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**Subject:** Fw: (s)3/28 Wires (PM): Bahrain-Kuwait/Oman/Qatar-Libya/Lebanon/UAE/Israel-Palestians  
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**From:** Fabrice Aidan [REDACTED]  
**To:** Terje Rod-Larsen  
**Sent:** Mon Mar 28 16:01:11 2011  
**Subject:** Fw: (s)3/28 Wires (PM): Bahrain-Kuwait/Oman/Qatar-Libya/Lebanon/UAE/Israel-Palestians

### **Bahrain FM Says No Plan for Dialogue Under Kuwait's Mediation**

**AFP**

**Mar. 28, 2:11pm ET**

**Manama**

Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed Al Khalifa denied on Monday that any role could be played by Kuwait to mediate to defuse the tiny Gulf nation's ongoing political headache.

"There is no plan for dialogue under the tutelage of Kuwait. Any talk about Kuwait's mediation is baseless," the minister said on his Twitter page.

A member of Bahrain's largest Shi'ite opposition group Wefaq said on Sunday that his group accepted an offer by Kuwait to mediate in talks with the government to end a political crisis in kingdom.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional bloc grouping all six Gulf nations, welcomed the report about the Kuwaiti mediation and its Secretary-General Abdulrahman al-Attiyah hoped that initiative would support security and stability in Bahrain.

Bahrain has been swept by anti-government protests, most by majority Shiite, for more political and economic reforms and some of the protesters have called for bringing down the county's ruling family led by King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, a strong U.S. ally, and establishing a constitutional-based monarchy.

Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, is ruled by the Sunni Muslim al-Khalifa family where the majority Shiite population said they are facing discrimination in jobs and other services. The kingdom denies such claims.

### **Oman protests carry on despite sultan's reforms**

**AFP**

**Mar. 28, 2:42pm ET**

**Muscat**

Pro-reform demonstrators are keeping up a sit-in demonstration in Muscat and other Oman cities despite offers already on the table from Sultan Qaboos who has ruled the Gulf state for four decades.

Residents of the Omani capital said on Monday that dozens of youths have been holding a daily vigil on a square near the offices of Oman's Consultative Council and huddling round at night-time to talk politics.

Elsewhere in the sultanate, which has a 2.5-million population of whom an estimated 20 percent are foreigners, peaceful sit-in actions are being held in other cities, especially the industrial hub of Sohar, north of the capital.

The army was posted outside public buildings in Sohar, residents said.

On Sunday, a group of around 30 demonstrators pressed public sector workers in Sohar, where police killed a protester at the end of February, to go on strike, a civil servant said, adding the action carried on into a second day.

"They told us to leave our offices and stop work because of corruption in the administration," he told AFP, on condition of anonymity.

A protester, meanwhile, said that activists were planning to seal off Earth Square in central Sohar and block off access to its industrial port unless their demands were met by Wednesday.

They are calling for housing debts to be scrapped and for the resignations of Oman's housing and justice ministers.

Sultan Qaboos earlier this month granted legislative power to the previously toothless Oman Council, or parliament, in his latest action to appease rare protests which flared up late last month.

The announcement followed the sultan's sacking of controversial ministers in a major cabinet reshuffle. The economy and interior ministers were among at least 12 cabinet members who lost their jobs.

Demonstrators are demanding more representation, jobs, better pay and an end to corruption but insist they do not want to topple the revered sultan, who has ruled for 40 years.

They have been holding their sit-in at Earth Roundabout since February 27.

In an effort to placate the protesters, Sultan Qaboos has also announced the creation of 50,000 new jobs, a monthly allowance for registered job seekers and a higher minimum wage for nationals working in the private sector.

And the oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council decided on March 10 to create a \$10-billion development fund for Oman and Bahrain.

### **Qatar recognizes Libyan opposition**

**UPI**

**Mar. 28, 2:02pm ET**

**Doha**

The Libyan Transitional National Council is the legitimate representative of the Libyan people, the Foreign Ministry in Qatar announced Monday.

A source in the Qatari Foreign Ministry told the state-run Qatar News Agency that the recognition of the transitional council stems from its acceptance by the Libyan people.

Al-Jazeera adds that though Qatar is the first Arab state to recognize the Libyan opposition, Qatar's move came with the blessing of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Ali al-Issawi, the former Libyan envoy to India, announced March 10 in Paris that France recognized "the (Libyan Transitional) National Council as the legitimate representative of the Libyan people."

Rebel leaders in Libya announced last week that they formed an interim government bent on maintaining the unity of the country.

Rebel forces in Libya gained ground on fighters loyal to Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi through the help of a multilateral military intervention in support of ████. Security Council Resolution 1973.

Resolution 1973, which enacted the no-fly zone, authorizes member states to "take all necessary measures" to protect Libyan civilians from Gadhafi's forces. The international community is debating whether or not that means regime change, however.

U.S. President Barack Obama scheduled a speech Monday to discuss the Libyan intervention amid heated bipartisan controversy.

British Prime Minister David Cameron said in a joint statement with French President Nicolas Sarkozy that an international conference on Libya set for Tuesday would mark a new beginning for Libya.

"Tomorrow in London, the international community will come together to support a new beginning for Libya," the statement read, "a new beginning in which the people of Libya are free from violence and oppression, free to choose their own future."

### **French warplanes strike Libyan command center**

**Reuters**

**Mar. 28, 12:58PM ET**

**Paris**

French warplanes struck a command center Sunday night belonging to troops loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, a French armed forces spokesman said Monday.

"(There were) strikes on a command center 10 km (six miles) south of the Tripoli suburbs on the night of the 27th and 28th," spokesman Thierry Burkhard said. He added that there were no new French strikes Monday.

### **Mario Aoun: Al-Rahi's Remarks on Baroud Unprecedented**

**Naharnet**

**Mar. 1:18pm ET**

**Beirut**

Former minister Mario Aoun on Monday described Maronite Patriarch Beshara al-Rahi's recent remarks on caretaker Interior Minister Ziad Baroud as "unprecedented."

Al-Rahi's comments "in defense of Minister Ziad Baroud are unprecedented, because he is the highest (Maronite) religious authority," Aoun said.

Free Patriotic Movement leader "MP Michel Aoun will make a response to this issue," the ex-minister added.

On Sunday al-Rahi threw his support behind Baroud, saying he is "a national minister who brings hope to every Lebanese."

"No one can be in no need of him," al-Rahi told a delegation visiting him from the town of Jeita on Sunday. Baroud was at the head of the delegation.

An Nahar daily said Monday that al-Rahi would soon visit President Michel Suleiman, Speaker Nabih Berri, caretaker Premier Saad Hariri and Prime Minister-designate Najib Miqati to thank them for their participation in his inauguration ceremony in Bkirki last Friday.

Al-Rahi also said Sunday that the Lebanese were in dire need for a truthful reconciliation based on forgiveness.

Addressing visiting delegations, he said Lebanon was home to multiculturalism and coexistence based on openness and faith.

### **Emirates invests heavily in arms industry**

**UPI**

**Mar. 28, 1:04pm ET**

**Abu Dhabi**

Raytheon is expected to establish local manufacturing plants when it upgrades the United Arab Emirates' Patriot missile systems, boosting a burgeoning defense and aerospace industry that's becoming the most advanced in the Arab world.

Abu Dhabi, the richest of the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates, spearheads the nascent defense industry emerging in the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council -- the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain.

Abu Dhabi signed defense contracts worth \$1.8 billion in February as part of its drive to diversify its economy, which is primarily oil exports, principally from its own fields.

The growing confrontation between Iran and the United States and its Persian Gulf allies and the massive arms drive this has engendered in the regional states, primarily Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, has given impetus to Abu Dhabi's drive to develop its own defense industry.

"Heightened threat perception around the Arab gulf states from Iran is the main driver for the increase in defense spending, although there's also a threat from terrorism," said Riad Kahwaji, chief executive of the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis in Dubai.

These days, the emirate is lining up joint ventures with defense industry companies like Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and the Boeing Co., all of the United States, and BAE Systems, the largest defense contractor in Europe.

The focus increasingly is on aerospace and aircraft technologies, with thousands of new jobs expected to be generated in this rapidly expanding sector.

The emirate even has ambitions of getting in on the space race. In 2009, Aabar Investments bought a 32 percent stake in Virgin Galactic, the world's first commercial spaceline.

Virgin Galactic, founded in 2004 as part of British tycoon Richard Branson's Virgin Group, plans to provide suborbital flights for paying passengers and eventually orbital space flights as well.

Aabar secured the rights to launch space flights from Abu Dhabi for tourists as well as scientific research and has announced plans to build a spaceport in the emirate.

Abu Dhabi is also building satellites. Its first, Yahsat 1A, a telecommunications craft, is expected to be launched soon atop an Ariane 5 rocket from French Guyana.

A second launch is expected this year by the Al-Yah Satellite Communications Co. a subsidiary of the Mubadala Development Co., a government-owned enterprise that's at the forefront of the defense industry drive.

Mubadala subsidiary Abu Dhabi Aircraft Technologies has a partnership venture with Sikorsky Aerospace and Lockheed Martin, both of the United States, in the Advanced Military Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul Center.

Abu Dhabi Ship Building, arguably the most advanced defense contractor in the GCC, has built two 420-ton landing craft for the Bahrain navy at the company's \$30 million headquarters in the Mussafah industrial zone.

Along with Mubadala, established in 2002 as Abu Dhabi's investment vehicle in sectors as diverse as aerospace, energy, infrastructure and services, ADSB is in the forefront of building an indigenous defense sector.

It was established in 1995 as a joint venture between Newport News Shipbuilding of Virginia -- now owned by the Northrop Grumman Corp. -- and the UAE Offset Group, now owned by the Abu Dhabi government.

Its main contract so far is a 2004 order worth \$1 billion to build five of the six planned Baynunah-class corvettes for the emirates' navy with ADSB's strategic partner, Constructions Mecaniques de Normandie of Cherbourg, France.

The Baynunah-class vessels, with waterjet propulsion and designed for multiple missions, represent "the most modern and sophisticated warship ever produced in any of the GCC countries," says ADSB Vice President William Stewart.

The United Arab Emirates has become a military heavyweight in the Persian Gulf region, particularly with the

buildup of its air, naval and missile forces in recent years.

BAE Systems of the United Kingdom, Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Raytheon, the leading U.S. defense manufacturers, "have a strong foothold in the regional defense industry and expect to win big contracts," The Middle East Economic Digest reported.

Among other deals, the Emirates is finalizing a \$7 billion contract with Lockheed for the Theater High Altitude Air Defense missile system. Abu Dhabi is also discussing the construction of a missile maintenance facility with Mubadala.

### **Israeli Premier Picks New Internal Security Head**

**AP**

**Mar. 28, 3:00am ET**

**Jerusalem**

Israel's premier has chosen a veteran agent of the Shin Bet internal security service as the next head of the agency.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appointed Yoram Cohen to replace outgoing director Yuval Diskin.

Netanyahu said Monday, "Yoram was the spearhead of activity in the agency over the past few years." Netanyahu said Cohen is "a real field man."

The Shin Bet handles internal security in Israel and the Palestinian areas.

Cohen takes over at a time of tension with the Palestinians, with a sudden escalation in attacks and counterattacks between Israel and Hamas-led Gaza.

He served as deputy under Diskin, who steps down in May after six years at the helm of the agency.

Israeli media said Cohen would be the first Orthodox Jew to hold the position.

### **Abbas Would Give Up US Aid for Palestinian Unity**

**AP**

**Mar. 28, 2:55pm ET**

**Ramallah**

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is making a heavy push for reconciliation with Hamas and is willing to give up hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. aid if that's what it takes to forge a Palestinian unity deal, a top aide said Monday.

The comments were the latest sign that Abbas is giving up on stalled peace talks with Israel and prefers to pursue unity with Gaza's Hamas rulers as he makes a push toward independence.

"Of course we need the American money. But if they use it as a way of pressuring us, we are ready to relinquish that aid," said Azzam Ahmed, an Abbas aide.

The U.S. and Israel consider Hamas a terrorist group. The U.S. administration, the largest single donor to the Palestinians, withheld funds when Hamas was a part of a short-lived unity Palestinian government. The Palestinian Authority is heavily reliant on foreign aid and forgoing the funds could easily spark its own crisis.

The Palestinian unity government, isolated internationally because of Hamas' refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist, collapsed during a five-day civil war in 2007 that ended with the Islamic militant group seizing power in the Gaza Strip.

Since then, the Palestinians have been divided between rival governments in the West Bank and Gaza, the two territories they hope to turn into an independent state.

With peace talks stalled since September, Abbas has begun an effort to win international recognition of

Palestine, with or without an agreement with Israel. That effort is to culminate at the United Nations in September.

Speaking in Jerusalem Monday evening, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that reconciliation with Hamas could spell the end of peace talks. "You can't have peace with both Israel and Hamas. Choose peace with Israel," Netanyahu said.

Israel, the U.S. and the EU consider Hamas a terror group because of its rocket attacks and suicide bombings aimed at Israeli civilians.

Palestinian officials acknowledge that they must solve their differences with Hamas before they can go to the United Nations. Abbas has made repeated overtures toward Hamas in recent weeks — including an offer to visit Gaza to lay the groundwork for national elections. Over the weekend, he met with local Hamas officials in the West Bank.

"The president is working hard in order to bring about a unified Palestinian territories before he goes to the [REDACTED]," Ahmed said.

Hamas leaders say they want a full power-sharing deal before meeting with the Palestinian president — including a deal on how to divide security responsibilities.

"This visit should be for the sake of achieving progress on the ground and not only for photos and media coverage," said Mushir al Masri, a Hamas spokesman in Gaza. "The problem is not in forming the government, it's in reaching an agreement."

Hamas is demanding further gestures from Abbas before considering unity, such as a release of hundreds of Hamas prisoners locked up in the West Bank, re-opening closed Hamas charities and the removal of a ban on Hamas activities in the West Bank.

Palestinian analysts say Hamas has hardened its negotiating positions recently and is feeling empowered by the recent upheavals in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt, where its ally, the Muslim Brotherhood, is expected to play a key role in the new regime.

Ayman Hussein, a West Bank Hamas member who recently met Abbas in Ramallah, said Abbas appeared "serious in his efforts" to reach out to Hamas and was pessimistic about the peace process with Israel.

Hanna Amerah, a member of the PLO executive committee, said Abbas is waiting for an official response from Hamas about his initiative to go to Gaza and expects an answer within a few days.

He claimed Abbas has support for his move from the European Union, the [REDACTED] and the Arab League. But giving up on the U.S. and Israel could come at a heavy price.

The Palestinians receive more than \$470 million a year in direct financial assistance from the U.S. The U.S. hasn't said what it will do if Hamas returns to power in the West Bank, but it will likely cut off the funds unless Hamas agrees to renounce violence and recognize Israel. Hamas has given no indication it is prepared to do either.