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## Rafsanjani concerned about terrorism in Iraq

Chairman of the State Expediency Council Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (R) welcomes visiting member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq Adel Abdul-Mahdi in Tehran on January 7.

Chairman of the State Expediency Council Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said that all sects and ethnic groups should be unified to fight the ominous phenomenon of terrorism in Iraq.

In a meeting with visiting member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq Adel Abdul-Mahdi, Rafsanjani said it seems that the terrorist groups are exploiting the dispute and political differences among Iraqi officials, IRNA reported.

Rafsanjani said that the Iraqi government must strengthen national solidarity and political understanding to fight terrorism.

The Iraqi official, for his part, appreciated Islamic Republic of Iran's support for the Iraqi nation.

The Iraqi parliamentarian is in Tehran to discuss issues of mutual interests with Iranian officials.

Meanwhile, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani told Abdul-Mahdi on Wednesday that Iran is pursuing the policy of supporting Iraq's security and national solidarity.

"The present situation in the region requires further solidarity of various political and national groups in Iraq," Larijani said, voicing Tehran's support for any move to strengthen unity in that country.

He reiterated that Tehran has no restrictions on promoting bilateral relations with Baghdad.

He stressed that parliamentary cooperation between the two capitals would seriously help promote bilateral relations and remove any obstacle to that end.

The Iraqi MP briefed Larijani on the latest developments in his country.

Abdul-Mahdi underlined the need for further expansion of all-out cooperation between Tehran and Baghdad, noting that boosting relations between the two parliaments would help the trend.

The Iraqi official also in a Tuesday meeting with Iranian foreign

minister briefed him on the ongoing operations of the Iraqi armed forces against Al-Qaeda-affiliated militants, and described extremism and terrorism as scourges that require collective efforts of all regional countries to be eradicated.

Mohammad Javad Zarif said the fight against terrorism is the demand of people from all walks of the Iraqi society and political currents.

Zarif pointed to the gravity and seriousness of ongoing developments in the region, such as the campaign against terrorism and extremism in Syria and Iraq, and lauded the achievements of the Iraqi government in its campaign against terrorism as well as the pursuit and arrest of those responsible for terrorist attacks on Iranian nationals.

Zarif also made reference to the good relations and cooperation between Iran and Iraq, calling for all-out enhancement of Tehran-Baghdad ties in line with the stability, security and progress of the two neighboring countries as well as the entire region.

He also pointed to the atrocities perpetrated by terrorist groups in various parts of Iraq, noting that many tribal people hit by insecurity and vicious acts have thrown their support behind the Iraqi military forces in their operations against terrorists.

The cities of Fallujah and Ramadi in Iraq's western province of Al-Anbar have been the scene of deadly clashes between the Iraqi army and Al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorists over the past few days.

Iraqi military officials say that dozens of militants loyal to the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant have been killed in Al-Anbar.

The violence broke out on December 30, 2013, when the army removed an anti-government camp in Ramadi. Authorities said the camp was used as "headquarters for the leadership of Al-Qaeda".

## Iran optimistic about comprehensive nuclear deal

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Wednesday that a comprehensive solution to Iran's nuclear program is possible only through mutual commitment to Geneva deal.

On his Facebook page, Zarif wrote that Iran is serious to move towards the joint plan of action reached in November between Iran and the P5+1 group of world powers.

Zarif said that he was optimistic about the landmark nuclear agreement with world powers, saying negotiations were progressing amid "strong political will".

The comments by Iran's top nuclear negotiator came on the eve of the resumption in Geneva on Thursday of talks aimed at putting into action the interim nuclear deal clinched in November. "The nuclear talks are continuing with seriousness and a strong political will," Zarif wrote, adding that hours of technical talks with experts from the so-called P5+1 group



of world powers in December had produced "positive results".

Zarif said Iran was "very serious" about the negotiating process due to begin after the interim deal is implemented. "We believe commitment to the Geneva deal will (allow) progress into the next difficult phase of negotiations, and make reaching a comprehensive

accord quite conceivable," he said.

He further said he is to travel to some influential countries in the region and the world in near future.

The trips will be in line with Iran's policy of constructive interaction with the world, he noted.

Iran and P5+1 reached a deal on Tehran's nuclear program in Geneva on November 24, 2013.

## Halkbank to keep processing Iran energy payments

Turkey's state-owned Halkbank will continue to process payments for Turkey's oil and gas imports from Iran, Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said on Wednesday.

"The state of Iran has accounts with Halkbank and we deposit the payments for the oil and gas purchased to these accounts," Halkbank will continue to carry out this function," Babacan told Bloomberg HT Television.

sons, are still in custody, local media says.

Halkbank has repeatedly said its dealings with Iran are entirely lawful, but its Iranian business ties had drawn western criticism amid US-led efforts to curb Tehran's nuclear program.

Turkey has bought natural gas and oil from Iran through an indirect system whereby Iranian exporters received payment in Halkbank lira accounts and



Halkbank general manager, Suleyman Aslan was among dozens of prominent business people, the sons of three cabinet ministers, and state officials questioned as part of a corruption inquiry swirling around Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's government.

Most have been released but 24, including Aslan and two of the ministers'

used that money to buy gold. The bulk of that gold was then shipped from Turkey to Dubai, where Iran could import it or sell it for foreign currency.

Halkbank said last month that the gold sales had stopped on June 10, in line with a July ban. Since then, sources say, Iranians have bought mostly food and medicine with the funds.

## Gates slams Obama's leadership style in new book

Former US defense secretary Robert Gates, in his upcoming memoir, has harsh words for President Obama's leadership style and commitment to the Afghanistan war, accusing the president of losing faith in his own strategy.

"For him, it's all about getting out," he wrote.

The tone of Gates' book is a break from Washington decorum, in which former cabinet members rarely level tough judgments against sitting presidents. Gates writes that by early 2010 he had concluded the president "doesn't believe in his own strategy, and doesn't

consider the war to be his."

The book, "Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War," is scheduled for a Jan. 14 release by the Knopf DoubleDay Publishing Group.

The 70-year-old Gates writes that Obama appeared to doubt his own strategy in Afghanistan to the point of being "outright convinced it would fail."

Obama deployed 30,000 more troops to stabilize Afghanistan before starting to remove soldiers in mid-2011, after months of tense discussion with Gates and other top advisers.

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## Japanese crude refiner renews contract with Iran

Chairman of Japan's JX Nippon Oil & Energy, said the company has renewed its annual contract with Iran starting Jan. 2014.

Yasushi Kimura added that the confirmation of renewing Iran's annual crude import contract marked the first among Japanese buyers of Iranian oil for the 2014 import contracts.

Refiners Showa Shell, Cosmo Oil and Idemitsu Kosan also have annual crude import contracts with Iran, expiring at the end of March.

"We have concluded our annual contract starting from January," Kimura said on the sidelines of a reception in Tokyo hosted by the Petroleum Association of Japan, of which he is president.

Until December 2012, the company had an annual contract to import 80,000 bpd of Iranian crude. Like Iran's other customers in Japan, JX continues to buy Iranian crude under exemption from US sanctions that would otherwise bar Japanese banks from the US financial system.

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## Geneva deal changes West approach toward Iran

Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht Ravanchi said Wednesday that the Geneva deal reached between Iran and the P5+1 group of world powers turned the West's policy of confronting Iran into interaction with the country.

He made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran on the impacts of the Geneva deal which was struck on November 24, 2013, IRNA reported.

He added after the interim deal, enemy has admitted Iran's right to pursue a domestic nuclear program for peaceful purposes.

Continuation of Iran's enrichment activity is another achievement of the Geneva deal, Takht Ravanchi added.

He said that breaking the mechanism of unfair western sanctions against Iran was the third achievement of the Geneva deal.

"A number of the sanctions are to be removed following the implementation of the Geneva deal," said the diplomat.

Experts of Iran and P5+1 organized a mechanism or a joint plan of action for implementation of the agreement reached between Iran and the sextet (US, Britain, Russia, France and China plus Germany).

The experts have proposed January 20 for implementation of the joint plan of action.

He added that failure of the West's

Iranophobia project as a result of the Geneva deal was another achievement of the accord as it made it clear that Iran is an influential country in the region.

According to Takht Ravanchi, the Geneva deal has led to a row between US and the Zionist regime.

Political circles in Washington are now facing the question whether Washington and Tel Aviv share the same interests and are their national interests in one direction, said the diplomat.

He stressed that the Geneva deal was the outcome of the policy of President Hassan Rouhani's administration for constructive interaction with the world.

The Geneva deal was made about four months after President Rouhani's government came to power, he said.

He added that a large number of political and economic delegations from European countries have flooded to Iran after the Geneva deal voicing willingness to promote bilateral ties with the country.

The deputy foreign minister also said that two European delegations will visit Iran in the coming weeks.

He underlined that delegations from Poland and Sweden will travel to Iran in the near future but no date has yet been fixed for the visits.