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World ...

Pafilis underlined the necessity of Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, establishing an independent Palestinian state with Beit-ul-Moqaddas as capital, the return of Palestinian refugees, and the release of Arab detainees from the Zionist regime's jails.

The Council's Chairperson, Sorko Goms, in his address said, "Israel's brutal acts against the Palestinians and its attack on Gaza are crimes against humanity", voicing the council's solidarity with just causes in the region.

She criticized interference in sovereign states' internal affairs in the name of democracy and freedom.

Qoms also called for freeing the world from weapons of mass destruction by implementing the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and supporting states that seek to acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

For his part, Head of Pro-Peace Movement's National Council in Syria, Ahmad Al-Hassan said: "The world public opinion and peoples of the region aspire for translating words about peace and freezing settlement-building, especially in Beit-ul-Moqaddas, into clear-cut, tangible steps on the ground under the current U.S. administration".

(Source: sns.sy)

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West ...

Soltanieh did not reveal any details of the Iranian proposals, but Press TV earlier quoted a senior member of the Iranian negotiating team as saying that Iran prefers to buy the fuel from an international seller.

Iran can produce 20 percent enriched nuclear fuel

Soltanieh also said that Iran is able to domestically produce 20 percent enriched nuclear fuel for the Tehran research reactor.

However, Iran prefers to purchase the needed fuel for the reactor, which is part of a peaceful project for the production of medical isotopes, from foreign countries.

Iran insists its nuclear program is completely peaceful and that it has the right to enrich uranium.

Western states believe it is attempting to develop a nuclear weapons program, although the IAEA has never found evidence that Iran's civilian nuclear program has been diverted to weapons production.

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the U.S.) and Germany -- which are collectively known as the 5+1 group -- plan to hold a new round of wider-ranging nuclear talks with Iran in Geneva next week.

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Iran ...

Najjar traveled to Pakistan to discuss the two countries' response to the October 18 terrorist attack in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan in which at least 42 people were killed. Jundullah claimed responsibility for the attack.

To further strengthen security ties, it was agreed that the deputy interior ministers of Iran and Pakistan will meet in the near future, Najjar added.

He described the upcoming meeting between the governor of Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan Province and the governor general of Pakistan's Balochistan Province as "a positive and significant step" to resolve the security problems on the Iran-Pakistan border.

Najjar expressed hope that the Pakistani government will soon detain the members of Jundullah responsible for the recent attack and extradite them to Iran.

The Iranian interior minister also called

his meeting with the Pakistani prime minister positive and constructive.

Commenting on the despicable actions of the Jundullah terrorist group, Najjar told Gilani, "Unfortunately, the criminal actions of the group have cast a shadow over bilateral ties between Tehran and Islamabad."

Najjar also noted, "Iran and Pakistan can begin a new golden era of strategic cooperation by rooting out the Jundullah terrorist group."

Prime Minister Gilani said that Pakistan is now facing a new wave of extremism and terrorism that requires serious efforts by both countries to resolve border security issues as quickly as possible.

Gilani also expressed hope that the Iranian interior minister's visit would help expand and strengthen ties between Islamabad and Tehran.

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Rise ...

Revived role

Observers believe that Turkey's new attitude toward Israel is part of a plan to revive the role it believes it should play as the leader and guardian of the Muslim World.

"The new Turkish policy is interesting, in terms of trying to regain its ties with the Arab and Muslim world," said Mounzer Sleiman, the director of the Centre for American and Arab Studies.

"It is not the first Turkish government that has tried to do this, but the aspiration to join the EU was an obstacle. This government realizes that the road to the EU is rough and complicated, so it chose to go with its strategic plans in its Muslim environment instead of waiting indefinitely."

Turkey also believes it is traditionally and historically linked to the rest of the Middle East - Turkish Ottoman Empire ruled large parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe for almost five centuries, until its defeat in the First World War.

The new policy, aimed at placing Ankara at the center of Middle East's geopolitics and regaining Turkey's former power and influence over the region, makes conscious reference to the country's imperial past. The trend is even known as Neo-Ottoman, a term coined by Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish foreign minister and architect of the policy.

It is a popular approach. Erdogan says that the decision to exclude Israel from Anatolia Eagle drill was based on Turkish public opinion.

"Anyone who exercises political power has to take account of public opinion ... It is a question of sincerity... I want people to know that Turkey is a powerful country which takes its own decisions," he said. "We do not take orders from anyone."

Erdogan believes that the Turkish people back his goals to use the country as a counter-weight in relations between Israel, the West and the Muslim World. This viewpoint is shared by many observers.

"Anyone who looks at the Turkish press and listens to people in the street would realize how much the Turkish public opinion is in support of the government's new approach toward Israel," says Yousef al-Sharif, Al Jazeera's correspondent in Turkey.

"Also, the nature of the current Israeli government, which consists of conservative figures like Netanyahu and (foreign minister Avigdor) Lieberman, makes it easier for Erdogan to take such a tough approach against Israel."

History matters

Since it took office, Erdogan's government has been keen to show that Israel is no longer the only serious power in the region. During the Palestinian intifada uprising in 2000, Turkey condemned the Israel's use of force and can-

celled a proposed water deal with Tel Aviv.

By the end of 2008, the neo-Ottoman doctrine was more advanced. When Tel Aviv launched a war on Gaza in late December 2008, Erdogan squarely blamed the Israelis.

But he also invoked the shared history of Jews and Turks to make his point: "We are speaking as the grandsons of Ottomans who treated your ancestors (Jews) as guests in this land (Turkey) when they were expelled from Europe," he said.

But such references will also remind Israel that the cash-strapped Ottoman Empire turned down an offer by the Zionist leader Theodor Herzl to cede Beit-ul-Moqaddas to the Jews in return for huge loans and a personal reward for Sultan Abd al-Hamid II (1842-1918).

Erdogan's coded historical message was clear: Turkish policy toward the Middle East is no longer led by political expedience, but by principle.

Regional mediator?

Until recently, political analysts and observers characterized the relationship between Turkey and Israel as one based on mutual interests.

Israel needed a strong regional Muslim ally, and Turkey needed the Jewish lobby in the U.S. to prevent Greek and Armenian groups from securing a congressional condemnation against Turkey for its alleged role in the deaths of more than a million Armenians in the early 20th century.

Some observers, however, now believe that Erdogan's current Middle East approach could jeopardize the delicate balance of power in the region.

Elter Turkmen, a former Turkish foreign minister, warned earlier this year that the short-term benefits may be outweighed by the long-term disadvantages. "I do not think Turkish-Israeli relations would reach the point of clash," he said.

"Both sides will lose, Israel will lose a reliable partner and Turkey would lose the backing of Jewish lobby in Washington."

Still, others question whether Istanbul still needs the U.S. Jewish lobby.

Turkey and Armenia signed a landmark peace accord earlier this month, pledging to restore ties and open their shared border after a century of hostility stemming from what Armenians said was the mass killing of their people by Ottoman forces during the First World War.

Some believe that Israel and the U.S. will nevertheless continue to need Turkish help in brokering indirect talks between Israel and Syria, widely seen as a crucial but difficult step in the Middle East peace process.

In June 2008, and after years of diplomatic effort, Turkey succeeded in kick-starting indirect Syrian-Israeli talks. In Iraq, Turkey maintained balanced relationships with almost all Iraqi factions. The culmination of that successful policy was the visit of Muqtada al-Sadr, the Iraqi Shia leader of the Mahdi Army, in May 2009.

Turkey also played a pivotal role in brokering a strategic deal between al-Sadr, the Iraqi government, the UK and the U.S.. Mahdi Army militias laid down their arms and released U.S. and British hostages they had been holding since 2007.

In return the Iraqi government stopped the arrest campaign against the al-Mahdi Army and released some of its jailed leaders such as Abd al-Hadi al-Darraj, in 2009.

Middle East powerhouse

Bashir Nafie, a Palestinian historian specialized in Turkish politics, believes that Ankara is adopting a multi-directional policy, simultaneously resolving conflicts directly linked to its history (rapprochement with Armenia and resolving its Kurdish problem), and tackling the tensions in the

greater region.

He said: "Turkey has realized that its future not only with the EU, but more importantly with its Arab, Muslim and Caucasian neighbors. It also realizes that Western arrangements imposed after the First World War is the core of many problems the region is suffering, and it is willing to solve the problems of that heavy heritage."

Hasan Koni, a former adviser to the Turkish National Security Council agrees that Turkey is likely to play an increasingly important role in Middle Eastern politics in coming years.

"Given the fact that there are no more neo-cons in the White House, and that the new U.S. administration is attempting to get out of Iraq," he says.

"Turkey is qualified to play that role since it is a Muslim state that maintains ties with both Israelis and Arabs."

(Source: aljazeera.net)

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New ...

The court said it would discuss the complaint in a public hearing on October 27, but declined to say how long the process might take.

Friday's statement by Klaus is a second glimmer of hope for the EU in a week after the president suggested last Saturday that he would ultimately sign.

"The train carrying the treaty is going so fast and it's so far that it can't be stopped or returned, no matter how much some of us would want that," he said, fuelling hopes that the treaty might take effect soon.

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Michael ...

His opponent, William C Thompson, a Democrat, has spent just \$6 million in the race. A Thompson campaign spokeswoman on Friday told the Times the mayor's spending was "obscene."

The bulk of Bloomberg's spending has gone into television, radio and Web advertising, it said.

But some of the money has trickled down to recession-hit small businesses, including Goodfellas Brick Over Pizza on Staten Island and in the Bronx.

The Bloomberg campaign has so far forked over \$8,892 for pizza at Goodfellas alone.

Thomson Reuters competes globally with Bloomberg in the delivery of multimedia news, data and enhanced information.

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Israel ...

Netanyahu, whose right-leaning coalition includes pro-settler parties, has resisted Obama's calls for a total freeze on settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, politically weak because he governs only in the West Bank while Hamas Islamists control the Gaza Strip, has said he will not resume direct talks until a complete settlement freeze is implemented.

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ASEAN ...

"We adopted the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on Strengthening Cooperation on Education to achieve an ASEAN caring and sharing society which would promote regional standard of competencies, promote greater mobility of students within educational institutions in the region, as well as promote ASEAN awareness in all three pillars of the ASEAN Community", the Chairman's statement of the 15th ASEAN Summit said.

For this purpose, ASEAN lead-

ers have entrusted relevant sectoral ministers to develop a Five-Year Work Plan on Education.

ASEAN groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam.

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NATO ...

The problem is that Karzai, whose credibility was already in question before the election, has lost even more legitimacy after a million of his votes were found to be fraudulent.

Even if he remains president, analysts and diplomats say that he will have to make dramatic changes to the way that he governs or risk being cut adrift by his Western backers. NATO members made that clear at a meeting Friday in Bratislava, where Robert Gates, the U.S. Defense Secretary, urged them to increase their contributions.

"I think whoever is going to send more troops to Afghanistan will put up some conditions," said Sren Gade, the Danish Defense Minister. "They need to see the new Afghan president and say, 'If we send more troops to your country, you have to deal with this, this and this'."

Western officials in Kabul said that there are several priorities. The first is to unify the country by reaching out to Abdullah Abdullah, the former Foreign Minister who came second in the first round of voting, and will probably be runner-up in the second.

Dr Abdullah is half Tajik and half Pashtun, but he is most popular in the Tajik-dominated north, whereas Karzai is a Pashtun and derives most of his support from the Pashtun south.

Reaching out does not necessarily mean appointing opposition figures to the Cabinet but could involve holding cross-party consultations on key policies at Loya Jirga-style meetings.

Second is to tackle corruption — especially related to the drugs trade — by forming a new Cabinet that excludes crooks and representatives of powerful warlords. Third is to improve governance at all levels by basing decisions on realities and available resources, rather than tribal politics.

There are more specific demands from individual NATO members, such as Britain, which is concerned that Gulab Mangal, the competent governor of Helmand, may soon retire. British officials fear that he will be replaced by Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, who was removed as Helmand governor at their insistence in 2006 after nine tons of opium and heroin were found in his basement.

Karzai will no doubt resist many of these demands, especially if he wins the run-off easily. He will face pressure to reward the warlords who backed him in the election.

If he continues to govern as before, Western governments may soon have no option but to withdraw troops because public support, which is already shaky, will disappear. "The status quo in Afghanistan right now is not sustainable," Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer who has advised President Obama on Afghanistan, said. "We are losing this war." Gorbachev reached similar conclusions in 1985 and decided to sack Karmal and increase the Soviet troop presence to more than 100,000 before starting to pull out in 1987. Not that Karmal's successor fared any better.

Mohammad Najibullah oversaw the Soviet withdrawal and a civil war before seeking refuge in a UN compound in Kabul in 1992. Four years later the Taliban dragged him out, tortured him to death and strung him from a traffic light.

(Source: timesonline.co.uk)

Study says U.S. should engage N. Korea

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A group of experts called Thursday for the United States to open a path of engagement with North Korea, calling it a long-term strategy to moderate the communist state's behavior.

The study by the Asia Society and the University of California flies in the face of the approach by President Barack Obama, who has pushed to toughen sanctions after Pyongyang's string of provocations including a nuclear test.

But the experts said the United States should reconsider some positions including dropping its objections to North Korea's entry into the International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank and other global financial institutions.

"Encouraging a more open and market-friendly economic growth strategy would benefit the North Korean people as a whole and would generate vested interests in continued reform and opening, and a less confrontational foreign policy," the study said.

"In other words, economic engagement could change North Korea's perception of its own self-interest," it said.

While acknowledging it was not a perfect parallel, the study cited the example of neighboring China, saying that its economic transformation has helped moderate the developing giant's foreign policy.

The project was led in part by Charles Kartman, a former top U.S. diplomat for East Asia who headed the Korean Peninsula Economic Development Organization, set up to implement a 1994 denuclearization pact that has since collapsed.

Other authors include John DeLury, associate director of the Center on U.S.-China Relations at the New York-based Asia Society, and Susan Shirk, director of the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation.

Obama administration officials have vowed to be hard-nosed on North Korea, joining many conservatives in pledging not to "reward" the communist state for violating past agreements.

But the study said the Obama administration should follow its own precedent in cases such as Myanmar, with which the United States has offered talks while also maintaining sanctions.

Engagement "can complement our bargaining with North Korea in the short run, and in the long run have a positive influence on the environment in which Pyongyang makes calculations about the costs and benefits of its nuclear weapons and missile programs," the study said.

Shock growth figures derail fight-back plans

Oh dear. That was not in the plan. News that Britain is still in recession comes after weeks of nods, winks and downright flashing neon signs from Number 10 and the Treasury that new figures released on Friday would show a return to growth.

Gordon Brown gave an interview to this newspaper two weeks ago in which he proclaimed he was "going for growth."

He had better get a move on because make no mistake the one shot Mr Brown has left in the barrel is increasingly looking like blank. It is the one that he has been pushing for months: that Britain is, because of his actions, best placed to stave off recession and will emerge from it strongly.

The Prime Minister advised us to contrast that with the "do-nothing" Tories who oppose fiscal stimulus measures and want to pull up the spending drawbridge. Well on Friday night it was George Osborne who, while not appearing to relish continued economic discomfort, will have been smiling.