

► 31.10.2014

New disaster sparks debate on mining security in Turkey

Hurriyet Daily News, 29.10.2014



A mining accident in the Central Anatolian province of Karaman that left 18 workers 375 meters below the ground on Oct. 28 has sparked a fresh debate on mining safety, less than six months after Turkey's largest ever industrial disaster. Hopes were fading even as the water level started to decrease in the mine after a flood that caused the accident, with experts beginning to discuss the reasons for Turkey's latest mining catastrophe.

Survivors told reporters that the galleries of the coal mine in Karaman's Ermenek district were suddenly flooded after a "blast of water" while they were having lunch inside.

Some of them also said they smelled gas. The water levels quickly rose above the level where the miners were working. Only after 15 hours did the 11,000 tons of water start to recede thanks to additional pumps brought to the entrance of the mine. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said in Ermenek on Oct. 29 that the cause of the accident would be "comprehensively investigated," but experts have suggested that the flood stemmed from poor production planning. The Chamber of Mining Engineers (MMO), which is a part of the Turkish Union of Engineers' and Architects' Chambers (TMMOB), released a statement regarding the incident, concluding that the conditions in Ermenek that resulted in the disaster were similar to the deadliest-ever mining accident in Turkey, which occurred in Soma in May, claiming 301 lives.

As in Soma, three companies were mining separately in Ermenek without notifying each other of their production and planning, the MMO said. The lack of "basin mining" cooperation, it added, may have led any company to approach too closely to another one's old mine full of water. The statement also stressed that the responsibility for enforcing the necessary cooperation between private firms lies with the Energy Ministry's General Directorate of Mining (MİGEM), which officially collects all information regarding mining facilities. "MİGEM doesn't take basin mining into consideration when issuing production licenses. It creates a fragmented process for planning and operation. Gas and flooding risks regarding companies working in the same field cannot be known and prevented because of this system," the MMO statement added.

Mehmet Torun, the former chair of MMO, separately said that MİGEM had failed to mark an old mine in the area after it was closed down in the 2000s. "When the new mine expanded toward this old mine, where lots of water was accumulated over the years, the walls collapsed and the flood occurred," Torun said. Others allege that the mining company in Ermenek "failed to provide the ministry with the full map of its galleries to evade tax." Ibrahim Atalay, a world-renowned geography professor who has studied the Karaman region, said the massive amount of water that quickly filled the galleries might have come from an underground river. "If necessary studies were conducted before production, the disaster could have been averted," Atalay told Hurriyet.

Turkish PM rules out early election

Hurriyet Daily News, 28.10.2014



Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has refuted any prospect of moving forward the upcoming parliamentary election, currently scheduled for June 7, 2015.

“The election will be held according to its original schedule,” Davutoglu said during a visit to Kahramanmaras over the weekend, underlining the importance of “political stability” since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) first came to power in 2002. Talk of an early election has gradually gained momentum over the past few weeks in the Turkish capital, particularly after the country’s top election board began its preparations for a parliamentary election.

However, the chief of the Supreme Election Board (YSK) denied that its current work was intended as preparation for an early election. “It is unthinkable that the YSK will take a position according to reports in the media. Furthermore, the YSK is not the authority to make a decision for an early election. There is no early election alarm at the YSK,” YSK President Sadi Guven said. Meanwhile, Davutoglu also floated the idea that the two opposition leaders, Kemal Kilicdaroglu and Devlet Bahceli, should leave their posts if they do not succeed in the upcoming elections in 2015. “Look at the political lives of politicians in Europe, if you consider this to be an indication of political stability.

There, you cannot find anyone who has continued in their political lives despite such failure,” Davutoglu said. “In our country, however, there persistent failure but the leader keeps his post. There are no similar cases elsewhere.” The prime minister cited his ruling AKP’s internal three-term limit for deputies, an internal regulation stipulating that members of Parliament who have served three terms must subsequently be out of office for one, as an example of how the AKP is “sticking to its principles despite its overwhelming success.” Davutoglu also strongly rejected claims that his government has been following ethnic or sectarian-based policies.” I was still a Sunni when we were on good terms with [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad and we were going on vacation together,” he said, referring to the fact that Turkey’s bilateral relations with Syria deteriorated after the civil war erupted in 2011.

Turkey hopeful for solution of Kurdish issue

Anadolu Agency, 30.10.2014



Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said Thursday that his government will always maintain hope and commitment to achieve “the solution process.” The solution process refers to the Turkish government’s efforts launched early last year to secure an end to the decades-long conflict with the outlawed Kurdish Workers’ Party, or PKK, which has claimed the lives of more than 40,000 people.

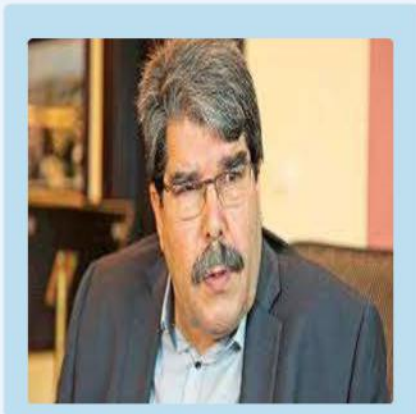
Turkey, the U.S. and EU list PKK as a terrorist organization. “What we need is to have all segments of the Turkish community united with the same sensitivity based on common sense and collective conscience,” he said.

The Turkish premier noted that it is a must for every individual and group involved in the solution process “to act upon the same diligence and responsibility, by clearly distancing themselves from a terrorist mentality and vandalism.” Earlier this month, pro-Kurdish protests broke out in Turkey, ostensibly held to show solidarity with Syria’s Kurdish-populated town of Kobani, which has been sieged by militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL. The demonstrators took to streets across Turkey to protests what they called “inaction” by the Turkish government to halt the advance of extremist ISIL militants pouring into Kobani.

“Once again, I resolutely express that we will never let anyone cripple our unity and solidarity, harm our brotherhood or disturb our peace,” he added. “Turkey will be free from all its burdens and make a takeoff once the Kurdish issue is settled, so as to concentrate all its energy into making more leaps forward,” he said. The Turkish government has already started to hold regular talks once a fortnight with the newly-established ‘solution process council’ to guide the efforts to solve the Kurdish issue as soon as possible. A 63-member committee called the ‘Board of Wise People’ is overseeing the ongoing efforts of the solution process and has been working towards a settlement to the Kurdish issue since early last year.

Kurds' own affairs do not concern Erdogan

Hurriyet Daily News, 28.10.2014



It is incomprehensible why Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues to meddle in the details of a security arrangement between Syrian and Iraqi Kurds given that it is an intra-Kurdish matter, Democratic Union Party (PYD) co-head Salih Muslim has said.

“Mr. Erdogan is constantly saying things. We don’t understand why an issue between Kurds concerns his,” Muslim told Hurriyet on Oct. 27, insisting that the details of the transfer of Peshmerga forces to Kobane are issues that should be dealt with only by Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish parties. “Mr. Erdogan wants to be the one who decides everything.

But not everything is in his power,” he added. Muslim also repeated accusations that Turkey is supporting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant’s (ISIL) assault on Kobane by allowing jihadists to cross its borders. Erdogan had previously accused the Kurdish group of “scheming along the Turkish border.” “Dear Erdogan accuses everybody and talks about a plot, but he should first stop his own plot, the passage of ISIL through Turkey,” Muslim said. “The videos showing ISIL militants passing [to Syria] through Turkey are self-evident.” Erdogan said the PYD had initially opposed the plans of Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces’ joining the fight against ISIL for Kobane out of “fear of their scheme being disrupted.”

“The PYD does not want the Peshmerga to come,” Erdogan said on Oct. 25. “The PYD thinks its game will be ruined with the arrival of the Peshmerga – their set-up will be spoiled.” He also argued that the PYD is part of a “higher mind playing games along Turkey’s southern borders.” “We need to think hard about this: There is probably a higher mind behind this set-up. I don’t think the PYD has a mentality strong enough to design it,” Erdogan was reported as saying. Muslim, however, dismissed these statements, criticizing Erdogan for “meddling” in an intra-Kurdish issue. “We have held our talks and agreed as Kurds. There is no problem with the Peshmerga coming to Kobane. They can come whenever they want. The Peshmerga will help us fight against ISIL. It won’t be as if they will come and stay in our territory,” he said.

The Turkish government views the PYD with deep suspicion because of its ties to the outlawed Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) and has previously turned down requests for it to open a land corridor so that Kobane could be resupplied from other Kurdish areas of northern Syria. Ankara insists on primarily supporting the Free Syrian Army (FSA) against ISIL in Syria, seeing it as the only “legitimate” party to negotiate with. On Oct. 24, Erdogan had announced that the PYD accepted the passage of 1,300 people from the FSA and said relevant teams were negotiating their route of passage. However, contradicting Erdogan’s remarks, Muslim said no agreement had been reached, adding that the FSA should open a second front against ISIL instead of coming to Kobane in support of the Kurdish fighters.

In his statement to Hurriyet, Muslim said he did not see any problem with the FSA coming to Kobane and claimed that the reason behind the delay in the FSA militants' passage "could be Turkey's objection." Meanwhile, Mustafa Qadir, the minister of the Peshmerga Affairs in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), said on Oct. 27 that Kurdish fighters were ready to depart for Syria to aid Kobane, but were being held up by Turkey. "Until now, Peshmerga forces have not gone to Kobane, but we are ready to send them," Agence France-Presse reported Qadir as saying. "We are waiting for Turkey to clarify its stance, and because of this we have not sent any forces," Qadir said, without elaborating on what exactly is required from Turkey for the deployment to go ahead.

Turkey announces new national action plan to join EU

Anadolu Agency, 30.10.2014



Turkey's European Union Minister Volkan Bozkir used a press conference Thursday to announce a new 'action plan' detailing the country's future steps in its bid to join the bloc.

The plan, called "National Program for the Adoption of the EU Acquis," will see the launching new pieces of legislation in order to make a headway in policy areas, or 'chapters' requirements which every candidate country needs to fulfill to become a member. Bozkir listed the three main pillars of the plan as "determination in the political reform process, continuity in socio-economic transformation in the accession process and effectiveness in communication."

"We have launched over 2,000 pieces of legislations over the last 12 years, this is a development to be proud of," he said. "Since last year, we have started to launch 170 new pieces of legislations as well." Turkey's latest national EU program was published in 2008. "The National Program for the Adoption of the EU Acquis is a guarantee from Turkey to the EU to pursue the necessary reforms," Bozkir said. The first stage of the program covers the period between November 2014 and June 2015. It will be comprised of 36 new bills and 142 pieces of secondary legislations. Bozkir also pointed out that accession to the EU is not a technical process, but a "political one." So far, 14 'chapters' have been opened, while 17 remain blocked and a further four have yet to be discussed. Only one chapter could be opened in the past three years. Cyprus problem and Germany and France's opposition to full membership stand as major obstacles before Turkey's accession.

EU-US trade talks should include Turkey

Anadolu Agency, 27.10.2014



Turkey needs to take part in parallel negotiations with the U.S. in order to prevent adverse effects from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, said the World Bank's Turkey director Martin Raiser on Monday.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a trade agreement currently being negotiated between the EU and the U.S. "Turkey's diplomatic efforts should be concentrated on making sure that the TTIP remains an open agreement available for countries such as Turkey," said Raiser. Raiser spoke during a panel held by Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD).

The panel took place in Germany's capital, Berlin, titled "20 Years Later: Deepening Turkey's Customs Union on perspectives of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. "I am not sure that the U.S. government is currently in a position to offer this to Turkey," Raiser added, referring to political realities in the U.S. Congress. According to Brookings Institute's report, if Turkey is not included into the Transatlantic Partnership, the economic cost for Turkey could reach \$20 billion and 95,000 jobs. Early in October, Turkey's economy minister Nihat Zeybekci said: "If Turkey doesn't become a member of the free-trade agreement between the U.S. and EU, or sign a simultaneous free trade agreement with the U.S., it will be impossible for Turkey to maintain its customs union agreement with the EU." Turkey has a customs union agreement with Brussels, which was set as a steppingstone in its EU membership bid. Turkish officials argue that potential future free trade agreements signed by the EU with other countries, such as the U.S., would effectively open Turkey's market to exports from these states because Ankara is a signatory of the Customs Union Agreement.

But, at the same time, it would also effectively block Turkish exports from benefiting from tax advantages in those same states, should Ankara not be a party to the free trade deals negotiated by the EU. The Customs Union Agreement with the EU, which was signed in 1995, has come under criticism as of late in Turkey as advantages acquired over the last 19 years have slowly been eroded. Indeed, Turkey's lack of progress in its EU bid, the change in world trade structure and free trade deals negotiated between Brussels and third-party countries are but a few of the reasons cited to promote the renegotiation of the agreement with the EU. "Turkey has withstood the competitive pressures coming from low-cost third-party countries, without much funding from the EU," Arzuhan Dogan Yalcindag, former chairwoman of the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association said during the panel. She added that Turkey should be able to participate in trade agreements that the EU is negotiating with other states. "If Turkey is not included in the [Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership] process, we fear our interests would be harmed," she added.

FDI inflow to Turkey rises by 10 percent in 2014

Anadolu Agency, 27.10.2014



International net direct investments in Turkey totaled \$8.6 billion in the first eight months of 2014, a 9.8 percent increase from the same period of the previous year, the Economy Ministry announced. The manufacturing sector benefited most from foreign direct investments, followed by the financial sector.

The ministry data showed that 63 percent of the capital, came from the European Union. The data also showed that 2,801 foreign-funded new companies were established in the first eight months of the year, up from the 2,313 firms registered in the same period last year.

As of August 2014, a total of 40,506 companies were operating in Turkey with international capital, 24,136 of them in Istanbul, the ministry said. Antalya followed Istanbul with 4,313 companies. Some 5,949 companies are German-funded and 2,736 have British funding. "Foreign capital inflow is of great importance for Turkey as the country's savings ratio is not sufficient to fuel its 5 percent growth target," Turkish Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci said Oct. 17. "It is not possible for Turkey to reach its 2023 economic targets with its current low levels of savings. We want to grow more through foreign direct investments to our country to achieve sustainable, predictable and stable growth," Zeybekci said at the "Regional Hub for Sustainable Competitiveness: Turkey" conference of the International Investors Association of Turkey (YASED) in Istanbul, vowing to do "whatever it takes" to attract more FDI to Turkey. "We know how low our savings are, at around 16 percent of our GDP. This amount is not enough for us to maintain an average yearly growth of 5 percent. More FDI flow is therefore of great importance for us," he added.

Turkey ranks 55 out of 189 countries in ease doing business

Hurriyet Daily News, 30.10.2014



Turkey ranked 55 out of the 189 countries surveyed for the World Bank's annual Ease of Doing Business report. "Turkey dropped to 55th place in the list this year out of 189 countries, from 51st on last year's updated list. This tiny drop was caused by the increase in the minimum capital requirements in Turkey," said World Bank's Turkey Director Martin Raiser.

"We can say that Turkey is in a good position in terms of ease of doing business and it has a score that can be expected from an upper-middle income country, but it needs to make more reforms to compete with the best performers in the list," Raiser added.

Turkey originally ranked 69 in the report last year, but it rose to 51 after the World Bank made changes to its calculation method. The ease of doing business ranking is now based on the "distance to frontier" score. This measure shows how close each economy is to global best practices in business regulation. A higher score indicates a more efficient business environment and stronger legal institutions, according to the World Bank report. "When the distance to frontier score is taken into consideration, we see that Turkey's score has increased. This is very good," said Raiser. However, the report stated that Turkey had made starting a business more difficult by increasing notary and company registration fees. It also added that Turkey had made doing business harder by increasing companies' social security costs. On the other hand, the World Bank praised Turkey for making the enforcing of contracts easier by introducing an electronic filing system for court users.

Overall, the World Bank's 12th annual report found that the 10 economies with the most business-friendly regulatory environments are Singapore, New Zealand, Hong Kong SAR, China, Denmark, the Republic of Korea, Norway, the U.S., the U.K., Finland and Australia. The 10 economies that have improved the most since last year are Tajikistan, Benin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Trinidad and Tobago, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Azerbaijan, Ireland, and the United Arab Emirates. "While 80 percent of the countries in the study improved their business regulations last year, only about one-third moved up in the rankings. However, the gap between the best and worst-performing countries continues to narrow as countries improve their business climates," wrote Rita Ramalho, manager of the Doing Business Project in the opening remarks of the report. "It's easier to do business this year than it was last year, [and easier] than it was two years ago or 10 years ago," she added. "We see that the economies that score the lowest are reforming more intensely, so they are converging toward the economies that do the best."

Egypt to hurt its economy by canceling trade agreement

Hurriyet Daily News, 29.10.2014



Egypt's government "will damage the country and the people's interests and prosperity" with its decision not to extend a comprehensive free trade agreement with Turkey, Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Tanju Bilgic has said.

"The current agreements with Egypt ... only held a small place in Turkey's trade with the region, but made significant contributions to Egypt's economy," Bilgic said in a written statement late Oct. 28. Egypt recently unilaterally annulled an agreement with Turkey for Ro-Ro and transit land transportation and declared it would not extend the agreement, which is in effect until April 2015.

It also decided not to extend a comprehensive free trade agreement signed with Turkey during the rule of the ousted ex-President Mohamed Morsi, the MENA news agency reported on Oct. 28. Ties between the two countries have been strained since Morsi's ouster last year, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan repeatedly condemning the "coup" and describing the military government as illegitimate. An undersecretary from Egypt's Transport Ministry was quoted as saying that the agreement, made up of several close cooperation measures, including allowing ships from both countries to use their respective waters, had significantly damaged the Egyptian national economy. Both countries downgraded their diplomatic relations after Egypt withdrew its ambassador from Turkey over Ankara's stance on the overthrow of Morsi. A recent attempt to spark dialogue between the two countries' foreign ministers in New York was nixed after Erdogan's strongly-worded criticism of Cairo at the U.N. General Assembly.

Kurds in Syria complain of years of marginalization under Assad but also fear Sunni Muslim militants. A report on state news agency SANA on Oct. 27 denied a claim which it said some Kurdish members of the Syrian government had made that Damascus was not helping Syrian Kurds besieged by Islamic State, the most powerful anti-Assad militant group. "The support provided by the government to Syrian Kurds is known and documented and comprehensive, including military support," SANA quoted the media source as saying. It said that the aid included direct and indirect military support but did not say which groups were recipients or when Damascus last sent military aid to Kurds. Salih Muslim, the co-chair of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) whose armed wing is leading the Kurdish fight against ISIL in northern Syria, told Reuters on Monday that no support had arrived from Damascus. "They are making such propaganda but it's not true, completely wrong," he said. "They have never done anything for Kobane," he added, referring to the Syrian border town where Kurdish fighters are besieged by ISIL forces. In Iraq, Kurds are one of the main Western allies against ISIL. A week ago, United States air-dropped arms to help the Kurds in Kobane.

First Iraqi Kurdish forces enter Syria's Kobane

Anadolu Agency, 30.10.2014



About 10 Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga fighters entered the Syrian town of Kobane through the border crossing with Turkey on Oct. 30, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The monitoring group said the remaining peshmerga fighters were expected to enter the town - known as Ayn al-Arab in Arabic - "within hours".

Syria has accused Turkey of committing a "flagrant violation" of its sovereignty, state television said. "Once again, Turkey has shown its conspiratorial role... by allowing foreign forces and terrorist groups to enter Syria," a foreign ministry statement said.

"This constitutes a flagrant violation of Syrian sovereignty." Two groups of Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga fighters linked up in Turkish border town of Suruc. A convoy of Peshmerga fighters carrying heavy weaponry and traveling by road arrived in Suruc after a painstakingly slow journey across Turkey, the reporter said. There they were met by a second group of Iraqi Peshmerga who had arrived by air in the region's main city of Sanliurfa in the early hours of Wednesday and then moved on to Suruc to await their comrades. They were waiting in a storage facility in Suruc, 10 kilometers from the border, which was heavily guarded by Turkish security forces who were not allowing media to approach close. It took the road convoy some 24 hours to make the around 400 kilometer journey from the Iraqi border to Suruc, held up along the way by crowds of Turkish Kurds who greeted their arrival. A contingent of fighters from the anti-Damascus regime Free Syrian Army (FSA) early Wednesday also entered Kobane, boosting hopes the jihadists could be defeated in the battle for the town.

ISIL attack on Syria oil field kills 30

Reuters, 29.10.2014



Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) jihadists have attacked an oil and gas field in Syria, killing at least 30 pro-regime forces and security guards, a monitoring group said Oct. 29. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the attack was launched on Tuesday night and fighting continued through the night.

“ISIL managed to control parts of the field,” the Britain-based group said after the assault at Shaer. An unknown number of jihadists were also killed, Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said. He said fighting resumed after several hours of relative calm, with the army bombing the region.

The Syrian Al-Watan daily, which is close to the government, acknowledged the ISIL advance, saying the group had taken control of “two wells and a hill” after fierce clashes. The newspaper reported dead and injured on both sides without giving a specific toll. “Army forces, backed by the National Defence Forces (pro-regime militia) are trying to retake control of the field,” the newspaper added. An earlier attack by ISIL fighters on Shaer in July left 270 people dead, including soldiers and pro-regime fighters. Most were reportedly executed at gunpoint after being taken prisoner. The site is near the famed archeological site of Palmyra. ISIL has targeted oil and gas facilities in Iraq and Syria as it seeks funds for its fight to seize territory for a self-proclaimed Islamic “caliphate”.

Iraqi Kurds prepared to send more fighters to Kobane

Hurriyet Daily News, 30.10.2014



Iraqi Kurdish is prepared to deploy more forces to the Syrian border town of Kobane if asked, the region’s president said in a statement, in which he thanked Turkey and the U.S. for their cooperation in sending Iraqi Kurds to the Syrian town.

President of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Masoud Barzani said they only sent a “backup force and weaponry” to Kobane, adding, “We will not hesitate to send more Peshmerga troops if the conditions at the battlefield change or if there is a request for further troops and we once again have consent.”

Barzani also stated Turkish approval and U.S. support enabled Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga fighters to go to Kobane to reinforce the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The leaders of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Kobane had requested a backup team of Peshmerga with heavy weapons “and based on their request we decided to send this force,” Barzani said. “[U.S.] Secretary of State John Kerry in a telephone conversation told me they were working with Turkey about sending Peshmerga forces through Turkish territory to Kobane,” he said. He also stated the deployment of Peshmerga forces to Kobane had involved several meetings between Kurdish, U.S. and Turkish officials. The leader described standing by Kobane “as a patriotic duty.”

“It is an honor for Kurdish and the brave Peshmerga to help any town or village in any part of Kurdish,” said Barzani. “It is an honor that we are fighting the most violent terrorist group on behalf of humanity.” “In the beginning, and due to geographical distance and the siege by terrorists, sending support to Kobane was very difficult. But we have done our best with our own people and our friends to make sure Kobane doesn’t fall to the terrorists,” he said. Barzani also described ISIL as a “racist organization.” “The group isn’t only an extremist religious group, but most of them are also racists. That is why they have targeted the Kurdish Region and Rojava,” he emphasized.

Sweden is first EU member to recognize Palestine as state

Anadolu Agency, 30.10.2014



Sweden’s newly elected center-left government has officially recognized Palestine as a state on Thursday, making it the first EU member to do so. “Today the government takes the decision to recognize the state of Palestine,” Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom said in a statement published in the Swedish daily, Dagens Nyheter.

By recognizing Palestine as a state, Wallstrom said Sweden wanted to first give its support to “the moderates among the Palestinians.” She referred to those “who will govern the complex Palestinian policy and those who soon will again have to sit down at the negotiating table.

On October 3, Sweden’s Prime Minister Stefan Lofven had announced that his country would recognize Palestine as a state. “The conflict between Israel and Palestine can only be solved with a two-state solution, negotiated in accordance with international law,” Lofven said. “A two-state solution requires mutual recognition and a will to peaceful coexistence. Sweden will therefore recognize the state of Palestine.” The decision comes after the Social Democrats won the Swedish parliamentary elections, in alliance with the Greens and the Left Party on September 14. Countries such as Hungary, Poland and Slovakia also recognize Palestine as a state; however they had done so before joining the European Union. Although the U.N. General Assembly approved the de facto recognition of the sovereign state of Palestine in 2012, the European Union has not followed suit. -.

Russia urges Israel to refrain from construction on occupied Palestinian territories

CNN, 26.10.2014



Russia is strongly urging Israel to abandon plans to proceed with the construction of settlements on the occupied Palestinian territories, the Foreign Ministry's official spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said. "Israel's plans to expand settlements in any part of the occupied Palestinian territories run counter to the international law and cannot but arouse deep concerns," Lukashevich said.

Russia is especially concerned about the construction projects in East Jerusalem as "any ill-thought-out unilateral actions there may have far-reaching consequences," Lukashevich said.

The statement comes after Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this week announced plans to construct over 1,000 new housing units in populous Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. Netanyahu has also ordered preparations for implementing infrastructure projects in the West Bank, including the construction of 12 new roads to be used by both settlers and Palestinians. The continued construction in the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is one of the key obstacles to the peaceful settlement of the decades-long Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The international community urges Israel to abandon settlement activity which hampers efforts to resolve the conflict based on the principle of two states for two peoples.

Israel broke international law

Anadolu Agency, 30.10.2014



Israel violated international law according to a report released Thursday that investigated the use of human shields during Israel's 2014 onslaught of the Gaza Strip. The report, published by the Geneva-based Euro-Mid human rights observer, says that the Israeli army broke international law on at least six occasions in the southern Gaza Strip in August.

Civilians were subjected to "inhumane and abusive" treatment, according to the report entitled, "Israeli Matrix of Control: use of Palestinian civilians as human shields." Palestinians were beaten and exposed to the hot sun while naked for long periods of time, investigators found.

The human rights organization claims that testimonies collected by its observers show that the use of Palestinian human shields is a recurring Israeli policy since there have been similar cases outside of Gaza, such as in the West Bank. Jessica Purkiss from the Middle East Monitor, told Anadolu Agency on Thursday that the cases of human shields were "horrific." Purkiss referenced the case of Ramadan Qdeih from Khan Younis, where he told observers that he saw his father shot dead and was made to stand at the windows with his hands tied while Israeli soldiers stood behind him, shooting. "It's complete injustice, it's treating people absolutely like animals, and I think it's symbolic of how the Israeli military see Palestinians and Gazans," said Purkiss. The Euro-Mid team also said that they did not find any evidence of Palestinians who were forced to stay in their homes or to use their bodies for the protection of Palestinian fighters.

The report calls on Israeli military prosecutors to carry out a "serious and reliable" investigation of the cases documented in the report and asks for the individuals that are found guilty to be held to account. Euro-Mid also called on the United Nations Human Rights Council to establish a fact-finding mission into the recent conflict and to investigate the issue of human shields. Ihsan Adel, a legal advisor working at Euro-Mid, told Anadolu Agency that they will give the evidence that they have gathered to the UN in the hope that those who committed crimes would face trial. Adel said that both Palestinians and Israelis should join the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court and an investigation should be launched into war crimes committed during the war on Gaza. In a separate report released Thursday by the same organization, it was claimed that the Israeli military deliberately carried out indiscriminate attacks on the Gaza Strip. The observers based their claims on the testimonies of 432 people and again urged a UN investigation. Euro-Mid said that "reconstruction of the Gaza Strip is needed for Palestinians... However without accountability for crimes and protection for human rights; it will be a life without dignity or hope."

The report concludes that Israel violated Article 16 of the fourth Geneva Convention that obliges parties to protect people with special needs such as those with disabilities. "By bombing a Palestinian charity and other institutions housing disabled people without effective warning, Israeli forces violated its obligations under the fourth Geneva Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities," the report said.

Israel has denied all charges that it has acted outside of international law and has instead accused Hamas of using human shields. During Israel's onslaught this summer, over 15,000 housing units were damaged across the Gaza Strip, including 2,200 that were totally destroyed, according to official Palestinian figures. More than 2,160 Gazans were killed and 11,000 injured, mostly civilians, during seven weeks of unrelenting Israeli bombardment -- from air, land and sea -- throughout July and August.

Israeli policy on Iran is the biggest threat to its 'special relationship' with America

The Guardian, 30.10.2014



Is the US-Israel relationship in crisis? The prominent journalist Jeffrey Goldberg – the man a White House aide once called the “official therapist” of the relationship – seems to think so.

But while most coverage of Goldberg's long article in *The Atlantic* revolves around an unnamed official calling Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu “chickenshit” – which the Obama administration spent two days disavowing – lost in the pearl-clutching is the insightful look at how Netanyahu's policies on Iran are a direct affront on American interests.

Even most of the rest of chatter about the story focused on Israel's expansion of settlement plans in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as a sore spot in the so-called “special relationship” between the US and Israel. Settlements are certainly an effective test of Israel's intentions in the peace process (and the US would be remiss to not denounce their expansion as harmful to prospects for peace). But while settlement expansion depletes hope for a two-state solution – and exact a price on America's overall standing in the world – they are hardly as big a problem for the US as Israel's Iran policies – especially considering Israel's Iran-related involvement in American domestic politics and, most recently, its utter rejection of diplomatic progress in Iran and a prospective comprehensive nuclear accord. American interests are far more threatened by Netanyahu's Iran positions than by his reluctance to make peace with the Palestinians: the direct costs to America of Israeli settlement expansion and peace process intransigence over the past six years pale in comparison to the potential costs of a hot American war with another Middle Eastern country (especially a country whose regional power outstrips by orders of magnitude any actor the US has fought over the past decade).

For example, an eminent bi-partisan panel of experts from the Iran Project warned last year that the “unintended consequences” of an American attack on Iran could lead to the US being bogged down in an “all-out regional war”. The tensions between the two leaders' approaches to Iran were on display even before Obama took power. In 2008 – while Obama was touting diplomacy on the campaign trail – Netanyahu (then Israel's opposition leader) reportedly told George W Bush's

national security adviser Stephen Hadley that then-Iranian president Mahmoud “Ahmadinejad is a modern Hitler and the mistakes that were made prior to the Second World War must not be repeated” – a reference to pre-war diplomatic agreements between the British and that Nazis that were subsequently violated by the latter. After being elected, Obama maintained throughout his first term that Israel’s security was sacrosanct and pledged to keep “all options on the table” to prevent an Iranian from obtaining a nuclear weapon. But Obama’s offer to Iran of talks over the nuclear program also remained on the table.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, sharpened his rhetoric and made one thing clear: either the US would bomb Iran’s nuclear facilities, or Israel would do it. There was, as far as he was concerned, no room here for talking to today’s Nazis. Many regarded the bluster as a bluff, but his purpose was to pressure the US into taking harsher measures against Iran – climaxing in an inevitable military confrontation. Israel’s Iran policy over the past half-dozen years has basically been to pressure the US – and it might’ve, as Goldberg noted in his piece, convinced the US to impose tougher sanctions on Iran. But most striking was how Netanyahu went about applying that pressure: by leveraging his American allies in Congress and special interest groups (particularly the powerful American Israeli Political Action Committee – Aipac) against the administration. By late 2013, secret talks between the Obama administration and Iran – much to the consternation of Netanyahu’s government – came to a head in an interim nuclear agreement that laid a plan for this year’s effort to reach a comprehensive deal.

Netanyahu reacted with anger, calling the interim deal a “historic mistake”, and his cabinet ministers waged a campaign of either intentional or deeply sloppy misinformation about the deal. And Netanyahu to this day maintains that any deal with Iran must eliminate its domestic enrichment program – a view that Iran experts agree is an unrealistic and unworkable position. Aipac swung into action around the interim deal, lobbying for a sanctions bill in Congress that would have ended talks and imposed onerous requirements on a final deal. That bill stalled due to grassroots opposition and parliamentary stone-walling by the Democratic majority leader Harry Reid. Now the US, its international partners and Iran are on the cusp of a potential comprehensive nuclear accord that would restrain Iran’s program in exchange for reducing international sanctions against them – but Netanyahu’s opposition to the deal remains steadfast and his US allies have denounced a deal of which few of us currently know the exact contours. If a deal is finally struck, it would be a major foreign policy accomplishment for the Obama administration amid a dark regional picture of chaos and instability. But Netanyahu would have the US throw it away in order to maintain the position that Iranian leaders are Nazis we cannot appease – in other words, a situation in which war is the only answer. “The crisis in US-Israel relations is officially here,” blared Goldberg’s Atlantic headline. Given Israel’s positions on Iran over the past six years, what’s remarkable is that it took so long to arrive.

UK formally ends combat mission in Afghanistan

CNN, 26.10.2014



Britain formally ended its combat mission in Afghanistan on Sunday 26 October, lowering the Union Jack for the final time before handing over its last remaining base to the Afghan forces.

“I made a commitment that I would get our Armed Forces out of Afghanistan by 2015, and today sees the end of combat operations in the country,” Prime Minister David Cameron tweeted on Sunday. American troops also took part in the ceremony at the Bastion-Leatherneck coalition base in Helmand province, marking the end of 13 years of UK military operations in the country.

Britain's military presence moved to Helmand in 2006 to tackle an insurgency together with troops from the United States and other countries. A total of 453 UK troops have died in service in Afghanistan. “We will always remember the courage of those who served in Afghanistan on our behalf and never forget those who made the ultimate sacrifice,” said Cameron. According to the Ministry of Defence, Afghan National Security Forces will take over the bases and all operations. The United Kingdom will continue to support them in their development. Already, the country's military is handling most of its security needs.

“In June 2013, the 330,000-strong ANSF took assumed lead responsibility for security across Afghanistan and since then they have been responsible for 99% of operations,” the ministry said. Meanwhile, two rocket attacks hit the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood of Kabul, home to the American Embassy, reported Pajhwok News Agency and Tolo News, a CNN affiliate that cited Kabul police spokesman Hashmat Stanekzai. There were no known casualties. Also, two rockets landed outside the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, confirmed ISAF spokesman Mike Hartnett, speaking to CNN by phone. Hartnett said the attacks resulted in no ISAF casualties.

Hong Kong activists mark one month of 'Umbrella Movement'

Agence France-Presse, 28.10.2014



Hong Kong democracy activists on Oct. 28 marked one month of mass protests, calling on supporters to gather for an evening rally wearing the masks they have used to ward off police tear gas and pepper spray.

Organisers striving to inject new momentum into the movement told crowds to gather at the main protest camp opposite the city's government headquarters for commemorations starting with an 87-second silence at 5:57 pm (0957 GMT). At that time on September 28, riot police shot 87 volleys of tear gas at crowds of largely peaceful protesters who had taken over a highway near the city parliament.

That decision backfired, drawing tens of thousands of sympathisers onto the streets and kickstarting a movement that has become the most concerted challenge to Beijing since the bloody 1989 Tiananmen protests. Demonstrators are calling on Beijing to rescind its insistence that candidates standing to be the city's leader in 2017 must be vetted by a loyalist committee -- an arrangement demonstrators deride as "fake democracy". But the Chinese government shows no sign of backing down and protest leaders are unsure of how to achieve their goals. Occupy Central, one of the main protest groups, called on supporters to don the same protective masks and goggles they wore to defend themselves when the street rallies descended into chaotic confrontations.

The protests have been dubbed the "Umbrella Movement" following the creative ways demonstrators used them to shelter from the heat, torrential rain, pepper spray and police batons. A Facebook group has called on supporters to open umbrellas en masse at 6 pm to "express our disappointment and outrage" over police heavy-handedness and the lack of political progress. More than 9,000 people have so far pledged to take part. Hu Jia, a prominent Chinese dissident on the mainland currently under house arrest, said he would unfurl his own umbrella in solidarity with Hong Kong. "I will participate in this event. In my home prison in Beijing," he told AFP. Now into their fifth week, the protests are at something of an impasse.

Student leaders held talks with government negotiators one week ago but made little headway, while a planned poll to gauge the movement's response to the government was shelved on Sunday. At the same time, the movement's leaders are aware the disruption caused by their roadblocks has caused mounting frustration among some Hong Kongers. The city's Beijing-backed leader Leung Chun-ying has seen his popularity nosedive during the crisis. A new poll by the Chinese University of Hong Kong showed Leung now scores 38.6 on an approval scale among voters which runs from 0 to 100 -- his lowest since taking office in March 2012 when his score was 53.9. Protest camps have been frequently attacked by angry locals and masked thugs -- some of whom are thought to have links to the city's murky criminal triad gangs. The police have also repeatedly clashed with demonstrators during attempts to clear some of the protest camps and ease traffic disruption.

US air war on ISIL costing \$8.3 million a day

Agence France-Presse, 28.10.2014



The Pentagon has revised its estimate of the cost of the U.S. air war in Iraq and Syria, saying the price tag for the campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) comes to about \$8.3 million a day. Since air strikes began on August 8, the campaign has cost \$580 million, said Pentagon spokesman Commander Bill Urban.

The Defense Department had previously put the average daily cost of the military operation at more than \$7 million a day. The higher figure reflected the increased pace of air strikes and related flights, a defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP.

But independent analysts say the Defense Department is underestimating the genuine cost of the war effort, which began in mid-June with the deployment of hundreds of U.S. troops to secure the American embassy in Baghdad and to advise the Iraqi army. Some former budget officials and outside experts estimate the cost of the war has already exceeded a billion dollars, and that it could rise to several billion dollars in a year's time. Todd Harrison of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments projected the war could cost \$2.4 to \$3.8 billion a year, in an analysis issued on September 29. If the intensity of the bombing raids is expanded, the air war could cost as much as \$4.2 to \$6.8 billion per year, according to Harrison's report. One of the biggest drains on the budget for the air war are the large number of surveillance and reconnaissance flights that bombing raids require, analysts say.

The campaign, dubbed "Operation Inherent Resolve," has seen thousands of spy flights and aerial refueling runs. The cost of flying the spy planes range from about \$1,000 an hour for Predator and Reaper drones to \$7,000 an hour for high-altitude Global Hawk drones, or as much as \$22,000 per hour for E-8 J-STAR (Joint Surveillance Target Radar Attack System) aircraft. Funds for the air war are coming out of the Pentagon's de facto war budget, the Overseas Contingency Operations fund. Separate from the regular defense "base" budget, the OCO fund is often portrayed as a "credit card" to cover the costs of wars. Congress increased the OCO budget to about \$85 billion for last fiscal year, ending Sept. 30. The proposed fund for the new fiscal year 2015 is due to drop to \$54 billion.

Announcements & Reports

► *Toward a new era in Tunisian politics: 2014 parliamentary elections*

Source : ORSAM

Weblink : http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/enUploads/Article/Files/20141024_policybrief14ing.pdf

► *Capital confidence barometer*

Source : Ernst & Young

Weblink : [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssetsPI/EY-Capital-Confidence-Barometer-Global-October-2014/\\$FILE/Global_Capital_Confidence_Barometer_Oct14.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssetsPI/EY-Capital-Confidence-Barometer-Global-October-2014/$FILE/Global_Capital_Confidence_Barometer_Oct14.pdf)

► *2014 global aerospace and defense industry outlook*

Source : Deloitte

Weblink : http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedStates/Local%20Assets/Documents/us_AD_GlobalAandDOutlook_01022014.pdf

► *Anticipating problems, finding solutions: global annual review 2014*

Source : PwC

Weblink : <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/global-annual-review/assets/pwc-global-annual-review-2014.pdf>

► *A blueprint for addressing the global affordable housing challenge*

Source : Mc Kinsey & Company

Weblink : http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/urbanization/tackling_the_worlds_affordable_housing_challenge

► *Improving the protection of internally displaced women: assessment of progress and challenges*

Source : Brookings

Weblink : <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/10/un%20dps%20women/improving%20the%20protection%20of%20internally%20displacement%20women%20october%2010%202014.pdf>

► *Illegal logging and related trade: the response in Indonesia*

Source : Chatham House

Weblink : http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20141029IllegalLoggingIndonesiaHoareWellesleyFinal.pdf

Upcoming Events

► *Climate Change: Raising Ambition, Delivering Results*

Date : 03 November 2014
Place : London – United Kingdom
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/conferences/ClimateChange14>

► *Exclusive Seminar on State-to-State Arbitration for Government Officials*

Date : 04 November 2014
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.encharter.org/>

► *Unbundling Mexico's Telecommunications Sector: Reform, Investment and Digital Democracy*

Date : 10 November 2014
Place : Houston – CUSA
Website : <http://bakerinstitute.org/events/1672/>

► *The New EU Political Cycle: Addressing the Growth Agenda*

Date : 12 – 13 November 2014
Place : Bratislava – Slovakia
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/464-the-new-eu-political-cycle-addressing-the-growth-agenda/>

► *Food Security: Mapping Risks, Building Resilience*

Date : 01 – 02 December 2014
Place : London – United Kingdom
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/foodsecurity2014>

► *11th Asia Europe Economic Forum*

Date : 05 December 2014
Place : Tokyo – Japan
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/view/460/>

► *18th Middle East Iron and Steel Conference*

Date : 08 December 2014
Place : Dubai – United Arab Emirates
Website : <http://www.woodmac.com/public/events>

► *Ageing and Health: Policy-making in an Era of Longevity*

Date : 09 February 2015
Place : London – United Kingdom
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/conferences/ageing>

► *Security and Defense*

Date : 23 February 2015
Place : London – United Kingdom
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/Defence2015>

► *Diversifying MENA Economies*

Date : 02 - 03 March 2015
Place : London – United Kingdom
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/conferences/MENA-Economies>