1. Joint Arab action

- Arab ministers of foreign affairs vowed, in a meeting held in Cairo, to take the necessary steps to support the efforts of US President Barack Obama to resolve the Arab–Israeli conflict on the basis of achieving a comprehensive peace and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. They called on Israel to cease all settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in order to resume the peace process, affirming that a just and comprehensive peace can be achieved only through ending the Israeli occupation and withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories to the line of 4 June 1967. Arab ministers, however, did not clarify the nature of the steps that would be taken by Arab governments to aid the US administration in its efforts to push the peace process, but US officials had asked Arab countries to take steps to normalize relations with Israel. The Cairo meeting was not attended by the ministers of Saudi Arabia, Sa‘ūd al-Faysal; of Syria, Walīd al-Mu‘allim; or of Qatar, Sheikh Ḥamad bin Jāsim bin Jābir ʿAlī Thānī (al-Nahār, Beirut, 25 June 2009).

- Arab health ministers decided in a meeting held in Cairo to restrict the elderly, children under twelve and the chronically ill from performing this year’s pilgrimage (ḥajj) to Mecca due to fears over the H1N1 flu pandemic (al-Safīr, Beirut, 24 July 2009).

2. Arab–Arab Relations

- Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh discussed with Saudi King Abdullah in Riyadh the situation in Yemen in light of the unrest witnessed in the southern governorates. Saleh said that King Abdullah supports Yemen’s unity and stability (al-Hayāt, Beirut, 1 June 2009).

- Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki affirmed in a meeting with the Kuwaiti Ambassador in Baghdad ʿAlī al-Mu‘min that Iraq is seeking to resolve outstanding issues with Kuwait since the invasion in 1990 through dialogue. Kuwait claimed that Iraq should pay all compensations imposed by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII. In response, some Iraqi legislators demanded compensation from Kuwait for facilitating the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London, 4 June 2009).

- In a meeting held in Cairo, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika discussed bilateral
relations and agreed to coordinate their positions on regional issues (al-Ahrām, Cairo, 18 June 2009).

- Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak discussed with Saudi King Abdullah in Jeddah ways to improve inter-Arab relations. They agreed to develop bilateral relations (al-Hayāt, Beirut, 29 June 2009).

- Saudi envoy to Damascus Prince ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin ʿAbdullah (son of King Abdullah) discussed with Syrian President Bashar Assad the current developments in Lebanon (al-Nahār, Beirut, 30 June 2009). Reports affirmed that the meeting, which was attended by the former Saudi Ambassador in Lebanon and the current Minister of Information ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Khūjah, focused on the relations between Syria and the Lebanese government that will be formed by MP Saad Hariri (al-Quds Al-ʿArabī, London, 30 June 2009).

- A Moroccan court of first instance in Casablanca fined three Moroccan newspapers US$360,000 (US$120,000 each) for defamation and belittling the dignity of the Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi as a head of state (al-Quds Al-ʿArabī, London, 30 June 2009).

- The joint Jordanian–Syrian Demarcation Committee of the Border agreed in a meeting held in Amman to complete all necessary procedures for signing a final agreement for the delineation of the border between the two countries (al-Nahār, Beirut, 20 July 2009).

- Head of al-Sadr movement in Iraq cleric Muqtada al-Sadr discussed with Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus the efforts aimed at consolidating reconciliation in Iraq. Al-Sadr spoke of ‘his deep respect’ for Syria’s policies that support Iraq’s unity (The Daily Star, Beirut, 22 July 2009).

- In a report to the UN Security Council reviewing all Iraq-related resolutions adopted after the Kuwait invasion in 1990, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon urged Iraq and Kuwait to discuss alternatives to payment of the remaining US$25.2 billion debt Iraq owes Kuwait as a result of its invasion. Out of a total of US$52.3 billion in compensations, Baghdad has already paid US$27.1 billion. Iraq currently pays 5% of the proceeds of all oil and gas sales to a UN Compensation Fund, and the government is requesting the Security Council to reduce that ratio to 2.5% (al-Hayāt, Beirut, 29 July 2009).

3. Arab–Israeli Conflict

- Israeli President Shimon Peres called for the establishment of a Palestinian state with provisional borders. Palestinian officials rejected this proposal (which is regarded as an Israeli attempt to avoid Israel’s obligations towards the peace process) (al-Quds Al-ʿArabī, London, 12 June 2009).

- In a new tour in the region to push the peace process, US Middle East envoy George Mitchell visited Cairo and called on Arab leaders to take concrete steps to normalize relations with Israel (al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London, 12 June 2009). Mitchell had talks with Lebanese officials in Beirut, where he pointed to a Lebanese key role in the peace process, affirming that there will be no settlement in the region at the expense of Lebanon (al-Hayāt, Beirut, 13 June 2009). The US envoy continued his tour in the region and discussed with Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus ways to normalize relations between Damascus and Washington. Mitchell indicated the pivotal Syrian role in the peace process (al-Hayāt, Beirut, 14 June 2009).

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu affirmed that his government refuses the return of Palestinian refugees as well as the freezing of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. He reiterated that Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel, and the
Palestinians should recognize Israel as a ‘Jewish state’. Netanyahu affirmed that he would not accept a Palestinian state without assurances that such would be demilitarized. US President Barack Obama regarded Netanyahu’s stance as an important step forward, while the Palestinian Authority condemned his policy, which undermines the basis of peace process (al-Quds Al-‘Arabi, London, 15 June 2009).

● European Union High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana has, for the first time, held talks with Hezbollah MP Husayn Häjj Hasan in Beirut. Israel’s Ministry of Foreign affairs requested Solana to justify a meeting that would not ‘contribute to the disarmament of Hezbollah’ (al-Nahār, Beirut, 15 June 2009).

● Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak stressed Egypt adherence to the principle of land-for-peace as the basis to resolve the Arab–Israeli conflict. He also affirmed that the Palestinian refugees have the right to return, and insisted on the cessation of Jewish settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories (al-Ahrām, Cairo, 16 June 2009).

● Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas discussed with Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus ways to unify the Arab positions to face the policies of Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. They also reviewed the various efforts to end the Palestinian division (al-Hayār, Beirut, 21 June 2009).

● Israeli Minister of Defense Ehud Barak had talks in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the peace process and developments in the region. Barak said that there is a genuine rare opportunity for progress, attributing this opportunity to the existence of common ground between the interests of the moderate countries in the region to fight against terrorism and confront Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Egyptian sources, however, said that the main reason of Barak’s visit to Egypt was to discuss a swap deal to secure the release of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit captured by Hamas (three years ago) in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails (al-Nahār, Beirut, 22 June 2009).

● The Israeli government earmarked US$250 million for the construction of Jewish settlements, despite US calls on Israel to freezing settlements in the West Bank (al-Nahār, Beirut, 22 June 2009).

● The Sudanese Press Service said that ‘Justice and Equality Movement’ (JEM) (a rebel group involved in the Darfur conflict), headed by Khalīl Ibrāhīm, received large quantities of arms from Israel in coordination with Chad to overthrow the regime in Sudan (al-Ahrām, Cairo, 22 June 2009).

● Israeli authorities released the speaker of the Palestinian Parliament, ‘Azīz Dwayk (a Hamas leader in the West Bank), after holding him in prison for three years (al-Safīr Beirut, 24 June 2009).

● Israeli Ma‘ariv newspaper said that Israel plans to buy from the US Stealth fighter jets (F-35) and it will receive twenty-five jets in 2014 (al-Nahār, Beirut, 25 June 2009).

● The two main Palestinian movements Fatah and Hamas failed to sign an Egypt-brokered unity agreement during their sixth round of talks in Cairo to end the Palestinian division. Failure was attributed to difficulties facing both parties in resolving the dossier of detainees as each party denies having political detainees to release (The Daily Star, Beirut, 2 July 2009).

● UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon requested Lebanon and Israel to abide by the obligations of UN Resolution 1701 (The Daily Star, Beirut, 2 July 2009). Hezbollah accused Ban of ‘extreme bias’ towards Israel as he ignored the danger of Israeli spy cells in Lebanon in his tenth report on the implementation of Resolution 1701 (The Daily Star, Beirut, 3 July 2009).
Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev said that Israel had won agreement from the United States for the continued construction of 2500 housing units in Jewish settlements in the West Bank despite US calls for a freeze of settlements (The Daily Star, Beirut, 9 July 2009).

Israel’s National Security Adviser Uzi Arad said that Israel is ready to withdraw from areas of the occupied Golan Heights, but it will not give up large parts of the occupied territory in any peace deal with Syria (The Daily Star, Beirut, 11 July 2009).

The Palestinian Authority rejected any deal between Israel and the US that would allow even limited Jewish settlement construction in the occupied West Bank, top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said. He affirmed that the President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas expressed that message in a letter to US President Barack Obama (al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London [English Edition], 12 July 2009).

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mu‘allim affirmed that Syria will not resume indirect peace talks with Israel unless Israeli officials are willing to discuss a full withdrawal from the occupied Golan Heights (The Daily Star, Beirut, 13 July 2009).

The Israeli Ministry of Transport announced that it will wipe out the Arabic names of towns in Israel from traffic signs and keep only Hebrew names (al-Quds Al-Arab, London, 14 July 2009).

Israel rejected a US demand to suspend a planned housing project in Occupied East Jerusalem (al-Nahar, Beirut, 20 July 2009).

Fourteen peacekeeping troops were injured when scores of protestors confronted soldiers from UNIFIL near the village of Khirbet Silim, South Lebanon, where UNIFIL soldiers tried to investigate an explosion in the village (The Daily Star, Beirut, 20 July 2009).

US Middle East envoy George Mitchell along with US Defense Secretary Robert Gates and US National Security Adviser James Jones had a tour in the region to push for progress toward Middle East peace and to urge Iran to respond to overtures over its nuclear programme. Mitchell confirmed to Israeli officials that Washington’s commitment to Israel’s security was unshakeable, adding that this security could be achieved and protected through comprehensive peace in the region. He called on Israel to make possible improved access and movement and economic growth for Palestinians and for dealing with difficult issues such as settlement and outposts, while calling on Arab leaders to take meaningful steps toward normalizing relations with Israel (The Daily Star, Beirut, 28 July 2009).

The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed that there will be no normalization of relations with Israel before Israel achieves a complete withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and recognizes the ‘two-state solution’ (al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London, 30 July 2009).

4. International Arab Relations

US President Barack Obama met in Riyadh with Saudi King Abdullah seeking counsel before his speech at Cairo University on US relations with the Muslim world. Obama praised the strategic relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia (al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London, 4 June 2009).

US President Barack Obama delivered his speech at the University of Cairo on America’s relationship with Muslim communities in order to build bridges with the Islamic world after the ‘September 11 attacks’. Obama affirmed that America is not at war with the Islamic world as Islam has demonstrated in word and deed, the possibility of tolerance and racial equality, calling for tackling the stereotypical negative
Chronology

Image of Islam as well as the offending image of America. Obama addressed various Arab issues, renewing his support for the establishment of a Palestinian state and his call to freeze the Israeli settlements. He stressed the strong American ties with Israel and criticized those who deny the Holocaust. He called on the Palestinian Authority to develop its capacity to govern with institutions that serve the needs of its people and requested Hamas to recognize Israel’s right to exist. On Iraq, he said that Washington ‘does not seek bases in Iraq’. With regard to Iran, he pointed out that Tehran could have a peaceful nuclear programme (al-Ahrām, Cairo, 5 June 2009).

- Russia, China, Turkey, Libya, Vietnam, Burkina Faso and Uganda rejected a report submitted by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, to the UN Security Council to exert pressure on the Sudanese government to implement the arrest warrant issued by the Court against the Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir (al-Hayāt, Beirut, 7 June 2009).
- Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi visited Italy where he discussed with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi ways to promote bilateral relations. Gaddafi promised to grant Italian companies priority in a plan of €11.8 billion-worth of investments in Libya (al-Hayāt, Beirut, 13 June 2009).
- Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thānī, Emir of Qatar, made a visit to Paris where he discussed with French President Nicolas Sarkozy the situation in Iran and bilateral relations. Sheikh Hamad pointed to the importance of stability in Iran, while Sarkozy praised the positive role of Qatar in the region (al-Safîr, Beirut, 23 June 2009).
- French President Nicolas Sarkozy affirmed that the Islamic veil is not welcome in France, but was careful to say that we ‘should not make mistakes … the Islamic religion must be respected as far as respect for other religions’ (al-Nahār, Beirut, 23 June 2009).
- Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak a strategic partnership agreement between the two countries in Cairo. Mubarak stressed Egypt’s support for the proposed international Middle East peace conference in Moscow (al-Ahrām, Cairo, 24 June 2009).
- Commander of US Central Command, General David Petraeus, discussed with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo the current regional security situation, including Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq. Petraeus praised the military cooperation between the two countries, stressing the status of Egypt as a strategic partner of the US (al-Ahrām, Cairo, 30 June 2009).
- The Israeli Prime Minister’s office denied a report published by The Sunday Times stating Saudi Arabia would turn a blind eye to Israeli jets flying over the Kingdom in any raid on Iran nuclear sites (The Daily Star, Beirut, 6 July 2009). Saudi Arabia denied the report (The Daily Star, Beirut, 7 July 2009).
- French President Nicolas Sarkozy said that Syrian President Bashar Assad kept the commitments that he had promised France concerning Lebanon (The Daily Star, Beirut, 9 July 2009).
- US President Barack Obama said he was troubled by Syria’s behaviour but hoped for progress in ties with former foe Damascus (al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London (English Edition), 12 July 2009). US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman clarified that Syria’s support for Hezbollah remains a point of contention for the United States as the two countries inch toward warmer relations after more than three years of political stand-off (The Daily Star, Beirut, 17 July 2009).
- Iran’s Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki met with his Egyptian counterpart Ahmad Abū al-Ghayṭ on the sidelines of the 15th Non-Aligned Movement Summit
in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Abū al-Ghayt’s spokesman Ḥusām Zakī said the two countries have had their differences but expressed hope they could work together for stability in the region (*The Daily Star*, Beirut, 17 July 2009).

- In an attempt to revise US–Syrian relations, the US administration said it would take new steps to ease American sanctions against Syria on a case-by-case basis (*International Herald Tribune*, Paris, 30 July 2009).

- An Iraqi raid on an Iranian opposition group’s camp north of Baghdad killed seven people. Tensions around the camp known as ‘Camp Ashraf’, housing exiled members of the People’s Mujahedeen Organization of Iran, rose as the Iraqi government stepped up efforts to get the group to leave the country in a friendly gesture to Iran, which regards the members of Camp Ashraf as terrorists. Iran thanked the Iraqi government for the raid (*The Daily Star*, Beirut, 30 July 2009).

- Ministers from the ten African countries on the Nile River agreed to delay the drafting of a new-water sharing agreement for six months, a process that has been hampered by Egypt’s refusal to reduce its share of the world’s longest river. The ministers formed committees to review points of contention over the next six months with the hope of reconciling their differences. Egypt enjoys the largest share of any country along the river according to a fifty-year-old pact. It has resisted an amendment to its share and demanded a veto over any future upstream projects. Participants in the meeting in Alexandria had hoped to establish a permanent body to oversee water allocation (*The Daily Star*, Beirut, 30 July 2009).

5. The situation in Iraq

- Kurdistan region started exporting oil without the approval of the Iraqi central government in Baghdad in an escalation of tension between the two sides (*al-Quds al-‘Arabī*, London, 2 June 2009). Iraqi Oil Minister Ḥusayn al-Shahrūstānī, however, affirmed that all contracts signed by Kurdish officials in the region remain illegal until ratified by the Iraqi ministry of oil (*al-Ḥayāt*, Beirut, 11 June 2009).

- Iraqi MP Ḥārith al-‘Ubaydī, the head of Iraqi Accordance Front, the top Sunni parliamentary bloc, was assassinated in Baghdad after the Friday sermon in which he denounced the indiscriminate arrests and torture of detainees, demanding Iraqi authorities release all innocent detainees. Iraqi Prime Minister Nūri al-Malikī regarded the assassination of al-‘Ubaydī as an attempt to provoke sectarian strife in the country (*al-Ḥayāt*, Beirut, 13 June 2009).

- More than fifty-six people were killed and 166 wounded in a truck bomb explosion near a Shīʿite mosque in Kirkuk (*al-Ḥayāt*, Beirut, 21 June 2009).

- Amid almost daily reports of violence ahead of the US withdrawal from Iraqi cities, fifty-five people were killed and more than 107 wounded in a motorbike bomb blast in Sadr City of eastern Baghdad (*al-Nahār*, Beirut, 25 June 2009).

- Iraqi Kurdistan’s Parliament passed a new constitution in which it laid claim to the disputed oil-rich province of Kirkuk (a move likely to increase ethnic tensions). The text, which also said that areas within Nineveh and Diyala provinces were part of Iraqi Kurdistan, was approved by ninety-six of the 111 MPs in the regional parliament in Arbil, capital of Kurdistan region. The regional government’s new constitution refers to Kurdistan as being ‘composed of Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs, Chaldeans, Syriac, Assyrians, Armenians and others who are citizens of the Kurdistan region’ (*al-Nahār*, Beirut, 25 June 2009).

- US troops completed their withdrawal from Iraqi cities, amid cheers from the Iraqi people. However, about 130 000 US soldiers will remain in rural areas and urban outposts to help the Iraqi forces, if called upon. Under the Security Agreement
between the United States and Iraq, US troops will completely pull out from Iraq in 2011 (*al-Safr*, Beirut, 30 June 2009).

- Over thirty people were killed in a bomb blast in Kirkuk, Iraq (*The Daily Star*, Beirut, 1 July 2009).
- US Vice-President Joe Biden made an unannounced visit to Baghdad urging the Iraqi government and various factional leaders to push the process of political reconciliation in the country (*The Daily Star*, Beirut, 3 July 2009).
- The Iraqi government has banned visits to the grave of Saddam Hussein who was executed in 2006 (*al-Quds al-‘Arabi*, London, 7 July 2009).
- Iraqi authorities increased security measures around churches in Baghdad after a series of bombings in or near churches that killed at least four people (*al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, London (English Edition), 13 July 2009).
- A road-side bomb exploded near a convoy carrying US Ambassador Chris Hill in southern Iraq. Hill was unhurt (*The Daily Star*, Beirut, 14 July 2009). At least five Iranians were killed when gunmen opened fire on a convoy of buses of religious pilgrims visiting Shi‘ite Muslim holy sites in Iraq (*The Daily Star*, Beirut, 23 July 2009).
- US President Barack Obama affirmed to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who visited Washington, that the US was on schedule to withdraw all its troops by the end of 2011, urging the Iraqi government to move ahead with national reconciliation for the sake of security and stability in Iraq. Obama pointed out that the future US–Iraqi relationship will emphasize non-military cooperation (*The Daily Star*, Beirut, 24 July 2009).
- The Iraqi Foreign Ministry said that it is verifying reports about the signing of a protocol between the US and parties from the ‘Iraqi resistance’ without the Iraqi government’s knowledge with the aim of including these parties in the political process and allowing them to participate in the upcoming legislative elections, due to be held in January of next year (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, London (English Edition), 26 July 2009).
- Britain’s 100-odd troops in Iraq are to withdraw to a base in neighbouring Kuwait because a deal regularizing their presence has yet to be approved by the Iraqi Parliament. Although the agreement has been endorsed by the Iraqi Cabinet, MPs loyal to Iraqi Shi‘ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr have repeatedly walked out of parliamentary debates on the accord. As a result, Parliament failed to achieve the quorum required for a vote. The troops had been given permission to remain in Iraq until the end of July, but Iraqi MPs are now unlikely to be able to vote on the security pact until the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan in September (*The Daily Star*, Beirut, 29 July 2009).
- The Independent High Electoral Commission announced the results of Kurdistan elections according to which Massoud Barzani won the presidency of the Kurdistan region with 69.57% of votes, and as concerns the Kurdistan Parliamentary elections, the ‘Kurdistani List’ won over 57% of votes (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, London, 30 July 2009).
- US Defense Secretary Robert Gates met in Arbil with Massoud Barzani, President of Kurdistan region, and offered him US assistance to try to solve the Kurds’ dispute with the central government in Baghdad which US military commanders consider the biggest threat to Iraq’s fragile new unity (*International Herald Tribune*, Paris, 30 July 2009).
- Col Timothy R. Reese, an advisor to the Iraqi military’s Baghdad command, asserted in a memorandum that the Iraqi forces suffer from an array of problems, including corruption and poor management, but are now capable of protecting the Iraqi government, and that it is time for the US to declare victory and go home. Extending the US military presence in Iraq beyond 2010, he argued, would do little

6. Civil society

- Israeli gunboats intercepted the ship Human Spirit while trying to reach the shores of the Gaza Strip to break the Israeli siege. Israeli forces threatened force, and obliged the ship’s captain to return to Larnaca. More than twenty activists, Arab and Western, were on the ship with quantities of medical aid and medicines (al-Jazeera Net, 30 June 2009).
- The Executive Committee of the National Work Forum in Beirut urged the various national forces in Arab countries to uphold the principles of Arab nationalism, especially the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. The Committee warned as well of the suspicious calls for normalization with the Israeli enemy (al-Safir, Beirut, 31 July 2009).

7. National Affairs

Mogadishu

- Sheikh Hasan Dahir ‘Aways, the hard-line leader of the Somalia Islamic Courts – an ally of the Islamic Youth Movement (al-Shabab) against the interim government – accused the international community of meddling in Somalia to partition the country (al-Hayat, Beirut, 2 June 2009).
- Somalia’s Security Minister Omar Hashi Aden was among twenty-four people killed in a suicide bombing which targeted a hotel in Beledweyne, northern Mogadishu. The Islamic Youth Movement claimed responsibility for the attack (al-Hayat, Beirut, 19 June 2009).
- Somalia’s Parliament called for neighbouring countries to support government forces in fighting against the Youth Movement in Mogadishu. It was reported that Ethiopian troops advanced toward the border with Somalia (al-Hayat, Beirut, 21 June 2009). Moreover, The Washington Post reported that the US had already sent arms to the Somali government to confront the attacks on Mogadishu (al-Hayat, Beirut, 26 June 2009).
- Over 200 000 people have fled Mogadishu as a result of fighting between the Youth Movement and government troops since last May, the United Nations and a medical charity said (The Daily Star, Beirut, 8 July 2009).
- African Union peacekeepers in Mogadishu intervened for the first time in fighting to support government forces against the Youth Movement (The Daily Star, Beirut, 13 July 2009).
- Ethiopian forces have advanced into central Somalia in what appears to be a preparation for action against the Islamists of the Youth Movement, which is in control of most areas in southern and central Somalia (al-Sharq al-Awsat, London (English Edition) 27 July 2009).

Nouakchott

- The leaders of Mauritania reached an agreement in Dakar to end the institutional crisis that dominated the political scene in the country since the coup of August in
2008. The agreement, which was sponsored by Senegalese and international mediators, requested the toppled Mauritanian President Sidi Muhammad Wulfd Shaykh to issue a decree to appoint a government of national unity to hold the presidential elections in July 2009. In turn, Gen. Muhammad Wulfd ‘Abd al-‘Azidine, leader of the coup, resigned and announced his candidacy for the forthcoming presidential elections (al-Sharq al-‘ Awsat, London, 4 June 2009).

- Gen. Muhammad Wulfd ‘Abd al-‘Azidine, leader of the coup, won the presidential elections in Mauritania with 52.6% of votes (al-Nahdár, Beirut, 20 July 2009).

**Beirut**

- The ‘March 14’ Coalition won the Lebanese Parliamentary elections with seventy-one seats out of 128 (al-Nahdár, Beirut, 8 June 2009).
- Nabih Birri was re-elected as Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament (al-Hayit, Beirut, 26 June 2009).
- MP Saad Hariri, head of the future parliamentary bloc, was designated to form a new Lebanese government (al-Nahdár, Beirut, 28 June 2009).
- Premier designate Saad Hariri said that Lebanese politicians agreed on the form of a new coalition cabinet and will complete the allocation of ministerial portfolios within days (The Daily Star, Beirut, 30 July 2009).

**Cairo**

- The Egyptian People’s Assembly (Parliament) passed a constitutional amendment reserving sixty-four out of the 508 seats in the parliament for women. The Muslim Brotherhood accused the ruling National Democratic Party of making use of the principle of empowerment of women to raise its share of seats in parliamentary elections scheduled next year (al-Hayit, Beirut, 15 June 2009).
- Egyptian authorities arrested six of the Muslim Brotherhood, including Dr ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Abul- Futuh, member of the Egyptian Medical Syndicate, Executive Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood and Secretary-General of the Arab Medical Union (al-Hayit, Beirut, 29 June 2009).

**Khartoum**

- Dozens of people were killed in bloody ethnic clashes in southern Sudan between the Sudan People’s Liberation Army and fighters from the Murle ethnic group (al-Hayit, Beirut, 15 June 2009).
- An international arbitration panel awarded the Sudanese government control over almost all major oil reserves in Abyei, a disputed region of Sudan that erupted into violence between state forces and Southern rebels last year. The arbitration is a crucial test for a 2005 agreement that ended twenty years of warfare between the government and the Southern Sudanese insurgents. Both sides said they accepted the decision. The Abyei region, with its rich oil reserves and grazing lands, has suffered violence since the peace deal. The Northern government and semiautonomous South asked the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration to set the region’s permanent borders in 2008. The five-member panel affirmed the northern boundary as set by a 2005 Commission, but drew new lines in the east and west that placed the Heglig oil fields and the Nile oil pipeline under control of the Khartoum government (The Daily Star, Beirut, 23 July 2009).
Sana’a

- Nine foreigners, including seven Germans, were kidnapped in Yemen’s northern Şa’dah province. Yemeni authorities accused al-Ḥūthī rebel group of kidnapping the foreigners to tarnish the image of Yemen, but al-Ḥūthīyūn denied any involvement (al-Ñahār, Beirut, 15 June 2009). Yemeni authorities found three bodies of the kidnapped people (two German women and one South Korean) (al-Ḥayāt, Beirut, 16 June 2009).

- Eight people and one Yemeni soldier were killed in new clashes between Yemeni forces and protesters in the southern governorate of Abyān. Clashes continued in several Southern governorates where the Yemeni authorities decided to confront the separatist movements (al-Ñahār, Beirut, 24 July 2009).

Rabat

- The newly emerged party, the Authenticity and Modernity Party (close to Moroccan King Mohammed VI), won the greatest number of seats in Morocco’s Municipal elections, which were held in Morocco on 12 June. The ruling party, the Independence (Istiqlāl), ranked second, followed by the National Rally of Independents, third, and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, which ranked fourth (al-Ittiḥād al-Ishtirākī, Casablanca, 15 June 2009).

- Ahead of the celebration of his ten-year reign, King Mohammed VI has granted pardon to 24,865 prisoners, and commuted thirty-two death sentences to life imprisonment. Moreover, Morocco’s government regained its control of Parliament as the King reshuffled the Cabinet to include members of the opposition party, the Popular Movement (al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London, 30 July 2009).

Riyadh

- The Saudi Security apparatus has revealed it has arrested over 65,000 illegal immigrants and 1,084 smugglers attempting to enter Saudi Arabia illegally during the second quarter of 2008 (al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London (English Edition), 20 July 2009).

Algeria

- At least fourteen Algerian soldiers were killed by Islamist militants in an ambush in Tipāzah province in the west of the country (International Herald Tribune, Paris, 31 July 2009).