

## President Gul praises Constitutional Court for 'implementing universal law'

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.06.2014



The Constitutional Court has caught attention recently with its rulings that have been in line with universal law. It is not only about the recent rulings that it has made regarding individual applications, but also the fact that the Court does not hesitate to cancel laws that the government considers important, if it detects any irregularity.

What does President Abdullah Gul think about the Constitutional Court's stance? I asked him on June 26, and he stressed that it was him who appointed many of the Court's current member judges. "I appointed 11 of the current 17 members of the Constitutional Court.

It is pleasing that important verdicts are taken unanimously. While I was appointing the judges, I first of all focused on the merit needed to be a judge of the Constitutional Court. Of course, a judge has political views, but when on duty the only thing he or she has to take into consideration should be universal law," Gul said. He recalled the top court's "367 decision," which cancelled the first round of the presidential election in 2007, saying it was "political and ideological," but added that he was very pleased that the Constitutional Court - including the members he appointed himself - is now acting according to "universal law." "The Court is implementing universal law, the practices of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)," Gul said, stressing the importance of the right to direct individual application to the Constitutional Court, introduced last year.

"Our Constitutional Court, by implementing universal law, has proved that it is a court of the same caliber of those in developed countries." Gul said the right to individual application to the Constitutional Court had led to a decrease in the number of applications from Turkey to the ECHR and added that he believed they would continue to do so. Discussing how he decided to appoint members to the Constitutional Court, the president stressed the importance of "universal justice and conscience." "Naturally, first I research their qualifications and careers. When I decide to appoint a member, I call him to talk. I told all the members that I appointed: 'Just act according to universal justice and conscience and don't be influenced by anything else,'" he said.

Touching on the recent verdicts of the Constitutional Court that disturbed the government, such as the crucial annulments regarding bills on the Court of Accounts and the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), he said responses should be more detached. "We should consider Constitutional Court rulings not in terms of 'liking and disliking,' but by evaluating whether they are in line with universal justice in developed countries," Gul said. He also spoke about the U.S. Supreme Court, saying that the members were appointed by the president, a political character, but they were generally less swayed by partisan political views. "In America, presidents appoint the members of the Supreme Court. Presidents are either from Democrat or Republican Party.

It is normal for them to appoint individuals who are politically closer to themselves. However, after the appointment, a member rules according to his own legal consideration and conscience, not the president's views. In short, they act like judges. This is very important. Furthermore, appointed members are checked by the public, which considers their actions," he said. I would like to make a contribution here. I wrote about this before: President Reagan tried to appoint ultra-conservative Robert Bork as a Supreme Court judge in 1987, but he was rejected by the Senate. President Bush recommended his own adviser Harriet Miers as a Supreme Court judge in 2005, but even his own party revolted. Bush stepped back, appointed Samuel Alito, who was a qualified judge, and the Senate approved. You see, in "Poor Obama's" country, checks and balances work smoothly. We witness the quality of Constitutional Court judges from their verdicts, their "counter votes" and their books. The result: It is extremely important for politicians who make appointments to public offices, and particularly to the judiciary, to have awareness about the rule of law and the objectivity of public services.

## Turkey emphasizes Iraq's territorial integrity

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.06.2014



Turkey's top security board has reiterated Ankara's long-standing policy of protecting the territorial integrity at a moment where calls for Kurdish independence are increasing due to the unrest in the country.

"It is noted that our support for the Iraqi people for the protection of the country's territorial integrity and political unity will continue," read the statement issued following the bi-monthly MGK meeting late June 26. The statement came on the same day when Turkish officials held lengthy meetings with Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of KRG, and nephew of Massoud Barzani, president of the KRG.

Massoud Barzani recently has said "there was a new reality" in Iraq and the people of KRG have the right to determine their fate, implying the declaration of an independent Kurdish state is on their agenda. Having convened under the leadership of President Abdullah Gul and with the participation of senior government and military officials, the MGK discussed the reflections of violent activities that have the tendency to turn into a sectarian-based conflict in the entire region. The MGK also reviewed the state of Turkmens in Iraq who had to flee their homes following the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) offensive toward Mosul, Telafer and other nearby cities where Turkmens and Kurds are the majority. Additionally, the board reviewed the efforts carried out for the release of the 80 Turkish citizens who have been kept by ISIL militants since June 10.

## World Bank's Turkey envoy: 'Central Bank interest rate decision is premature'

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.06.2014



The Central Bank's latest interest rate reduction is "premature" according to Martin Raiser, the World Bank's Turkey director, who told the Hurriyet Daily News that the current conditions would usually dictate a tight monetary policy, not reduced interest rates.

On June 24, the Central Bank lowered its benchmark interest rate for the second straight month with a 75 basis points cut, in a bid to boost economic growth amid political pressure for a looser monetary policy. "We believe it was premature because we don't see in the data yet the reduction in core inflation.

We do see inflation expectations in the long run lower than inflation is today. But we would have preferred a more cautious policy stance at this particular juncture," Raiser told the Daily News on June 26. "We believe that in the current environment Turkey is growing reasonably well compared to other markets in the region, it is probably operating relatively close to full economic potential. Inflation is above the target range that the Central Bank set for itself. These are not conditions in which you would typically reduce interest rates; these are conditions in which typically you would keep monetary policy tight until you see headline inflation coming down," he added. Raiser said there was no need to "overemphasize" the drop, as the move is gradual and the markets have not reacted too negatively, though he also added that the current political discussions about Central Bank policies were "not helpful."

The rate reduction came shortly after Numan Kurtulmus, the deputy chairman the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), suggested a change in Turkey's laws to rein in the influence of the Central Bank. "I (prefer to) put emphasis on the statements of those government officials who have publicly reinforced the government's commitment to the independence of the Central Bank. The officials that have spoken in that direction are the ones responsible for economic bloc and I believe they have sent the right message on the independence of the Central Bank and generally the rule of law and the independence of monetary regulatory institutions," said Raiser.

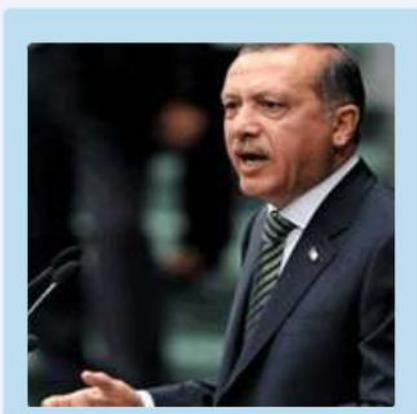
Monetary policies being discussed in political arena is not unique to Turkey, said Raiser, but markets need to know that central banks are ultimately independent. "There is no reason why these things should not be debated. But what the markets needs to know in the final event is that the Central Bank has a mandate to guarantee price stability and sets interest rates in view of this mandate, not in view of other political considerations. Unfortunately, the discussion in Turkey has sometimes raised questions over the extent to which that is the case," he said, adding that the Bank has a mandate to fight inflation and its policies should only be judged on whether it achieves that mandate.

“It would probably be better if the discussion (on Central Bank decisions) was turned down a little bit and the Bank was left to do its job. Ultimately we will see if the inflation starts to come down, as it has predicted, and then it should be given credit for it if it remains above the target range for a longer period of time,” Raiser said. When asked how the Central Bank had fared so far Raiser said inflation still had to be brought down. “Inflation is above the target range so I don’t think they should be entirely happy. At the same time this has been a volatile environment and a difficult one to navigate. But in our view inflation is still too high and should be brought down,” he said. The World Bank readjusted its 2014 growth forecast for Turkey from 2.4 in its global economic prospect report to 3.5 in its country note for Turkey, which was recently published, nearly two weeks after the first report. Raiser stated that Turkey’s first quarter GDP numbers were not reflected in the global economic prospect report, as they had still yet to be released at the beginning of June.

“It looked like we changed our mind in the course of 12 days, but the global economic prospect forecast was the old forecast and didn’t take into account the first quarter. What we released earlier this week is the forecast that takes into account the first quarter numbers,” he said, adding that these first quarter numbers were “surprisingly good.” “We felt we would be unrealistically conservative if we stayed with the lower number. We did not expect growth to maintain such momentum and we were encouraged by the strong performance of net exports. You had in the first quarter an economy that both grew quickly and started to rebalance; it is a lovely combination. It is not clear to what extent that can be sustained during the rest of the year but we welcomed it nevertheless and readjusted our forecast accordingly,” Raiser also said.

## Turkey submits bill to boost Kurdish peace process

Hurriyet Daily News, 26.06.2014



Turkey’s government sent a bill to parliament on Thursday setting out a legal framework for peace talks with Kurdish militants, a step that may boost support for Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan before an August presidential election.

Pro-Kurdish politicians have long sought such a bill, partly to remove the risk of those involved in the talks being prosecuted if the political climate in Turkey turns against the peace process in the future. Ankara began peace talks with jailed Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan in 2012 in a bid to end a 30-year-old insurgency which has killed 40,000 people.

“We are nearing the stage when these problems are solved, violence ends, people put down their weapons and come down from the mountains to return to normal social life,” Deputy Prime Minister Besir Atalay said after submission of the bill. The draft law protects anyone involved in the talks from prosecution over the insurgency by Ocalan’s Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). It also makes it the government’s responsibility to rehabilitate militants who lay down their weapons.

Ocalan himself signalled his support for the draft law after meeting members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) at his jail on the island of Imrali off the Istanbul coast. "It's a historic development for this law to come to parliament," Ocalan said, according to CNN Turk's website. The bill was presented less than a week before the ruling AK Party announces its candidate - widely expected to be Erdogan - for Turkey's first direct presidential election, due in August. Kurds account for around a fifth of Turkey's population, and their support would help Erdogan's bid. However opinion polls indicate he may not even need broad Kurdish support to win the necessary majority.

Two surveys on Thursday showed him gaining 55-56 percent support in the first round, even taking into account votes for the main pro-Kurdish party candidate. Erdogan has invested significant political capital in peace efforts, boosting cultural and language rights for Kurds at the risk of alienating some of his grassroots support. Atalay said the bill would allow the cabinet, rather than individual state institutions, to take measures related to the talks, enabling it to speed up the process. Parliament, where Erdogan's AK Party has a large majority, is expected to pass the law before its recess on July 25. A ceasefire called by Ocalan in March 2013 has largely held. The PKK took up arms against Turkey in 1984 with the aim of carving out a separate state in the southeast for the country's Kurds. They subsequently moderated their demands, seeking increased political and cultural rights which were long denied.

## Erdogan would win Turkish presidency in first round: polls

Reuters, 26.06.2014



Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan would comfortably win the August presidential election if he decides to run, according to two local polls which give him a 20-point lead over his nearest challenger. The vote will be the first time that Turkey has directly elected its head of state. Erdogan, who has dominated political life for more than a decade, has made little secret of his desire to be president.

If he assumes the presidency he is expected to exercise existing presidential powers to a much greater extent than incumbent President Abdullah Gul, whose role over the past seven years has been largely ceremonial.

His ruling AK Party will not announce its candidate until next Tuesday but Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said on Wednesday it will almost certainly be Erdogan. A survey conducted by Turkish pollster Genar predicts Erdogan would win 55.2 percent of the vote, with Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the joint candidate of the country's two leading opposition parties, on 35.8 percent. A second poll conducted by MAK Consultancy put Erdogan on 56.1 percent and his rival on 34.2 percent, the pro-government newspaper Daily Sabah reported on Thursday. Both polls have Selahattin Demirtas, the expected candidate for Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party, on less than 10 percent.

Erdogan would need at least 50 percent to win outright in the first round on Aug. 10, and avoid a potential second round run-off which could see opponents of his divisive style attempt to rally behind a single candidate. Turkey's abrasive premier has endured one of the most challenging periods of his political career over the last year, facing down widespread anti-government protests last year, and having to deal with growing concerns over the security situation in neighboring Iraq and Syria, and a corruption scandal that has swirled around his inner circle. However, a strong showing for the ruling AK Party in local elections in March has buoyed his supporters. Last week the secularist Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) said they had agreed to nominate Ihsanoglu, who stepped down in December as head of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as their joint candidate for the race.

## Iraq Parliament to start talks on new government

Wall Street Journal, 26.06.2014



Iraq's vice president ordered parliament to convene on Tuesday to begin the process of electing a new government, a step the Obama administration considers crucial to bridging the deep fissures among the country's religious and political factions and quelling an extremist insurgency.

Maliki, faces pressure from home and abroad to step down and make way for a government that encompasses Sunni and Kurdish politicians. John Kerry met on Thursday in Paris with diplomats from several majority Sunni states to seek their influence on the shape of a new government in Baghdad and their aid in convincing Iraq's Sunni tribes to support it.

Mr. Maliki's Shiite-dominated government has been accused of marginalizing the country's Sunni minority, stoking an insurgency that has captured much of western Iraq in recent weeks, including the country's border crossings with Syria and Jordan. "There must be a new government to end this crisis, we need a government that unites all factions," said Hisham Suhail, a member of parliament who isn't in Mr. Maliki's party but has traditionally supported him. "If the government doesn't include all sides, we will have a weak government like before."

The prime minister on Wednesday rejected the notion of a national salvation government, complicating efforts to elect a new parliamentary speaker and two deputy speakers, which will be the assembly's first order of business next week. The premier's State of Law party holds 92 seats, more than any other party, but needs partners to reach the 165 majority necessary to form a government. Parliament was constitutionally bound to meet by July 1 after Iraq's Supreme Court this month ratified the results of April elections. Within 30 days of Tuesday's vote, the assembly must reconvene to choose a president. Within 15 days of the president's selection, the largest bloc in parliament must nominate a new prime minister, Iraq's most powerful government post.



The formation of the current government in 2010 took almost five months. The Obama administration welcomed Iraq's decision to convene its parliament as an important first step to forming a new government. Mr. Kerry visited the Iraqi capital Monday and pressed Mr. Maliki and other politicians to quickly form a new government that is more inclusive of Sunnis and Kurds, in hopes of blunting the advances of Sunni insurgents. U.S. officials privately said they believe that Mr. Maliki, a Shiite, should step aside in order for Iraq to build a more unified government. Mr. Suhail said removing Mr. Maliki will be difficult because he has Iran's backing. Finding a candidate agreeable to both of Baghdad's biggest benefactors—Washington and Tehran—will be especially challenging.

Although Iran and the U.S. are at loggerheads over issues ranging from Tehran's nuclear program to its support for Syria's regime, both are independently aiding Baghdad in its fight against the Sunni militants. The U.S. this week sent the first of some 300 advisers to aid the Iraq government on military strategy to counter the insurgency. "It will be difficult to change Maliki. He leads the army and we are in a war," said Mr. Suhail, the member of parliament. "We know what the opposition wants from us and what needs to be done. But if Maliki goes, Baghdad is open." The parliament convenes as Iraq's military tries to recapture hundreds of square miles of territory it lost to insurgents this month.

The armed opposition is led by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, a breakaway al Qaeda faction. ISIS is allied to Sunni tribal leaders and secular Baathists, an unlikely alliance fed by dissatisfaction with Mr. Maliki's government. Mr. Kerry's meetings in Paris with the foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan were a bid to enlist their support for the creation of a more inclusive government in Baghdad. He was scheduled to travel to Saudi Arabia on Friday to meet with King Abdullah. U.S. officials said Washington is also working with these governments to try to wean Iraq's Sunni tribes away from tactical alliances with ISIS and get them to reconcile with Baghdad.

American diplomats said that Mr. Maliki's removal from office may be necessary for that rapprochement to take place. "The secretary's message was: We share their concerns and are as focused as they are to make sure the next Iraqi government is as inclusive as it could be," said a senior U.S. official traveling with Mr. Kerry. Mr. Maliki will also face resistance from Iraq's Kurds, who amid the recent upheaval have captured more territory for the semiautonomous state they control in northern Iraq. Kurdish Peshmerga forces captured Kirkuk two weeks ago, the oil-rich city they've long sought for their territorial ambitions. On Thursday Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish Regional Government, visited Kirkuk and vowed to hold on to the city at a rally of Peshmerga forces.

"Iraq is suffering from clear collapse," Mr. Barzani said, in comments carried by Iraqiya, the state news agency. "We cannot remain hostages to the unknown, and it is time to identify the Kurdish identity and draw our own future." Mr. Barzani added that although the Kurds dreamed of independence, they "did not indicate a desire to achieve that dream of independence. But the recent events seem to have helped (advance) this issue." On Thursday, the Iraqi government launched a series of airstrikes on northern Tikrit city, held by ISIS, prompting families to flee, residents said. Iraqi military helicopters attacked a makeshift ISIS headquarters erected in one of Mr. Hussein's former palaces during the early hours of Thursday morning.

## K.R.G. president Masoud Barzani vows to keep forces in Kirkuk

Financial Times, 26.06.2014



The president of KRG made a surprise visit to the disputed city of Kirkuk on Thursday, vowing to never withdraw his forces from the territory, which Kurds claim as their own. The visit by Barzani, his first since Kurdish forces seized control of the oil-rich province two weeks ago, was aimed at showing confidence in the Kurds' hold on the city, where a suicide bomber had a day earlier hit an arms market.

Violent incidents in Kirkuk have sparked fears that sympathizers or sleeper cells from militant groups including the ISIS, which has seized a swath of territory from the Iraqi government, may move on the area.

Mr Barzani, addressing a crowd of Kurdish peshmerga fighters, local political party officials and journalists, promised to send additional forces to defend Kirkuk as he appointed a commander to oversee military operations in the province. "We are not ready to relinquish even a hand's width of Kurdish land," he said. "If Kirkuk at any time becomes part of the KRG again, it will be clear how well we will serve it." Mr Barzani entered Kirkuk in a convoy of SUVs and military vehicles with anti-aircraft guns. Security in the city was tight, with peshmerga special forces stationed on rooftops and along miles of the convoy route into the city. The Kurdish leader did not meet any officials of the central government, however, perhaps to avoid further provoking Nouri al-Maliki, Iraqi prime minister, with whom they have tense relations. Over the past three weeks, Isis's lightning assault in northern Iraq has seen cities such as Mosul and Tikrit fall into the hands of the Sunni insurgency. However, the militants had so far avoided any big confrontation further north with the Kurds, who have taken advantage of the confusion created by Isis to grab several disputed regions both they and Iraq's central government claim as their own.

Iraqi forces withdrew from most of those areas as Isis advanced. Kirkuk, location of some of Iraq's largest oilfields, is a big prize for Kurds. They see it not only as their historic capital but also a way to ensure that independence could be economically viable. Eager to defend Kurdish gains and wary of the violence reaching his region, Mr Barzani called on all former peshmerga fighters to re-enlist and for volunteers to join Kurdish forces. "I myself am ready to take up arms again as a peshmerga fighter," he said. The atmosphere in Kirkuk has been tense in recent weeks, as its mix of majority Kurds and minority Arab and Turkmen residents watch carefully for signs of unrest. There have been small but increasingly frequent episodes of violence – from roadside bombings of peshmerga forces to an assassination of a local politician. Mr Barzani has hinted that his regional government may hold a referendum to determine whether the disputed regions should become part of the autonomous KRG, and even over whether the region should seek independence from Iraq. At his meeting in Kirkuk, he pledged to treat all minorities equally if they were ever to officially become part of the KRG. "We are protecting the rights of all other ethnicities in Kirkuk," he said.

## Kerry in K.R.G. to urge leaders to be part of national government

Reuters, 24.06.2014



**U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was in KRG on Tuesday to urge its leaders not to withdraw from the political process in Baghdad after their forces took control of the northern oil city of Kirkuk.**

**Peshmerga fighters, the security forces of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish north, seized control of Kirkuk on June 12 after the Iraqi military fled in the face of an onslaught from Sunni militants from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Kurds have long dreamed of taking Kirkuk, a city with huge oil reserves just outside the autonomous region, which they regard as their historical capital.**

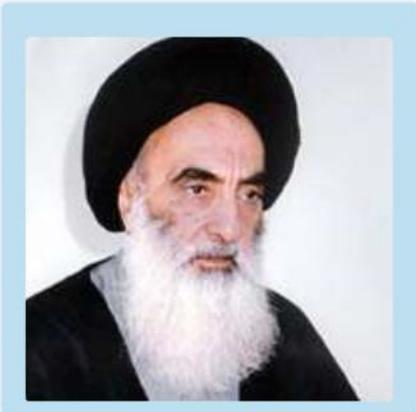
If they hold onto Kirkuk, revenues from its major oilfields could far surpass any budget offer from Baghdad, boosting its ambition of succeeding as a fully independent state. But Kerry, who is on a tour of Middle East countries to discuss the deepening crisis in Iraq, hopes to convince Kurdish leaders to be part of a new government in Baghdad where they can assume senior positions and have a say in the oil wealth. While in Baghdad on Monday, Kerry said he had been assured by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki he would meet a July 1 deadline to form a new inclusive government. Washington is pressing Maliki to move quickly in the face of gains by Sunni militants who have advanced toward the capital.

“The secretary’s visit will be very important both to confer with the Kurdish leadership and also encourage them to play a very active role in this government formation process, including choosing a very strong president who can represent both Kurdish interests but also Iraqi interests,” said a senior State Department official who briefed reporters. “If they decide to withdraw from the Baghdad political process it will accelerate a lot of the negative trends,” the official said. The new territory includes vast oil deposits the Kurdish people regard as their birthright and foundation for the prosperity of a future independent homeland.

With full control of Kirkuk, the Kurds could earn more on their own, eliminating the incentive to remain part of a failing Iraq and leaving them in the strongest position ever to secure the city many Kurds consider their spiritual capital. Still, the Kurds have slowly moved to securing oil deals with Turkey and international companies, moves that Washington regard as illegal because the oil wealth should benefit all Iraqis, not just a few. “If we are to have a chance ... to use this process of forming a new government to reset the political foundation here, the Kurds have to be a critical part of that process, and we think they will be,” the senior State Department official said.

# Iraq's top Shi'ite cleric calls for top political jobs to be filled by Tuesday

Reuters, 27.06.2014



Iraq's Shi'ite Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the majority sect's most influential cleric, called on Friday for Iraq's political blocs to agree on the next government's prime minister, parliament speaker and president before parliament meets.

He said that after a presidential decree that called for a new parliament to convene on Tuesday, "what is required of the political blocs is to agree on the three presidencies within the remaining days to this date", referring to the PM, president and parliament speaker. In a similar speech last week he said that a new parliament should start work and start the process of forming a new government as soon as possible.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki - fighting growing calls from his opponents, and some of his former allies, to step aside as he tries to win a third term - has said he is committed to the process of forming a new government on time. Sistani's speech was read by his aide, Sheik Abdel Mehdi al-Karbalai at the Imam Hussein shrine in Karbala, in front of thousands of his followers. Revered by millions, he has rallied Iraq's Shi'ite population as Sunni armed groups, led by the extremist Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), have seized large swathes of northern Iraq since June 10 and are marching on Baghdad. "There has been scheming against Iraq for some time and it is being executed now," Sistani said. "Scheming that aims at disintegrating this country and dividing it. Therefore we should have the caution and awareness and make the enemies of Iraq miss the chance to reach that goal."

## Why would Syria bomb Iraq?

CNN, 26.06.2014



Syrian warplanes reportedly targeted Iraq this week. Scores of civilians were killed at markets and gas stations in Anbar province Tuesday, local leaders told CNN. A militant group called ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, has been pushing into Iraq, shaking the country, its leadership and, in turn, threatening the region. But what does it mean that Syria reportedly is now attacking its neighbor?

What does ISIS want, and how is that related to Iraq and Syria? ISIS includes mostly Sunni militants who want to create an Islamic state across Sunni areas of Iraq and Syria. In the towns it controls in Syria, it has imposed Sharia law.

Women must be covered, music is prohibited, girls and boys must not mingle at school. The group's tactics are so ruthless even al Qaeda has distanced itself. For example, ISIS kidnapped more than 140 Kurdish schoolboys in Syria last month and forced them to take daily lessons in radical Islamic theory, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a London-based monitoring group. The militant group was born in Iraq, initially called the Islamic State of Iraq, an umbrella organization headed by al Qaeda. The group's leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, served four years in a U.S. prison camp for insurgents, at Bucca in southern Iraq. He was released in 2009. The Islamic State in Iraq relocated to Syria and eventually became known by its new name, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Regrouping and strengthening in Syria, ISIS became well-financed and highly organized. Today, the group has grown large enough to divide the entire region along sectarian lines, experts say.

ISIS has produced and attracted more jihadists and foreign fighters than the war in Iraq ever did. It has more suicide bombers at its disposal, more heavy weaponry and vehicles and more money than any other terrorist organization in the world. It also has launched an intensive and sophisticated media campaign with flashy videos directed at Westerners, enticing them to join the fight. ISIS has also employed a classic guerilla warfare tactic -- the militants live among civilians. It would be difficult to target these militants in general strikes without injuring or killing innocent people. Bashar al-Assad's regime knows where ISIS bases are inside Syria, but its response to ISIS has been fairly muted for months.

The existence of ISIS has helped to justify the Syrian government's often-used line that it is fighting "terrorists," and opposition activists have long accused the regime of allowing the group to operate and grow, pointing to the government's constant barrel bombing of civilian neighborhoods in places such as Aleppo, while ISIS positions remain largely untargeted. But since the militant group has taken over large parts of northern Iraq recently, Syria has intensified its targeted campaign of ISIS positions, particularly in Raqqa, Syria, where ISIS has operated its headquarters for some time. Damascus denies bombing positions in Iraq, but several sources, including an eyewitness and the head of the Anbar provincial council, said Syrian warplanes launched this week's strikes.



CNN is seeking a response from the Syrian government. It's unlikely al-Assad anticipated that ISIS would achieve such impressive and significant victories in Iraq. The only weapon Syrians have in the border area is air power; Syrian ground forces pulled out long ago. Bombing Iraq now serves to clip ISIS' wings a little. How are the Iraqi and Syrian conflicts linked? Under Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, the Iraqi government has gradually become closer to the Syrian regime. They share allies such as Iran and Hezbollah and enemies such as al Qaeda, ISIS, Sunni extremists and Saudi Arabia, too. The old colonial borders in the region are disappearing, and a conflict is emerging that is more Sunni versus Shiite. Al-Maliki, some experts said, stoked that sectarian tension even more in a speech Wednesday in which the Shiite leader slammed Sunnis. He blamed his political rivals for "coordinating" the crisis in Iraq and accused Sunnis of collaborating with militants. What are the Iraq military's shortcomings?

Iraq is using its air force -- what's left of it -- to fight back against ISIS. Iraq has initiated airstrikes, but targeting the group means putting a scope on constantly moving targets. ISIS uses pickups, not tanks. Without precise intelligence from the ground, battling ISIS is tough. And it's critical to remember that Iraq lost virtually all its air power with the 2003 U.S. invasion. The Iraqi army crumbled in the face of ISIS' advances. The governor of Kirkuk told CNN that the Iraq force is a "checkpoint army," meaning that it is able to set up and run checkpoints but isn't sophisticated enough to fight ISIS cells. The Iraqi army also tends to use a counterproductive strategy of rounding up individuals as a method of control, aggravating the local population. Finally, the Iraqi military is up against a terror organization more powerful than anything that the U.S. military was battling and struggled to overcome. Why has U.S. air power not been used against ISIS in Iraq? Many experts believe that U.S. airstrikes in Iraq are far too risky and might not deliver the results the United States wants. Again, consider that ISIS is mixed among the civilian population. Airstrikes may kill innocent people. And there are logistical questions that have to be answered.

Where would the air power come from? Bases in Turkey perhaps? Would Turkey give its green light? Also, some in Iraq perceive that the United States put al-Maliki in power and supported his regime for years, and U.S. interference with air power might not be welcomed. The United States has to worry about Iran, too. U.S. strikes in Iraq could undermine progress Iran and the United States have made on the issue of nuclear weapons. Also, ISIS is not the only group fighting to gain control of Iraq. Sunni insurgent groups that were active during the U.S.-led invasion have also joined in the battle. Sunni tribal leaders all oppose al-Maliki and view him and his Shiite-dominated government as a bigger threat to the country than ISIS. Members of insurgent groups not aligned with ISIS could be killed, possibly creating a new set of enemies. Any U.S. airstrikes in Iraq could further deepen the divide if there's a perception the action was done to bolster al-Maliki's government. It could also further alienate Sunni groups whose support eventually will be needed for any sort of political process to succeed in the country.

## Syria airstrikes target ISIL militants along border with Iraq

The Telegraph, 26.06.2014



Syrian warplanes have attacked Islamic State in Iraq and Levant fighters at a border crossing with Iraq, Iraqi prime minister Nouri Al Maliki confirmed yesterday. There were conflicting claims about whether the attack took place on Iraqi soil.

The incident is a further sign that Mr. Al Maliki's Shiite allies – Iran and the regime of Syrian president Bashar Al Assad – are being drawn into the battle against Iraq's Sunni insurgency led by the ISIL militants. Mr. Al Maliki also announced that efforts would be made to form a new government after talks with Britain's foreign secretary, William Hague.

Mr. Hague visited Baghdad to persuade Iraqi leaders to unite against the threat of a full-blown sectarian war. His visit was part of a wider diplomatic effort to address the conflict in Iraq before it affects the wider region. In Paris, US secretary of state John Kerry met the foreign ministers of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Jordan to discuss how to resolve the crisis sparked by the ISIL offensive. "The move of ISIL concerns every single country here," he said. Calls have mounted for Mr. Al Maliki to step aside or form an emergency coalition that is more inclusive of Iraq's religions and ethnicities. Sunni resentment, in particular, against Mr. Al Maliki's Shiite government has fed an offensive by ISIL militants, tribal forces and former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath party that has wrested large chunks of territory from Baghdad's control.

Mr. Al Maliki confirmed the Syrian airstrike on ISIL militants to the BBC, saying it took place on the Syrian side of the border but without coordination with his government. "Yes, Syrian jets did strike Qaim inside the Syrian side of the border," he said. ISIL militants captured the town last Friday. The group has virtually erased much of Iraq's border with Syria. ISIL is seeking to establish an Islamic caliphate straddling the border. "There was no coordination involved," Mr. Maliki said. "But we welcome this action. They carry out their strikes and we carry out ours, and the final winners are our two countries." US officials had said the attack, which occurred on Tuesday, struck the Iraqi side of the border.

Mr. Al Maliki said Iraq had bought used Sukhoi fighter jets from Russia and Belarus to battle the Islamist militants because US delays in delivering F-16 fighters had left its troops without air support. US military advisers arrived in the country on Wednesday, although the US president, Barack Obama, has ruled out direct military involvement in Iraq. Washington's arch enemy in the region, Iran, is reported to have started supplying Baghdad with weapons such as rockets and machine guns. The head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, visited Baghdad this month in another sign of Iraq's increasing coordination with Tehran and Damascus, which has also lost large tracts of territory to ISIL militants.

Iraq's armed forces have struggled to combat the ISIL-led campaign that began with a lightning takeover of Mosul on June 10. An offshoot of Al Qaeda, ISIL militants have gone on to capture predominantly Sunni areas, including three oilfields about 30 kilometres east of Tikrit on Wednesday. Iraqi officials said security forces launched a helicopter-borne assault in Tikrit on Thursday, seizing control of its strategically located university. ISIL captured the town on June 11. There has been increasing international pressure on Mr. Al Maliki to form a unity government to handle the crisis, which has dramatically raised tensions between Sunnis and the Shiite majority. He faces similar calls from leading Shiite figures in Iraq.

On Wednesday, Muqtada Al Sadr, a powerful imam, called for a national unity government of "new faces" that represents all groups. In the meeting with Mr. Hague yesterday, Mr. Al Maliki struck a conciliatory tone by saying the crisis required political reconciliation as well as military efforts. "We should proceed in two parallel tracks," he said. "The first one is work on the ground and military operations against terrorists and their gatherings. The second one is following up on the political process and holding a meeting of the parliament (on time) and electing a head of parliament and a president and forming the government." Iraq's vice president, Khudeir al Khuzaiie, issued a decree on Thursday ordering the 328-member parliament to convene on Tuesday to begin the process of forming a new government. Despite winning the most seats in the April 30 elections, Mr. Al Maliki's political bloc needs backing from other parliamentary groups to form a governing coalition.

## Iran rejects U.S. action in Iraq, ISIL tightens Syria border grip

Reuters, 23.06.2014



Iran's supreme leader accused the United States on Sunday of trying to retake control of Iraq by exploiting sectarian rivalries, as Sunni insurgents drove towards Baghdad from new strongholds along the Syrian border.

Khamenei's condemnation of U.S. action came three days after Obama offered to send 300 military advisers to help the Iraqi government. Khamenei may want to block any U.S. choice of a new PM after grumbling in Washington about al-Maliki. The supreme leader did not mention the Iranian president's recent suggestion of cooperation with Shi'ite Tehran's old U.S. adversary in defense of their ally.

On Sunday, militants overran a second frontier post on the Syrian border, extending two weeks of swift territorial gains as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) pursues the goal of its own power base, a "caliphate" straddling both countries that has raised alarm across the Middle East and in the West. "We are strongly opposed to U.S. and other intervention in Iraq," IRNA news agency quoted Khamenei as saying. "We don't approve of it as we believe the Iraqi government, nation and religious authorities are capable of ending the sedition."



Some Iraqi analysts interpreted his remarks as a warning to the United States not to try to pick its own replacement for Maliki, whom many in the West and Iraq hold responsible for the crisis. In eight years in power, he has alienated many in the Sunni minority that dominated the country under ousted dictator Saddam Hussein. Khamenei has not made clear how far Iran itself will back Maliki to hold on to his job once parliament reconvenes following an election in which Maliki's bloc won the most seats. Speaking in Cairo, Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States wanted Iraqis to find a leadership that would represent all the country's communities - though he echoed Obama in saying it would not pick or choose those leaders. "The United States would like the Iraqi people to find leadership that is prepared to represent all of the people of Iraq, that is prepared to be inclusive and share power," Kerry said.

The U.S. and Iranian governments had seemed open to collaboration against ISIL, which is also fighting the Iranian-backed president of Syria, whom Washington wants to see removed. "American authorities are trying to portray this as a sectarian war, but what is happening in Iraq is not a war between Shi'ites and Sunnis," said Khamenei, who has the last word in the Islamic Republic's Shi'ite clerical administration. Accusing Washington of using Sunni Islamists and loyalists of Saddam's Baath party, he added: "The U.S. is seeking an Iraq under its hegemony and ruled by its stooges." During Iran's long war with Saddam in the 1980s, Iraq enjoyed quiet U.S. support. Tehran and Washington have been shocked by the lightning offensive, spearheaded by ISIL but also involving Sunni tribes and Saddam loyalists.

It has seen swaths of northern and western Iraq fall, including the major city of Mosul on June 10. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani criticized oil-rich Sunni Gulf states that he said were funding "terrorists" - a reference to the likes of Saudi Arabia and Qatar which have backed Sunni rebels against Syria's Iranian-backed leader, Bashar al-Assad. "We emphatically tell those Islamic states and all others funding terrorists with their petrodollars that these terrorist savages you have set on other people's lives will come to haunt you," IRNA quoted Rouhani as saying on Sunday. ISIL thrust east from a newly captured Iraqi-Syrian border post on Sunday, taking three towns in Iraq's western Anbar province after seizing the frontier crossing near the town of Qaim on Saturday.

The gains have helped ISIL secure supply lines to Syria, where it has exploited the chaos of the uprising against Assad to seize territory. It is considered the most powerful force among armed groups who seized Falluja, just west of Baghdad, and took parts of Anbar's capital Ramadi at the start of the year. The fall of Qaim represented another step towards the realization of ISIL's military goals - erasing a frontier drawn by colonial powers carving up the Ottoman empire a century ago. ISIL's gains on Sunday included the towns of Rawa and Ana along the Euphrates river east of Qaim, as well as the town of Rutba further south on the main highway from Jordan to Baghdad. Jordan said traffic had stopped arriving from Iraq.

An Iraqi military intelligence official said Iraqi troops had withdrawn from Rawa and Ana after ISIL militants attacked the settlements late on Saturday. "Troops withdrew from Rawa, Ana and Rutba this morning and ISIL moved quickly to completely control these towns," the official said. "They took Ana and Rawa this morning without a fight." Military spokesman Major-General Qassim al-Moussawi said the withdrawal from the towns was intended to ensure "command and control" and to allow troops to regroup and retake the areas. The towns are on a supply route between ISIL's positions in northwestern Iraq and eastern Syria, where the group has taken a string of towns and strategic positions over the past few days from rival Sunni forces fighting Assad.



The last major Syrian town not in ISIL's hands in the region, the border town of Albukamal, is controlled by the Nusra Front, al Qaeda's branch in Syria which has clashed with ISIL. A monitoring group said on Sunday that ISIL fighters in northern Syria had for the first time been seen using U.S.-made Humvee all-terrain vehicles seized from the Iraqi army. Disowned by al Qaeda in February after defying the global leadership to pursue its own goals in Syria, ISIL has pushed south down the Tigris valley since capturing Mosul with barely a fight, occupying towns and taking large amounts of weaponry from the collapsing, U.S.-trained Iraqi army. Sunni militants also seized Tal Afar, west of Mosul, an Iraqi government official said late on Sunday. Tal Afar has been contested for a week after the military initially lost the community of Sunni and Shi'ite Turkmen and then kicked off a counter-offensive. Iraqi officials have wanted to use Tal Afar as a launching pad for rallying Mosul's Sunni population to oust ISIL.

Overnight, ISIL fighters attacked the town of al-Alam, north of Tikrit, according to witnesses and police in the town. The attackers were repelled by security forces and tribal fighters, they said, adding that two ISIL fighters had been killed. State television reported that "anti-terrorism forces" in coordination with the air force had killed 40 ISIL members and destroyed five vehicles in Tikrit, Saddam's hometown. There was a lull in fighting at Iraq's largest refinery, Baiji, near Tikrit, on Sunday. The site had been a battlefield since Wednesday as Sunni fighters launched an assault on the plant. Militants entered the large compound but were repelled by Iraqi military units. The fighters now surround the compound. A black column of smoke rose from the site on Sunday. Refinery officials said it was caused by a controlled burning of waste. At least 17 soldiers and volunteers were killed in overnight clashes with ISIL militants in the Saied Ghareeb area near Dujail, 50 km (30 miles) north of Baghdad, army and medical sources said. Near the city of Ramadi, west of the capital, a suicide bomber and a car bomb killed six people at a funeral for an army officer killed the previous day.

Relations between diverse Sunni fighting groups have not been entirely smooth. On Sunday morning, clashes raged for a third day between ISIL and Sunni tribes backed by the Naqshbandi Army, a group led by former army officers and Baathists, around Hawija, southwest of Kirkuk, local security sources and tribal leaders said. More than 10 people were killed in clashes, the sources said. On Friday, ISIL and Naqshbandi fighters began fighting each other in Hawija. Iraqi and Western officials have argued that ISIL and other Sunni factions may turn on each other after capturing territory. The fighting has threatened to tear the country apart for good, reducing Iraq to separate Sunni, Shi'ite and ethnic Kurdish regions. It has highlighted divisions among regional powers, notably between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iraq's Kurds have meanwhile expanded their territory beyond their autonomous region in the northeast, notably taking over the long-prized oil city of Kirkuk. Two Kurdish militiamen were killed by a roadside bomb there on Sunday, a police source said. The government has mobilized Shi'ite militias and other volunteers to fight on the frontlines and defend the capital - thousands of fighters in military fatigues marched in a Shi'ite slum of the capital Baghdad on Saturday.

## Iran expects deal soon on Russia building new nuclear reactors

Hurriyet Daily News, 24.06.2014



Iran said it expected to sign a deal with Russia in late August on the building of two new 1,000-megawatt nuclear reactors in the Islamic Republic, potentially boosting its case that it is refining uranium for civilian energy, not atom bombs.

Russia is one of six world powers negotiating with Iran on an agreement to end a decade-old dispute over Tehran's nuclear program, which the country says is peaceful but the West fears may be aimed at developing a nuclear arms capability. The head of Iran's atomic energy organization, will go to Moscow to finalize the reactor contract and construction may start early next year, according to IRNA.

There was no immediate comment from Russia. Iran has long argued that it needs to enrich uranium - which can have both civilian and military uses - to fuel a planned network of atomic power stations and that any contract on new reactors with Russia may help it back up its case. But Russia - which built Iran's so far only nuclear reactor, at Bushehr on the country's Gulf coast - is providing the enriched fuel for that plant and may want to do that also for any future facilities it will build in Iran. The world powers - also including the United States, France, Germany, Britain and China - want Iran to significantly scale back its enrichment of uranium to deny it any capability to quickly make bomb-grade fuels. Iran denies any such aims.

IRNA said senior Iranian and Russian nuclear energy officials - including the deputy chief executive of state-owned Rosatom, Nikolai Spassky - met in Tehran this week to discuss commercial and technical details of the planned reactors. Behrouz Kamalvandi, a spokesman for Iran's atomic energy organization, said the reactors would be built next to the first unit of the Bushehr nuclear power plant. "It is very likely the trip (Salehi's to Moscow) will take place at the end of August," he said, adding that construction of the reactors could start by the end of the Iranian year which runs until March 2015. Longstanding Western fears that the Bushehr project could yield spent fuel of use in nuclear weapons - something it denies it is seeking to do - receded after Iran promised to send the material back to Russia. Talks between Iran and the world powers will resume on July 2 in Vienna, with the sides aiming to clinch a deal ending the nuclear stand-off by a self-imposed July 20 deadline.

## Israel tells U.S. Kurdish independence is ‘foregone conclusion’

Reuters, 26.06.2014



Israel told the United States on Thursday Kurdish independence in northern Iraq was a “foregone conclusion” and Israeli experts predicted the Jewish state would be quick to recognize a Kurdish state, should it emerge.

Israel has maintained discreet military, intelligence and business ties with the Kurds since the 1960s, seeing in the minority ethnic group a buffer against shared Arab adversaries. Kurds have seized on recent sectarian chaos in Iraq to expand their autonomous northern territory to include Kirkuk, which sits on vast oil deposits that could make the independent state many dream of economically viable.

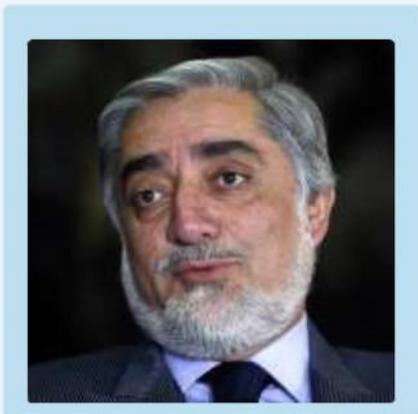
Washington wants Iraq’s crumbling unity restored. On Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Iraqi Kurdish leaders and urged them to seek political integration with Baghdad. Kerry discussed the Iraqi crisis with Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman in Paris on Thursday. “Iraq is breaking up before our eyes and it would appear that the creation of an independent Kurdish state is a foregone conclusion,” Lieberman’s spokesman quoted him as telling Kerry. A day earlier, Israeli President Shimon Peres had a similar message for U.S. President Barack Obama, who hosted the dovish elder statesman at the White House. Briefing reporters, Peres said he had told Obama he did not see unifying Iraq as possible without “massive” foreign military intervention and that this underscored Kurdish separation from the Shi’ite Muslim majority and Sunni Arab minority. “The Kurds have, de facto, created their own state, which is democratic. One of the signs of a democracy is the granting of equality to women,” Peres said.

He added that neighboring Turkey appeared to accept the Kurds’ status as it was helping them pump out oil for sale. Israel last Friday took its first delivery of the disputed crude from Iraqi KRG’s new pipeline. The United States disapproves of such go-it-alone Kurdish exports. There are some 30 million Kurds on a swathe of land running through eastern Turkey, northern Syria, northern Iraq and western Iran. They have hesitated to declare independence in Iraq, mindful of opposition from neighboring states with Kurdish populations. Israel’s Foreign Ministry said there were currently no formal diplomatic relations with the Kurds. Israeli officials declined to comment, however, on the more clandestine ties. “Our silence - in public, at least – is best. Any unnecessary utterance on our part can only harm them (Kurds),” senior Israeli defense official Amos Gilad said on Tuesday. Asked on Israel’s Army Radio whether Kurdish independence was desirable, Gilad noted the strength of the Israeli-Kurdish partnership in the past and said: “One can look at history and draw conclusions about the future.” Israeli intelligence veterans say that cooperation took the form of military training for Kurds in northern Iraq, in return for their help in smuggling out Jews as well as in spying on Saddam Hussein’s regime in Baghdad and, more recently, on Iran.

Eliezer Tsafir, a former Mossad station chief in Kurdish northern Iraq who is now retired from Israeli government service, said the secrecy around the ties had been maintained at the request of the Kurds. “We’d love it to be out in the open, to have an embassy there, to have normal relations. But we keep it clandestine because that’s what they want,” he told Reuters. Ofra Bengio, an Iraq expert at Tel Aviv University and the author of two books on the Kurds, said last week’s oil delivery and other commercial ties between Israel and KRG were “obviously” part of wider statecraft. “I certainly think that the moment (Kurdish President Masoud) Barzani declares independence, these ties would be upgraded into open relations,” she said. “It depends on the Kurds.” The Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq has denied selling oil to Israel, whether directly or indirectly. The Israeli government declined to comment on Friday’s oil delivery.

## Tension mounts in Afghanistan

Reuters, 21.06.2014



The United Nations on Saturday urged Afghan presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah to return to the electoral process after he dropped out earlier this week, accusing the organizers and the president of fraud.

Abdullah withdrew by declaring his camp would regard any outcome as illegitimate and recalling his observers from the vote count for last week’s run-off election. He also invited the U.N. to intervene. “We believe that the task ahead of us is to have the candidates re-engage fully in the electoral process,” U.N. deputy chief Haysom told. “We would want to emphasize that there is no other way of electing a legitimate leader.”

The run-off had pitted Abdullah against Ashraf Ghani, neither of whom gained the 50 percent of the vote needed to win outright in the first round of elections on April 5. Abdullah’s withdrawal has intensified longstanding concerns about a struggle for power along ethnic lines, casting doubt on Afghanistan’s attempt to transfer power democratically for the first time in its history. While the vote count is continuing, Abdullah’s withdrawal has heightened tension across the country. At least one deadly gun battle erupted between rival supporters this week. The election comes as most foreign troops are planning to leave Afghanistan by the end of the year.

The fragile state of the society they will leave behind was underscored on Saturday by a suicide bombing aimed at a government official. Ghani’s team has said it is in favor of any process that increases the transparency of the electoral bodies but wants the election to remain under local control. “We respect the role of the U.N. ... but any solution should be Afghan-led and shouldn’t affect the work of the Independent Election Commission and Complaints Commission,” said spokesman Abbas Noyan. The commissions were heavily criticized in the first round for lacking transparency. Both candidates say they failed to properly adjudicate cases of fraud, allowing hundreds of thousands of fake votes to be included in the final tally. However, Afghan officials and diplomats alike want candidates to give the electoral bodies a chance to prove they have reformed.

A statement by President Hamid Karzai on Friday backing Abdullah's call for U.N. intervention was met with dismay by those advocating the institutions be respected. "He has lost his marbles," said one Afghan official on condition of anonymity, who said he was seriously worried the electoral process would collapse. Abdullah's supporters have organized protests in the capital this week and there are fears that demonstrations could turn violent and take on an ethnic dimension. Most of Abdullah's supporters are Tajiks, the second-largest ethnic group. Ghani's are mainly Pashtun, the largest group in Afghanistan. So far, protests have been small, but they have taken on a nasty tone.

Several hundred people gathered near the airport on Saturday, for example, where they chanted "we will defend our vote to the last drop of blood" and brandished banners with slogans like "Death to Karzai" and "Death to Ghani". The tone of the debate on social media and in public has alarmed the U.N., among others. It has urged the candidates and the public to behave responsibly and avoid inciting ethnic divisions. "Should any violence emanate from the demonstrations it could set back the process, make the task of trust-building more difficult," Haysom said, "It could lead to a spiral of instability." He called the use of social media to inflame divisions "disturbing". The threat of violence was underscored on Saturday when a suicide bomber killed himself and a bystander in Kabul. Police said the bombing was an attempt to assassinate an advisor to the High Peace Council, which is seeking reconciliation with Taliban fighters. The advisor, Mohammad Massom Stanikzai, escaped unharmed, but other several people were wounded, police officials said.

## **Baltic States to back further Russia sanctions if Ukraine crisis does not ease**

*Kyiv Post, 22.06.2014*



**After the start of a ceasefire on Friday, separatists attacked Ukrainian posts on the border and a military base, and tried to storm an airforce base, Ukrainain forces said.**

**Earlier on Friday, the leaders of the United States, France and Germany agreed Russia risks new sanctions if it fails to take immediate steps to defuse tensions on the Ukraine border. Leaders of EU's member states may discuss the issue at a summit in Brussels next week. Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia - which all broke away from the Soviet Union in 1990-1991 - had already called for tougher EU sanctions against Moscow after its annexation of Crimea.**

"If there will be no de-escalation of the situation then Latvia will support a third bloc of sanctions," Latvian Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma told a news conference after meeting with her Baltic counterparts and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso in the Estonian capital. Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius said his position was the same, while their Estonian counterpart, Taavi Roivas, said that if there was no de-escalation in Ukraine, further sanctions would be the EU's only choice.

So far, the EU has imposed limited measures - asset freezes and travel bans on people and companies in Russia and Ukraine - and has mulled steps against Russia including restrictions ranging from luxury goods imports to an oil and gas ban. There has been no consensus on how to proceed. States with close trade and energy ties with Russia, such as Italy, Greece and Germany, worry about the potential impact on their economies of stricter sanctions while others, such as Greek Cyprus and Austria, have close financial links. Concerns over Europe's gas supplies are a major consideration in the decision around sanctions as EU consumers get about a third of their gas needs from Russia, around half of it through pipelines that cross Ukraine. Barroso at the news conference urged EU member states to reach a common stance on the issue of further sanctions. "I am pleading for a common position of the member states," he said.

## EU signs pacts with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova

BBC, 27.06.2014



Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova have signed partnership agreements with the European Union, in a move strongly opposed by Russia. The pact - which would bind the three countries more closely to the West both economically and politically - is at the heart of the crisis in Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said making Ukraine choose between Russia and the EU would split it in two. A ceasefire with pro-Russian rebels in east Ukraine is due to end on Friday. Poroshenko, in Brussels to sign the pact, said he would take a decision on an extension to the truce when he arrived back in Kiev later on Friday.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he would welcome an extension, but not if it were simply an ultimatum for separatists to lay down their arms. Meanwhile the United Nations refugee agency said there had been a sharp rise in the numbers of displaced people in eastern Ukraine in the past week, with 16,400 people fleeing the area. The total number internally displaced has reached 54,400, while a further 110,000 people left Ukraine for Russia this year.

# IMF mission visits Ukraine for bailout update

Kyiv Post, 24.06.2014



An International Monetary Fund mission was due in Kiev on Tuesday to check on Ukraine's progress in implementing tough conditions for a \$17 billion bailout, the Fund said.

The ex-Soviet republic, facing an insurgency in its eastern region, received a first tranche of about \$3.2 billion in May under the two-year program to shore up depleted foreign currency reserves and support the state budget. Ukraine has already met some of the strict requirements for the loan such as raising the price of gas in households and industry and allowing the exchange rate of the national currency, the hryvnia, to float.

It is also required, among other steps, to reduce the budget deficit by about 2 percent of GDP each year from 2014-2016. The IMF mission, scheduled to stay until July 3, will conduct a first review of the economic program as well as Ukraine's future objectives, the IMF said in a statement. The Kiev government's ability to meet the IMF targets may have been complicated by the crisis in Ukraine's eastern regions, where separatist rebellions erupted in April. Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the crucible of the pro-Russia rebel uprising, together account for nearly 18 percent of Ukrainian GDP.

Ukraine is at loggerheads with Russia, a major trading partner, over the price of strategic supplies of Russian natural gas, which are a huge drain on the budget. Its accusations of Russian involvement in the separatist insurgency have also helped drive ties to an all-time low. Russia is a market for around a quarter of Ukrainian exports. The IMF sees a deterioration of non-energy trade relations as the primary risk to the successful implementation of Kiev's economic program, Russia's deputy Finance Minister said in May.

# NATO chief says Russia not meeting international commitments over Ukraine

Deutsche Welle, 25.06.2014



The head of NATO said he saw no sign that Russia was respecting its international commitments over Ukraine as Britain warned Moscow it could face tougher European Union sanctions unless it acted to stop fighting in eastern Ukraine.

NATO has already suspended all practical cooperation with Russia over Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region though it has kept open high-level political contacts. "I regret to say that we see no signs that Russia is respecting its international commitments," NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told reporters during a meeting of alliance foreign ministers in Brussels.

"So today we will review our relations with Russia and decide what to do next," he said, without specifying how Moscow's actions had fallen short. British Foreign Secretary William Hague, arriving for the NATO meeting, warned that support for tougher EU sanctions would grow unless Russia acted to defuse violence in eastern Ukraine and to support a peace plan put forward by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. EU leaders may discuss imposing tough economic sanctions on Russia at a Brussels summit on Friday if they do not see Russian action to support Poroshenko's proposals. Russian President Vladimir Putin asked Russia's upper house on Tuesday to revoke the right it had granted him to order a military intervention in Ukraine.

But at the same time Kiev said pro-Russian rebels in east Ukraine had shot down a military helicopter, most likely killing all nine people on board. It was the most serious breach of a temporary ceasefire agreed in talks between government and rebels less than 24 hours earlier. "While there have been welcome words from Russia about that (the peace plan) we have not seen yet the actions to go with that, including tragically the shooting down of a Ukrainian helicopter yesterday with the death of nine more people," Hague told reporters at NATO headquarters.

"So we urge Russia to take the necessary action to stop the flow of arms across the border (and) to stop supporting illegally armed separatist groups in eastern Ukraine because in the absence of that action by Russia the case for stronger sanctions from European Union nations will of course become stronger," Hague said. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier called Putin's request to rescind the intervention law good news. "But seeing the development afterwards – the downing of the helicopter with nine dead – we see how fragile everything is and how quickly progress just reached can be destroyed again by activities of the separatists on the ground in eastern Ukraine, possibly helped by third parties," he said. "As there is no military option, it is crucial that we - despite the incidents of the last couple of days - leave no possibility unused and try cautious steps for the building of a minimum of trust, trust which has been completely lost between Russia and Ukraine," he said.

## Obama administration seeking \$500 m to train 'moderate' Syrian rebels

The Guardian, 26.06.2014



The Obama administration has proposed escalating US involvement in the Syrian civil war, asking Congress for 500 million USD for the United States military to train and equip "moderate" Syrian rebels.

The request to Congress on Thursday, heralded by the US President Barack Obama's vow, made during a speech at West Point military academy, to step up assistance to a beleaguered Syrian force, comes as the administration searches for effective alternatives to the jihadist army that has carved out massive swaths of Syria and Iraq for an Islamic state.

Previously, US aid to the Syrian opposition that is fighting dictator Bashar al-Assad focused on non-lethal provisioning, while the Central Intelligence Agency focused on sending small arms and missiles to what the US calls the "vetted" Syrian moderates. Yet the Gulf Arab states have established an arms pipeline giving a substantive military edge to jihadist groups fighting Assad and one another. Caitlin Hayden, the National Security Council spokeswoman, said in a statement that the requested aid would "help defend the Syrian people, stabilize areas under opposition control, facilitate the provision of essential services, counter terrorist threats, and promote conditions for a negotiated settlement." US military training for the Syrians, three-and-a-half years into a conflict that has killed more than 150,000 people and recast the boundaries of the Middle East, is likely to take place in Jordan, where the US military already trains its Iraqi counterparts. It is also in line with Obama's desired template for counterterrorism, as unveiled at West Point, in which the US trains foreign security forces to assault terrorists themselves.

Accordingly, a long-delayed war funding package, known for years as the Overseas Contingency Fund and before that a "supplemental", includes \$5bn for the administration's heavily promoted Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund. Some \$1.5bn of that would go into a "regional stabilization initiative" for Syrian neighbors Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. The overall size of the wartime funding package, distinct from the half-trillion annual defense budget, is \$65.8bn, down from \$79.4bn. Much of that money will go to funding the Afghanistan war now that Obama announced that 2014 will not mark its end but rather the end of most US combat. Yet the White House cautioned that despite a reduction in US troops, funding for the Afghanistan war will not "decline precipitously." Instead, according to a White House statement, "significant costs" will remain, both for the logistically complex and expensive process of removing personnel and equipment from Afghanistan and bolstering the Afghan security forces – a project with new salience after the US-trained Iraqi military was routed in Nineveh Province by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isis).



# Announcements & Reports

## ▶ *The Uncertain Next Steps in Iraq*

**Source** : Center for Strategic and International Studies  
**Weblink** : <http://csis.org/publication/uncertain-next-steps-iraq>

## ▶ *A Second Shot for Japan's Third Arrow*

**Source** : Center for Strategic and International Studies  
**Weblink** : <http://csis.org/publication/second-shot-japans-third-arrow>

## ▶ *Afghanistan and the Growing Risks in Transition*

**Source** : Center for Strategic and International Studies  
**Weblink** : <http://csis.org/publication/afghanistan-and-growing-risks-transition>

## ▶ *Paving the Way for a "New Type of Major Country Relations"*

**Source** : Center for Strategic and International Studies  
**Weblink** : <http://csis.org/publication/paving-way-new-type-major-country-relations>

## ▶ *Complexity, Strategy and the National Interest*

**Source** : Chatham House  
**Weblink** : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/complexity-strategy-and-national-interest>

## ▶ *Breaking Banks: The Financial Consequences of Counterterrorism*

**Source** : Foreign Affairs  
**Weblink** : <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141602/tom-keatinge/breaking-the-banks>

## ▶ *The Fallacy of Iranian Leverage*

**Source** : Foreign Affairs  
**Weblink** : <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141605/dalia-dassa-kaye/the-fallacy-of-iranian-leverage>

## ▶ *Maliki Isn't the Problem*

**Source** : Foreign Affairs  
**Weblink** : <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141599/kevin-russell-and-nicholas-sambanis/maliki-isnt-the-problem>



## Upcoming Events

### ► *2014 4th International Conference on Financial Management and Economics - ICFME 2014*

**Date** : 3 - 4 July 2014  
**Place** : Plymouth – United Kingdom  
**Website** : <http://www.icfme.org/>

### ► *2014 4th International Conference on Strategy Management and Research - ICSMR 2014*

**Date** : 3 - 6 July 2014  
**Place** : Plymouth – United Kingdom  
**Website** : <http://www.icsmr.org/>

### ► *ECPEL 2014 - The European Conference on Politics, Economics and Law*

**Date** : 16 – 19 July 2014  
**Place** : Brighton – United Kingdom  
**Website** : <http://iafor.org/ecpel>

### ► *International Conference on “Management of Marketing, Banking, Business and Finance for Sustainable Economy” (MBFSE- 2014)*

**Date** : 5 - 6 July 2014  
**Place** : New Delhi, Delhi, India  
**Website** : [http://krishisanskriti.org/mgt\\_conference.html](http://krishisanskriti.org/mgt_conference.html)

### ► *International Interdisciplinary Business-Economics Advancement Conference (IIBA 2014)*

**Date** : 16 – 19 July 2014  
**Place** : Istanbul - Turkey  
**Website** : <http://iibaconference.org>

### ► *Finance and Economics Conference 2014*

**Date** : 13 – 15 August 2014  
**Place** : Munich, Bavaria, Germany  
**Website** : <http://www.lcbr-fec.org/>