea, with Beijing demanding that the Philippines release a Chinese fishing boat and its crew seized on Tuesday off Half Moon Shoal in the Spratly Islands. Philippine police said the boat and its crew were seized for hunting sea turtles, which are protected under local laws. Hua said the Philippines' actions were illegal as they had entered Chinese waters to seize the boat and its crew. "We once more demand the Philippines immediately release them unconditionally ... China reserves the right to take further action," she said, without elaborating. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, rejecting rival claims to parts or all of the oil and gas rich waters from Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei.



Announcements & Reports

▶ *Africa at Crossroads*

Source : Center for Strategic and International Studies

Weblink : <https://csis.org/publication/africa-crossroads>

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Source : Chatham House

Weblink : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/199391>

▶ *Elite Perceptions of the United States in Europe and Asia*

Source : Chatham House

Weblink : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/199317>



Upcoming Events

► *3rd World Turkic Forum*

Date : 28 – 30 May 2014
Place : Edirne – Turkey
Website : http://www.tasam.org/en/Etkinlik/579/3rd_world_turkic_forum

► *9th International Turkish - African Congress*

Date : 24 – 25 April 2014
Place : Turkey
Website : http://www.tasam.org/en/Etkinlik/592/9th_international_turkish_-_african_congress

► *European Energy Horizons 2014*

Date : 8 May 2014
Place : Stockholm - Sweden
Website : <http://www.economistinsights.com/energy/event/european-energy-horizons-2014?region%5B4%5D=4®ion%5B7%5D=7>

► *3rd World Turkic Forum*

Date : 28 - 30 May 2014
Place : Edirne - Turkey
Website : http://www.tasam.org/en/Etkinlik/579/3rd_world_turkic_forum

► *World Water Conference*

Date : 11 November 2014
Place : Edirne - Turkey
Website : <http://www.economistinsights.com/sustainability-resources/event/world-water-forum?region%5B4%5D=4®ion%5B7%5D=7>