

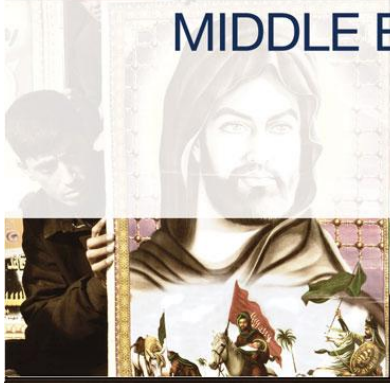
ORSAM
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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15 DECEMBER / ARALIK 2011
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1. IRAQ / IRAK

- **Iraqi National Dialogue considers Diyala region declaration as “rushed decision”**

Iraqi National Dialogue Front headed by deputy Prime Minister for services affairs Saleh Al Mutlaq described, on Tuesday, Diyala Province’s resolution to establish an independent, economic and administrative region as “rushed.” The region’s declaration coincides with US withdrawal at the end of the month, the front declared noting that this resolution doesn’t serve stability.

“The timing of Diyala region’s declaration is inappropriate because it coincides with US withdrawal from Iraq,” National Dialogue Front senior official Asad Al Mashaikhi told Alsumarianews. “At this stage we need cooperation to maintain security and stability,” he advanced, a source told Alsumaria.

“This declaration does not serve the province’s stability,” said Mashaikhi who is also head of the committee for Religious Affairs in Diyala provincial council stressing that the front currently refuses this “rushed” resolution.

Diyala provincial council member Suhad Al Hayali had declared, on Tuesday, that head of Diyala’s council, currently outside Iraq, gave its consent to establish Diyala Region. The voting that took place on Monday didn’t breach the law, Hayali argued expecting that the government will use disputed regions’ issue as a pressure. State of Law Coalition in Diyala announced, on Tuesday, that demonstrations are staged in 18 regions against the province’s declaration as an independent, administrative and economical region. The resolution is “unconstitutional,” the coalition stated blaming implications on those who signed the resolution.

Diyala provincial council had voted by the majority of its members, on Monday, upon declaring the province as an administrative and economic region. The majority of members signed an official demand for central government regarding this resolution. This resolution was made without the consent of council’s presidency, deputy chairman of the provincial council Sadek Al Hussaini said believing that this measure is not suitable currently.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-71707-Iraqi-National-Dialogue-considers-Diyala-region-declaration-as-%E2%80%9Crushed-decision%E2%80%9D.html>

- **Hayali: Head of Diyala provincial council approves region establishment**

Diyala provincial council member, Suhad Al Hayali, announced on Tuesday that head of Diyala council Talib Muhammad Hassan who is currently outside Iraq agrees upon establishing a region in the province. The voting that was carried out yesterday doesn't breach the law, Hayali declared predicting that Iraq Central Government would use disputed regions' issue as a pressure mean.

"Muhammad Hassan gave his consent to sign on province's declaration to form an economic and administrative region as well as authorized us to sign on his behalf," Hayali told Alsumarianews. "We deemed this procedure as illegal but Muhammad Hassan asked us to carry on with procedures regardless of his absence," she added. "Voting in the

absence of Muhammad Hassan does not breach the law," she argued.

"Iraqi constitution stipulates that two third of council members shall vote," Hayali, a member of Al Iraqiya List said revealing that the majority of attending members approved and signed the demand to be referred to Muhammad Hassan as soon as he returns to Iraq. "Deputy Head of Diyala provincial council refused to sign the demand to raise it," she stressed, a source told Alsumaria.

"We can still raise the demand through Iraqiya List's representative in the council," she pointed out.

"Diyala's council voted yesterday on establishing a region in the province for powers reasons, same as in central and southern provinces," Hayali advanced.

"Central government will use disputed regions' issue to pressure concerned provinces," Hayali explained adding that Iraqi Constitution forbids such manipulations and that this issue is within central government's authorities only. The province has no authorities regarding the issue; not even Kurdistan region has, she concluded.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-71675-Hayali%3A-Head-of-Diyala-provincial-council-approves-region-establishment.html>

- **Update: Banita in Baghdad ahead of full US forces withdrawal**

BAGHDAD, Dec. 14 (AKnews) – US secretary of defense Leon Banita has arrived in Baghdad today in a surprise visit two weeks ahead of a full withdrawal of the US forces in Iraq.

Banita's Iraq visit comes as Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is in the the United States where he is holding talks with top US officials over Iraq-US relations following the withdrawal of the remaining 6,000 US troops by the end of this year.

An Iraqi Defense Ministry official told AKnews that Banita has arrived in Iraq on a two-day official visit. "We believe he is here to follow up with the US forces withdrawal ... and we also think that he will discuss military cooperation between the two nations in addition to arming the Iraqi army"

US forces are expected to fully withdraw from Iraq by the end of this year under the Status OF Forces Agreement signed between Baghdad and Washington in 2008.

The US military currently maintain under 6,000 troops down from 170,000 in 2003 according to Iraqi officials. Earlier today, Iraqi authorities received the Eco military base, one of the biggest military bases in the country , from the US forces.

Iraqi authorities have received more than 500 military bases from the US forces since the withdrawal process began.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/278281/>

- **Alwani: corruption files turned to Integrity Commission, including the Canadian planes deal [Print]**



Baghdad (NINA) – Member of the Parliamentary Integrity Committee, Khalid Al Alwani, announced turning important corruption files to the Integrity Commission, including the Canadian Planes files.

In a press statement today, he said “the committee formed a committee in charge of inspecting the contracts of the planes through traveling to Canada,” pointing out that the electricity contracts file was turned to the Criminal Court.

Alwani, MP from Iraqiya Slate, continued “regarding the educational equipment file, for the Ministry of Education, an arrest warrant was issued against a Director General in the ministry and two of his assistants. As for the hotels file in preparation for the coming Arab Summit in Baghdad, for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a committee from the Cabinet Secretariat General was formed in this regard to investigate it.”

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=FJFLEK

- **Barzani, Jumblat, discuss development of bilateral relations**

ARBIL / Aswatal-Iraq: The President of North Iraq's Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barzani, has conferred with visiting Chairman of the Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Jumblat, on the strengthening of bilateral relations between both sides, following the recent changes that took over in a number of Iraq's neighboring states and the Middle East, according to the electronic site of Kurdistan government on Monday.

"Barzani presented in the meeting a description for the violations, committed against the Kurdish People during Iraq's former Iraqi regimes," it stressed, adding that he had also outlined the "current political, administrative and economic progress, as well as the reconstruction that is taking place in Kurdistan nowadays."

For his part, Jumblat expressed support for the Kurdistan Region and its Kurdish people, saying, "I'm honored to be in Kurdistan, hosted by its people, who won their just rights after long years of bitter struggle."

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%282h4irp5510atsv55zkau5v55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=145996&l=1

- **Georgia will permit Iraqi enter without visas**

BAGHDAD /Aswat al-Iraq: Chairman of Foreign Relations Commission announced today that Georgia will permit Iraqi to enter the country without having an entry visa.

Following his meeting with the Georgian ambassador Zorab Eristafy, responsible for Georgian affairs in Jordan and Iraq, it was announced to Aswat al-Iraq that bilateral cooperation was discussed and possibility of agricultural cooperation.

Both sides discussed possibility of benefiting from the Georgian experiment in different economic fields, as well combating financial and administrative corruption, the source added.

http://en.aswatiraq.info/%28S%282h4irp5510atsv55zkau5v55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=145993&l=1

- **Amerika Artık Kürdler İle İlişkilerine Netleştirmeli**

Haber Merkezi/14-12-11(PNA)-Amerikan Kongresi üyesi Allen West “ Kürdler dünya da devleti olmayan en büyük etnik gruptur. Ve artık Amerikan’ın Kürdlerle

ilgili siyasetini netleştirmesinin zamanı gelmiştir.”

Kürdistan bölgesinden Amerika giden heyetle 12-12-11 tarihin de görüşen Amerikan Kongresi üyesi Allen West, görüşme sonrası bir yazılı açıklama yayınladı.

West yazılı açıklamasında “ sahip olduğum deneyimlere dayanarak sizlere diyebilirim ki Kürd halkı ve Hükümeti eskiden buyana ABD’le kuvvetli işbirliği içinde olmuştur. Ve Bölgeleri, ki Irak’ın Kuzeyi’ne düşmekte, sürekli olarak saldırılara hedef olmaktadır. Şuanda ABD güçleri çekilmekte ve Kürdler güvenlik ile ekonomik konular bazında kaygı sahibiler ki bu yerinde bir kaygıdır.Çünkü Bölgesel güçleri ile Irak hükümetinde merkezi bir etkiye sahip olmayı bekliyorlar” denildi.

Açıklamada “ Fuat Hüseyin’in(KBB Divanı Başkanı) söylediğine göre Obama yönetimi Kürdlere “ sizler dostsunuz ve dostluğumuz özel bir dostluktur” mesajı vermiş. Bu nedenle bu yönetimin bu ilişkinin nasıl bir ilişki olduğunu açıklamasını zamanı gelmiştir. Yani bu ilişki nasıl bir anlam içeriyor ve ABD ne yapmak

istiyor. Gelişmiş ve güvenli bir Kürdistan için bir program var mı.”

“ Kürdistan Bölgesini meşgul eden bazı stratejik konular şunlar, ABD'nin Irak ile ilgili ileriye dönük stratejisi nedir. Bölgede ki güçlerin Kürdistan bölgesi üzerinde ki etkileri nelerdir? Kürdlerin Irak'ta nasıl bir etkileri olabilir? Kürdlerin Irak ordusu içinde ki oranı %3 azaltılmış durumda.”

“ Kürdler dünyada kendi devleti olmayan en büyük etnik gruptur. Onlar Amerika karşıtı değiller ve en kötü günde yani Irak savaşı sırasında iyi bir dost olduklarını gösterdiler. Bu nedenle Amerika Kürdlere borçludur ve onları güçlü bir şekilde karşılamalıdır. Nasıl ki bugün Sayın Obama Irak Başbakanı Nuri Maliki ile görüştüyse, Kürdler de onların söyleyeceklerini dinlenmesini istiyorlar. Kürdistan Hükümeti şu dönemde güçlü bir şekilde Kürd halkını unutmamamızı talep ediyor. Parçalanacak bir sonucu ortaya çıkarsa, ki bu büyük bir felaketi de kendisi ile birlikte getirebilir.”

West 22 yıl Amerika Ordusunda görev yapmış ve Irak'ta da Kürdlerle omuz omuza hizmetlerde bulunmuş.

<http://www.peyamner.com/Turkish/PNANews.aspx?nID=259409>

• **Kib'in Son Dönemde Ki Siyasetini Anlamıyorum**

Haber Merkezi/14/Dec/11(PNA)- YNK politbüro üyesi Erselan Bayiz, son bir kaç ayda, Kürdistan İslam Birliği'nin(KİB) siyasetinde gözlü görülür bir değişim olduğunu ve KİB'nin tanınan çizgisi ile şimdi ki duruşuna bakıldığında garib bir durum ortaya çıktığını ve Kürdistan siyasi sahnesinde olan biri olarak KİB'in yeni siyasetinin ne olduğunu anlayamadığını belirtti.

YNK politbüro üyesi ve Kürdistan Parlamentosu Başkan Yardımcısı Erselan Bayiz son dönemde yaşanan Zaho olayları ile ilgili olarak "kesinlikle yaşanmaması gereken bir durum. Yani otel ve turistik yerlerin yakılması Kürdistan Bölgesi'nin dünya'da ki prestijini de zedelemekte ki bu bölgeye gelen turist sayısı üzerinde olumsuz etkide yapacak. Aynı şekilde KİB'nin binasının ateşe verilmemesi gerekiyordu. Eğer KİB binası Zaho olaylarının tahriki sonucu vuku bulmuşsa, bence bu çok daha büyük bir hatadır. Çünkü Kürd halkının çıkarları

hoşgörüdedir, tahriklere kapılmakta değil."dedi.

KürdistanîNwê gazetesine konuşan Bayiz " ben hiç bir islami partinin direk olarak Zaho olaylarına dahil olduğuna kanaat etmiyorum. Ancak dindar insanları, içki satış noktaları, Masaj salonları ve bazı otellere karşı tahrik etmiş olmaktadır uzak değiller tabi. Çünkü direk olmasa da dolaylı olarak etkisi olduğu söylenebilir" ifadelerine yer verildi.

KİB'nin son dönemde ki siyasetini de değerlendiren Bayiz " KİB'in eski siyaseti akıllıca ve egemen bir siyasetivardı. Yani gerçekçi bir duruşa sahipti. Ve şiddetten uzaktı. Malesef bu bir kaç aydır bu partinin siyasetin de değişimler var ve eski siyasetle hiç uyuşmuyor. Ben Kürdistan siyaset sahasında olan biri olan KİB'in mevcut siyasetini anlamakta zorlanıyorum. İslami Arap hareketleri Kürdistan'dakileri bu kadar çok etkilemiş olabilir mi ? Toplantı öncesinde olaylardan tutuklu Partililerin serbest bırakılması talebinde bulunmadı, veya bunu neden toplantıya katılmanın ön şartı olarak koşmadı? Nasıl çözülecek eğer diyalog olmadan. Başka yol var mı? " değerlendirmesinde yer verildi.

<http://www.peyamner.com/Turkish/PNAnews.aspx?nID=259403>

- **Police: 5 terrorists arrested, cache of weapons seized in Baghdad**

Two terrorists were arrested on Wednesday by federal police forces in Al Mahdiya district of Baghdad province, Baghdad operations command announced in a statement, a copy of which was obtained by PUKmedia.

Elsewhere in the province, 5 terrorists were arrested on Wednesday by Baghdad police in Al Latifiya district, the statement said.

The forces seized a cache of weapons consisting of 132 pieces of mortar, the statement added.

http://www.pukmedia.com/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10857:police-5-terrorists-arrested-cache-of-weapons-seized-in-baghdad-&catid=25:iraq&Itemid=386

- **Baathists are trying to destabilize Iraq, adviser say**

BAGHDAD, Dec. 14 (AKnews) - An adviser to Iraqi Prime Minister for National Reconciliation said Wednesday that the Baathists are trying to destabilize the security situation in the country, indicating that the security forces are ready to foil any attempt.

The Iraqi government announced last month it foiled a Baathist scheme to seize power.

The security services implemented a series of arrests in more than ten Provinces against Baathists and military officers in the former Iraqi army.

Amer al-Khuzai told AKnews that the Iraqi people got rid of the dictatorship and will not allow the Baathists to return.

Security forces arrested 615 Baath members after P.M. Nouri al-Maliki received information from Libyan interim leader Mahmoud Jibril. The rebel forces obtained documents indicating that late Libyan dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi tried to support an attempt of Baath members to overthrow the Iraqi government.

The Iraqi Constitution prohibits in its Article VII dealing with any entity pursuing "atonement" and racism, especially with groups that are accused by the government of killing Iraqis.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/27/8209/>

2. IRAN / İRAN

- **President Ahmadinejad Censures US Harsh Tone towards Iran**



TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad blasted the US officials for picking up a harsh tone on Iran, and stressed that the Iranian nation cannot be intimidated by bullying and warmongering rhetoric.

Addressing a large group of the Iranian people in the Western city of Yasouj on Wednesday, President Ahmadinejad said that Americans should not feel that they

can humiliate the Iranians, and said, "What I say to them is: shame on you, don't talk with us from an upper position."

"You are standing against a great and civilization-breeding nation, you should behave yourself and you should know that you will have no option but dialogue with the Iranian nation," President Ahmadinejad reiterated.

"If you continue these rude behaviors and refrain from recognizing our nation's rights and honor for whatever reason, then I as representative of this nation, tell you that this nation will not retreat even for an iota against your expansionist demands," he cautioned.

The US and Israel have recently intensified war rhetoric against Iran. The US and its European allies have also intensified western sanctions against Tehran to make it give up its Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) right of access and use of the nuclear technology.

In the most recent case of the United States' intensified animosities towards Iran, the CIA flew a stealth drone into Iran to conduct spying operations on

December 4. The Iranian armed forces downed the drone through a cyber attack.

The remarks by Ahmadinejad came after US President Barack Obama in shameless and contemptuous remarks asked Iran to return the RQ-170 Sentinel spy drone that was downed in Eastern Iran around 11 days ago after it violated the Iranian airspace.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast lambasted Obama for asking Tehran to send back the US RQ-170 Sentinel stealth aircraft.

Mehman-Parast voiced surprise at the US administration's demand, reminding that the US should have apologized for violating the Iranian airspace and carrying out espionage operations against the interests of the Iranian nation, instead.

Obama's comments were the first official confirmation that the United States had asked for the return of the RQ-70 drone that was downed by Iran over a week ago.

During the last ten days, Pentagon and State Department officials have repeatedly claimed that they were

unaware of any efforts by the American government to contact Iran to have the drone returned to the US.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007277388>

- **Senior Opposition Leader Rejects Foreign Intervention in Syria**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A prominent Syrian opposition leader underlined that the country's opposition groups will stand against any foreign meddling in the country's internal affairs, and insisted the need for a domestic solution to the ongoing disputes in the Arab country.

Speaking to FNA on Wednesday, Secretary of the Popular Will Party and member of the Liberation and Change Popular Front Qadri Jamil blasted a number of opposition groups outside the country for their call for foreign intervention in Syria.

He said that these groups are not national and have exercised imperialist policies in the country, adding that such groups have played a main role in terrorist attacks and acts of sabotage in Syria.

"We are seeking materialization of reforms in the country but the issue should be solved within the country and without foreign interference," Jamil reiterated.



He reiterated that the opposition will not negotiate with the US as long as Washington continues interfering in Syrian affairs.

The remarks came after Syria held local elections on Monday as part of a reform promised by President Bashar Assad.

Many world nations, including Iran, Iraq, Algeria, China and Russia have warned against any foreign intervention in Syria.

Syria's President Bashar Assad himself has vowed to personally fight and die to resist foreign forces.

"You have to ask who killed 800 officers, soldiers and policemen on the streets, so

we are not talking about peaceful demonstrators, we are talking about militants," President Assad told Sunday Times in November.

"Whenever you have militants you have killings so the role of the government is to fight the militants in order to restore stability and to protect the civilians," Assad said.

"Not by leaving them to do what they want to do. This is our job and that's what we are doing."

Syria has been experiencing unrest since mid-March with organized attacks by well-armed gangs against Syrian police forces and border guards being reported across the country.

Hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed, when some protest rallies turned into armed clashes.

The government blames outlaws, saboteurs, and armed terrorist groups for the deaths, stressing that the unrest is being orchestrated from abroad.

In October, calm was eventually restored in the Arab state after President Bashar al-Assad started a reform initiative in the country, but the US and Israeli plots could spark some new unrests in certain parts of the country.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007277368>

- **General Cezayiri Meclis ve basını uyardı: “RQ 170” uçağıyla ilgili açıklamaları doğrulamıyoruz!**



FHA- İran Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı Savunma Propagandası ve Kültür İşleri Yardımcısı “RQ 170 uçağıyla ilgili yapılan açıklamaların hiçbirini teyit etmiyoruz” dedi.

FHA- Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı Savunma Propagandası ve Kültür İşleri Yardımcısı General Seyyid Mesud Cezayiri “Maşrik” gazetesinde röportajında, Amerikan “RQ 170” model insansız gelişmiş casusluk

uçacağı hakkında yapılan bazı açıklamalara değinerek “Elimize geçen bu casusluk uçacağıyla ilgili dile getirilen bu görüşlerin hiçbiri doğrulanmış şeyler değil” dedi.

General Cezayiri daha sonra “Savunma haberleriyle ilgili açıklamalarda maalesef kimileri yeteri kadar bilgi ve uzmanlıkları olmaksızın görüş belirtiyorlar ki onların bu açıklamalarının milli güvenlik açısından olumsuz sonuçlar doğurması da mümkündür” ifadesini kullandı.

Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı Savunma Propagandası ve Kültür İşleri Yardımcısı açıklamasının devamında Milletvekilleri ve ulusal medya sorumlularından savunma alanıyla ilgili konularda duygularına hakim olmalarını ve Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı tarafından onaylanmayan konular hakkında fikir beyanında bulunmaktan sakınmalarını istedi.

<http://turkish.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=9007277370>

- **İhsanoğlu:: İran’ın nükleer programı askeri değil**

FHA- İslam İşbirliği Kurumu Genel Sekreteri Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, İran’ın nükleer silah peşinde olduğunu ispat

edecek hiç bir belge ve kanıt bulunmadığını vurguladı.



FHA- Doha konferansı kulisinde siyonist Haaretz gazetesine demeç veren İhsanoğlu, barışçıl nükleer enerjiden yararlanmanın İran’ın en doğal hakkı olduğunu belirterek, İran’a yönelik her türlü askeri müdahaleye karşı olduğunu belirtti.

İhsanoğlu, İran’ın nükleer silah peşinde olduğunu gösteren hiç bir belge ve kanıt bulunmadığını, hatta UAEK raporunda bile İran’ın nükleer programında sapma olduğuna dair bir kanıt yer olmadığını vurguladı.

İran’ın barışçıl nükleer enerjiden yararlanma hakkına vurgu yapan İhsanoğlu, askeri müdahale İran’ın durumunu etkileyemeyeceğini ve sadece Irak ve Afganistan’da olduğu gibi vatandaşları olumsuz etkileyeceğini kaydetti.

<http://turkish.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=9007277328>

- **Iran may relocate enrichment facilities: official**

TEHRAN, Dec. 14 (MNA) – The director of Iran’s Passive Defense Organization said on Wednesday that security considerations may necessitate the relocation of the uranium enrichment facilities.

“Our vulnerability in the nuclear area has reached the minimum level,” however “if circumstances require it, the uranium enrichment facilities will be relocated to safer places,” Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali told the Mehr News Agency.

He also said that the measures necessary to enhance the safety and security of the nuclear facilities have been adopted.

“If Americans and Israelis had been able to launch strikes to damage our nuclear facilities, they would certainly have done so,” he stated.

On the security of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, Jalali said that the facility is

located in a border area, so any attack on it will undermine the security of the neighboring countries.

He added that the Bushehr power plant was the target of a cyber attack in the last Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), which was successfully repelled by Iranian experts, reassuring that the Islamic Republic is completely prepared to counter any possible cyber threat.

On the measures taken to deal with the most recent computer worm, namely Duqu, which has reportedly targeted some Iranian organizations and companies, the official said that fortunately the computer worm has not spread through the computer systems of state organizations.

In addition, he said Iranian experts have identified Duqu and developed an anti-virus software program to clean up infected systems.

Over the recent years, Iran has been the target of several cyber attacks.

In September 2010, international news agencies reported that the Stuxnet worm, which is capable of taking over power

plants, had infected many industrial sites in Iran.

Later, Western officials and media outlets claimed that the cyber attack had hindered Iran's nuclear program.

Iranian officials confirmed that some Iranian industrial systems had been targeted by a cyber attack, but insisted that no crashes or serious damage to the country's industrial computer systems had been reported and said Iranian engineers had rooted out the problem.

Iran also dismissed the claim that the cyber attack had seriously affected its nuclear program.

In April 25, Iranian officials announced that the country had been targeted by a new computer worm named Stars.

At the time, it was announced that experts were investigating the malware, but the results of their investigation have not been released yet.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1483640>

- **Egyptian FM says Tehran-Cairo ties are strategic: report**

TEHRAN, Dec. 14 (MNA) – Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr has described relations between Tehran and Cairo as “strategic”, according to Al-Youm Al-Sabe'a website.

“Egypt's relations with Iran are strategic, and what is important to us in this regard is Egypt's interests. Egypt's relations with Iran or any other country have nothing to do with another country, and it is our interest that determines the form of relationship,” Amr said on Tuesday, according to a translation of his comments.

“Exchange of views between Iran and Egypt on the region and the world continues, particularly given that Iran will assume the presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement after Egypt,” he stated.

On the situation in Syria, the Egyptian foreign minister said that Cairo has adopted a clear stance toward the developments taking place in this Arab country and is opposed to foreign intervention in Syria's internal affairs.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1484085>

- **Tehditler eyleme dönüşürse, İran'ın yanıtı Hürmüz Boğazı'nı kapatmak olacaktır**

Tahran, 14 Aralık 2011 – İran İslam Cumhuriyeti İslami Şura Meclisi İç Güvenlik Komitesi Başkanı, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Silahlı Kuvvetleri'nin yakın gelecekte Hürmüz Boğazı'nda düzenleyecekleri deniz tatbikatına değinirken, “Düşmanların aleyhimize savurdıkları tehditleri eyleme dönüştürmeleri durumunda, biz de kapasitelerimizi kullanacağız. Şüphesiz, Hürmüz Boğazı da bunların arasındadır” diye açıkladı.

MHA parlamento muhabirinin haberine göre Perviz Soruri, Çarşamba günü düzenlenen meclis açık oturumu sebebiyle muhabirlere İran Silahlı Kuvvetleri'nin Hürmüz Boğazı'nda bir tatbikat düzenlemek üzere program yapmakta olduğunu açıklarken, her ülkenin arazi ve sınırları dahilinde doğal ve deniz kapasitelerinden faydalanmanın saklı hakları arasında olduğunu söyledi.

İslami Şura Meclisi İç Güvenlik Komitesi Başkanı Soruri, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin İslam İnkılabı zaferinin ardından ve de son 32 yıl boyunca, her daim bölgede ve dünyada barış ve istikrarın sağlayıcısı olduğunu ve de olmaya devam edeceğini; İran'ın emniyetsiz bir hale dönüştürülmesi durumunda ise, bu emniyetsizliğin tüm bölgeye yayılacağını belirtti.

Perviz Soruri, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin ülke topraklarını ve sularını savunmak üzere mevcut tüm kapasitelerinden faydalanacağını belirtirken, “Şüphesiz, sözü geçen kapasitelerden biri de Hürmüz Boğazı'dır” dedi. Soruri sözlerine, Hürmüz Boğazı'nın herkes için güvenliken, İran için güvensiz hale gelmesi durumunda; doğal olarak İran'ın uluslararası yönetmeliklere göre toprakları ve sınırlarında tehdit hissetmesi durumunda kanun çerçevesinde bu tehditlerin önüne geçebilmeye ilişkin sahip olduğu kapasiteden faydalanacağını altını çizdi.

İslami Şura Meclisi İç Güvenlik Komitesi Başkanı Soruri, ülkelerin İran aleyhine tehditleri eyleme dönüştürmesi durumunda İran'ın da mevcut kapasitelerini kullanacağını, bu doğrultuda Hürmüz Boğazı'nın İran'ın coğrafi ve

ekonomik kapasitelerinin sadece küçük bir bölümünü oluşturduğunu; öte yandan tüm kapasitelerin el ele vermesi durumunda ise, İran'ın savunma gücünün şiddetle arttırılabileceğini vurguladı.

Perviz Soruri, İran'ın tehditler karşısında eli kolu bağlı bir şekilde sessiz kalamayacağını belirtirken, “Düşmanların aleyhimize savurdıkları tehditleri eyleme dönüştürmeleri durumunda, biz de kapasitelerimizi kullanacağız. Şüphesiz, Hürmüz Boğazı da bunların arasındadır” dedi.

Soruri, İran Silahlı Kuvvetleri'nin Hürmüz Boğazı'nda düzenleyeceği tatbikatın İran'ın huzuru ve güvenliğini savunmak amaçlı olmanın yanısıra, düşmanların petrol içerikli tehditlerine yanıt boyutu taşıdığını da ekledi.

Soruri, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'ni son günlerde askeri saldırı ile tehdit etmiş bazı ülkelere hitaben ise, bir ülkede istikrar mevcutken diğer ülkelerde mevcut olmaması şeklindeki bir teorinin İran tarafından kabul görmediğini ve de İran'ın gerek istikrarın gerekse de emniyetin herkes için mevcut olduğuna inandığını belirtti.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/tr/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1483759>

- **İran ve Afganistan, savunma ve işbirliği 'memo'su imzaladı**

Tahran, 15 Aralık 2011 - İran ve Afganistan savunma bakanlıkları eğitim, lojistik, teknik ve mühendislik alanlarında işbirliği konularını içeren bir ön anlaşma (memo) imzaladılar.

Mehr Haber Ajansı'nın İran Savunma Bakanlığı Tebligatlar İdaresi'nden aktardığı habere göre, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti ve Afganistan İslam Cumhuriyeti yetkilileri ilk 'ortak savunma ve işbirliği toplantısında' bir ön anlaşma (memo) imzaladı.

İran ve Afganistan savunma bakanlıkları arasında imzalanan ve uygulamaya yönelik anlaşmaların ön anlaşması niteliğinde olan memo'da; ilk 'ortak savunma komisyonu toplantısı'nda iki ülke savunma bakanlıklarının taraflar arasındaki anlaşmaların uygulanması için değerlendirmelerde bulduklarına ve de bölgede ve Afganistan'da barış, istikrar ve güvenliğin güçlendirilmesi amacıyla varılan anlaşmaların uygulanması için karşılıklı işbirliğine vurgu yapıldı.

Afganistan ve İran savunma bakanlıkları yetkilierince imzalanan memo genel olarak taraflar arasında eğitim, lojistik, teknik ve mühendislik alanlarında işbirliği konularını içermektedir.

Afganistan ve İran arasında gerçekleştirilen ilk 'ortak savunma işbirliği toplantısı' na katılmak üzere İran'a gelen Afganistan Milli Savunma Bakanlığı Politika ve Strateji Muavini Muhammed Hümayun Fevzi ve yanındaki heyet, Tahran'da buldukları süre içinde İran Savunma Bakanı'nın yanısıra Dışişleri Bakanı, İslami Şura Meclisi Milli Güvenlik ve Dış Politika Komisyonu Başkanı ile görüşmelerde bulunarak iki ülkeyi ilgilendiren meselelerde görüş alış verişinde bulunmuşlardır.

Heyet, bu ziyaret sırasında ayrıca İran Savunma Bakanlığı'na bağlı bazı merkezlerde incelemelerde bulunmuş ve bu merkezlerdeki İranlı uzmanların yeteneklerini yakından tanıma fırsatı da bulmuşlardır.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/tr/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1484270>

- **Salihi: İran ve Türkiye birbirine rakip değil birbirinin tamamlayıcısıdır**

İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanı Ali Ekber Salihi, İran ve Türkiye'nin rakip değil, birbirinin tamamlayıcısı olduğunu söyledi.



Salihi, Anadolu Ajansı'na yaptığı açıklamalarda, "Türkiye ile ilişkilerimiz halihazırda hem siyasi hem ekonomik hem de halklar arasındaki ilişkiler olarak en iyi düzeyde ve yılda iki milyondan fazla İranlının Türkiye'yi ziyaret etmektedir" dedi.

"Türkiyeli dostlarla sürekli olarak iletişim içinde olduklarını, Dışişleri Bakanı Ahmet Davutoğlu ile ikili ve bölgesel konularda devamlı müzakerelerde bulduklarını" belirten Salihi, "Elbette farklı görüşlerin olması da mümkün ve bu da aslında doğal bir şey. Türkiye ve İran, bölgede kalıcı barış, istikrar ve emniyetten yana" ifadesini kullandı.

Bazılarının bilerek ve bazılarının da bilmeyerek iki büyük millet ve ülke arasında ihtilaf yaratmak istediklerini belirten Salihi şunları kaydetti: "Türkiye ve İran basınında maalesef bazıları Batılı yorumcuların görüşlerini aktarıyor. Bazıları da uluslararası konularda gerekli bilgilere sahip olmadan kendi sorumlulukları dışında görüş beyan ediyor. Bilinçsizce görüş beyan etmeler biraz yanlış anlamalara sebep oluyor. Bu, iki ülkede de var. İran'da son dönemde bazıları sorumluluk alanları dışında ve bilmeyerek Türkiye ile ilgili görüş beyan ettiler. Biz, bu görüşlerin tamamını reddediyoruz."

Salihi, İranlı bazı yetkililerin basına yansıyan Türkiye'ye yönelik tenkit içeren açıklamaları hakkında, bu beyanların ilgili kişileri bağladığını söyledi.

Salihi, "İran'ın uluslararası konular ve dış politikadaki resmi tutumu, Rehber (Dini lider Ayetullah Ali Hamaney), Cumhurbaşkanı ve Dışişleri Bakanı tarafından beyan edilir. Bunların dışındaki açıklamalar kişi ya da kişilerin şahsi görüşleri olarak kabul edilir. Bu yüzden bilinçsiz açıklama ve görüşler İran'ın dış politikası açısından geçersizdir. Sorumsuzca ve bilinçsizce açıklama

yapanlara gereken uyarıda bulunduk" ifadelerini kullandı.

"Aziz Türk halkı, başta sayın Gül, Erdoğan ve Davutoğlu olmak üzere Türk devlet adamları bilsin ki İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin Türkiye'ye resmi bakışı derin kardeşlik ve dostluk esasına dayalıdır" diyen Salihi, bunun daha da pekiştirilmesi ve artırılması için çalıştıklarını söyledi.

Salihi, "Türkiye'deki bazı dostlar ve özellikle de basından ricamız, bu tür görüşleri ikili ilişkilerde tereddüte ve yanlış anlamaya sebep olmayacak şekilde ele almalarıdır" diye konuştu.

"Türkiye ve İran arasında ihtilaf çıkarmak ve yanlış anlamalara sebep vermek isteyen ortak düşmanlar var" ifadesini kullanan Salihi, "Türkiye'de de İran ile ilgili yanlış görüş beyan eden bazı şahıslardan kardeşçe ricam, iki milletin de düşmanlarına bu fırsatı vermemeleri" dedi.

İki ülkede hakim olan siyasi akıl, basiret ve iradenin mevcut durumu da çok iyi bir şekilde idare edeceğine olan inancını dile getiren Salihi, düşmanların, çeşitli

bahanelerle ikili ilişkileri bozmasına fırsat verilmeyeceğini kaydetti.

Salihi, İran ve Türkiye arasındaki ilişkilerin geleceğini çok parlak olarak gördüğünü belirterek, "Son birkaç yılda iki ülke ilişkilerindeki gidişat çok olumlu" dedi.

Türkiye ile İran arasında geçen yılki dış ticaret hacminin 12 milyar dolar olduğunu hatırlatan Salihi, bu rakamın yıl sonu itibarıyla 15 milyar dolara ulaşmasını beklediklerini söyledi.

İran ve Türkiye arasında vize uygulamasının olmadığını hatırlatan Salihi, "Dünyada kültür, tarih, din, gelenek ve millet olarak birbirine bu kadar çok yakın olan iki ülke az bulunur" ifadesini kullandı.

Dışişleri Bakanı Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun "İki ülke sınırı asırlardır dostluk ve barış sınırı olmuştur" şeklindeki ifadelerini aktaran Salihi, "Gelecekte de sınırlarımız dostluk ve barış sınırı olacak. İki ülke ilişkisi daha da gelişecek" dedi.

Batılıların Türkiye ve İran'ı birbirinin rakibi gibi göstermeye çalıştığını vurgulayan Salihi, "İran ve Türkiye rakip değil, birbirinin tamamlayıcısıdır. Her ikisi de

bölgede birçok alanda birbirinin tamamlayıcısı olma yönünde çalışıyor" ifadesini kullandı.

İki ülkenin yardımlaşma ve işbirliği içinde bölgenin barış, istikrar ve güvenliği ile halkların refahı için çalıştıklarını kaydeden Salihi, bu çabaların amacına ulaşacağına olan inancını dile getirdi.

Salihi, iki ülke arasını bozmak isteyenlerin hedeflerine ulaşamayacağını vurguladı.

Türk devlet adamlarına sağlık ve başarı dileklerinde bulunan Salihi, konuşmasını Türkçe olarak, "Türk milleti ve devletine izzet, başarı ve selamet diliyorum" sözleriyle bitirdi.

<http://www2.irna.ir/tr/news/view/line-120/1112154956124030.htm>

3. İSRAEL - PALESTINE / İSRAİL – FİLİSTİN

- **Israel takes steps to curb settler violence**

PM approves measures to crack down on violent ultra-nationalist settlers after mosque vandalism and attack on soldiers.

Human rights groups accuse Israel of failing to arrest most settlers involved in violence against Palestinians [Reuters]



Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, has approved measures to crack down on violent ultra-nationalist Jewish settlers after a rampage at an occupied West Bank military base and torching of a mosque's facade stirred public outrage.

Among the measures approved by Netanyahu on Wednesday were administrative detention of suspects, trials of some suspects in military rather than civil courts, and ejection from the West Bank of settlers suspected of inciting violence.

Israeli soldiers will also be empowered to carry out arrests, a statement from Netanyahu's office said. Until now Israeli police have had to be called to a crime

scene to conduct arrests, giving perpetrators time to flee.

But the prime minister rejected calls from the justice and internal security ministers to classify violent right-wing groups as "terrorists".

"Anyone who raises a hand against Israeli soldiers or police will be severely punished," Netanyahu said.

He said such suspects would be dealt with in the same way as protesters in Bilin, a Palestinian village where clashes, sometimes deadly, over the Israeli separation barrier built across occupied land occur regularly.

Attacks by violent Jewish groups have in the past generally targeted Palestinians and Arabs, but in recent months they have been increasingly directed at the army and left-wing Israelis.

Soldiers attacked

Settlers angered over rumours that the army was about to oust them from hilltop enclaves threw rocks at a commander and his deputy at a West Bank military base on

Monday, injuring one of them, and smashed windows and slashed vehicle tyres.

Netanyahu, in a statement, said that after consulting with security chiefs he would take the rare step of "immediately" ordering so-called administrative arrests of Israelis involved in such violence, jailing them without trial.

The measure has been used in the past against Israeli ultra-nationalists but is more commonly employed against Palestinians suspected of involvement with armed groups.

Human rights groups have long accused Israel of failing to arrest or try most settlers accused of involvement in violence against Palestinians. Suspects have been arrested but rarely put on trial.

On Wednesday, Jews burnt the facade of a Jerusalem mosque and scrawled "Death to the Arabs" on its walls, an assault blamed on a group that has vandalised other Muslim houses of worship over the past two years.

The incidents have angered some in Israel, where people worry that repeated settler assaults on Muslim holy sites might rekindle serious Israeli-Palestinian violence after months of relative calm that has prevailed despite a long impasse in negotiations.

In an unusually swift response after the Jerusalem mosque incident, Israeli police said they had arrested five Israeli men suspected of involvement in "nationalistically motivated crime".

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/2011121505941742857.html>

- **Hamas marks 24th anniversary, hails Arab Spring Islamists**

The Islamist Hamas movement on Wednesday marked its 24th anniversary, with its prime minister Ismail Haniyeh vowing to continue the "resistance" until the end of Israel's occupation.

"The resistance and the armed struggle are the way and the strategic choice for liberating Palestinian land from the (Jordan) river to the (Mediterranean) sea," he said at a mass demonstration in Gaza City's Kateeba Square.

In a statement to mark the anniversary, Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, published a list of statistics marking its achievements since the movement was created in December 1987.



It said it had fired 11,093 rockets and other projectiles into southern Israel and carried out 1,117 attacks, including 87 suicide bombings.

As a result of its activities, 1,365 Israeli soldiers had been killed and 1,365 Israelis injured, the statement said, claiming to have lost 1,848 of its members as "martyrs."

Organizers said 350,000 people attended the mass demonstration, which turned the square into a sea of green Hamas flags.

Founded in 1987 shortly after the beginning of the first intifada, or uprising, against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Hamas was inspired by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.

Haniyeh said the Brotherhood and other Islamist groups had "spearheaded the Arab Spring" of political change in the region "either through direct confrontation with tyrannical regimes or through the ballot box".

Though Hamas sprang from the Muslim Brotherhood, it operates independently due to its location and the conflict with Israel.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has renounced violence as a means of bringing about political change, but endorses it for those under foreign occupation.

"Resistance is the way and it is the strategic choice to liberate Palestine from the (Jordan) river to the (Mediterranean) sea and to remove the invaders from the blessed land of Palestine," Haniyeh told the crowd, which chanted: "We will never recognize Israel."

Its charter calls for the eventual destruction of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic state on the pre-1948 borders of the British Palestine Mandate.

Hamas is regarded by the West as a terrorist group for its refusal to recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept existing interim Israeli-Palestinian peace deals.

The group has said it might agree to a long-term truce with Israel in return for the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In 2006, Hamas won a landslide victory in Palestinian elections, routing the long-dominant secular Fatah party led by the Western-backed president Mahmoud Abbas, and took over Gaza in June 2007 after months of factional unrest.

It has since tightened its grip on the territory despite harsh Israeli sanctions imposed after the takeover and despite Israel's devastating 22-day offensive launched in December 2008 that cost the lives of 1,400 Palestinians – half of them

civilians – and 13 Israelis, including 10 soldiers.

Early Wednesday morning, the Israeli army arrested Hamas member Aymane Daraghmeh in his Ramallah home, Hamas officials said.

The Israeli army confirmed the arrest, which brings the number of West Bank Hamas members held by Israel to 72.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/15/182655.html?PHPSESSID=g2vra8dik8bleo1ea3ljgqc60>

- **Mideast Quartet holds separate talks**

JERUSALEM, (AFP) — Members of the international peacemaking Quartet appeared to make little progress on Wednesday after separate talks with Israeli and Palestinian officials in a bid to kick-start stalled peace talks.

Envoys and Quartet representative Tony Blair "stressed the important objective of a direct exchange between the parties without delay or preconditions," a statement from the diplomatic grouping read.

The envoys, representing the United Nations, Russia, the United States and the European Union, met the Palestinian team headed by Mohammed Shtayeh in the morning at the UN headquarters in east Jerusalem, and with the Israelis at the same place in the early afternoon.

Speaking to Voice of Palestine radio ahead of Wednesday's talks, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat said that Ramallah's stance "had already been presented to the Quartet" and it was now the Quartet's turn to answer the questions they had posed during their last meeting on November 14.

There was little progress to report after that meeting too, with the envoys saying only that they had "continued to encourage the parties to resume direct bilateral negotiations without delay or preconditions."

Direct Israeli-Palestinian talks have been on hold for more than a year, grinding to a halt over the thorny issue of settlement construction shortly after they restarted in September 2010.

Last week, the US State Department said its Middle East peace envoy David Hale was going to Jerusalem to further "efforts to get the two parties to put forward concrete proposals and to agree to come back to the table together."

The Quartet laid out a proposal in September aimed at reaching a peace agreement in a year.

But there has been no visible sign of progress, with the Palestinians demanding that Israel halt settlement construction before the talks can resume.

On Tuesday, a coalition of 20 international aid groups and rights organisations published a report detailing a sharp rise in the number of Palestinian homes destroyed by Israel in which they also criticised the Quartet.

"There is a growing disconnect between the Quartet talks and the situation on the ground," said Jeremy Hobbs, executive director of Oxfam International, with similar sentiments expressed by Human Rights Watch.

"The Quartet should call ongoing settlement expansion and house demolitions what they are: violations of international humanitarian law that Israel should stop," said Sarah Leah Whitson, director of the Middle East region at HRW.

Amnesty International took an even stronger line, saying the Quartet's approach was a failure.

"Israel's escalating violations show the fundamental failure of the Quartet's approach," wrote Philip Luther, interim director of Amnesty's Middle East and North Africa programme.

"It is time for the Quartet to understand that they cannot contribute to achieving a just and durable solution to the conflict without first ensuring respect for international law," he said.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27701>

- **Israel prepares to release 550 Palestinian prisoners in Hamas deal**

Release is second stage of deal with Hamas that brought home IDF soldier

Gilad Shalit after five years of captivity in the Gaza Strip.



Israel began preparations on Thursday to release 550 Palestinian prisoners in the second stage of a deal with Hamas that brought home soldier Gilad Shalit after five years of captivity in the Gaza Strip.

Israel's Prisons Service posted on its website the list of prisoners whose jail terms are to be cut and a spokeswoman said they would be assembled in two jails prior to release on Sunday.

Palestinian prisoners - Reuters - 30102011

Palestinian prisoners, freed from Israeli jails, as part of the Shalit exchange deal.

Photo by: Reuters

Israeli citizens have 48 hours to contest the releases in court, though historically the judiciary has chosen not to intervene in prisoner exchanges which it views as a political decision.

In the first stage of the Egyptian-mediated prisoner exchange, the most lopsided in Israel's history, 450 Palestinians were released on Oct. 18 in return for Shalit.

While many of those freed in the first phase of the deal were serving life sentences for deadly attacks, none of the prisoners to be released in the second stage was convicted of killings. Their terms ranged from a few months to 18 years.

Shalit was abducted in June 2006 by militants who tunneled into Israel from the Gaza Strip and surprised his tank crew, killing two of his comrades. He was held incommunicado in the Hamas-ruled territory and huge majority of Israelis backed the deal to bring him home.

The Prisons Service said nearly all the Palestinians to be released on Sunday - whose convictions include attempted murder, planting bombs and membership in militant groups - come from the West Bank where Hamas's rival, the Fatah movement of Western-backed President Mahmoud Abbas, is dominant.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-prepares-to-release-550-palestinian-prisoners-in-hamas-deal-1.401559>

- **Clinton slams Gingrich comments on Palestinians**

US Secretary of State Clinton says Gingrich's claim that Palestinians are an invented people is "unhelpful."



WASHINGTON - Newt Gingrich's comment that the Palestinians are an "invented people" was unhelpful, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Wednesday, saying the Republican presidential candidate had realized this.

Gingrich, a former speaker of the US House of Representatives, stirred controversy on Friday when told the Jewish Channel cable television broadcaster he saw the Palestinians as an

invented people who want to destroy Israel.

"Remember, there was no Palestine as a state. It was part of the Ottoman Empire" until the early 20th century, Gingrich said in the interview.

"I think that we've had an invented Palestinian people who are in fact Arabs and who were historically part of the Arab community. And they had a chance to go many places and for a variety of political reasons we have sustained this war against Israel now since the 1940s, and it's tragic," he said.

Asked by PBS Newshour Executive Editor Jim Lehrer at an event on economic innovation whether Gingrich's comment about the Palestinians being an "invented people" was helpful, Clinton replied: "No."

"I think he recognized that, from what I read," she added, speaking at an event on Innovation and the Global Marketplace. "I think he realized that was, you know, one of those innovative moments that happen."

Gingrich along with other Republican candidates are seeking to attract Jewish support for the November 2012 elections by vowing to bolster US ties with Israel.

Gingrich said the Hamas militant group, which controls the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinians' governing body, the Palestinian Authority, which controls the West Bank, represent "an enormous desire to destroy Israel."

The US government has sought to encourage the Palestinian Authority to negotiate with Israel but has labeled Hamas as a terrorist group.

<http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=249481>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT / AFRİKA ve MISİR

• Egyptians vote in second round elections

Voters flocked to polls in nine electorates, where Islamists hope to maintain lead and liberals aim to gain ground.

Egyptians have flocked to the polls in nine provinces across the country for the second round of voting in the first

parliamentary election since a popular uprising toppled former president Hosni Mubarak in February.

Polls closed at 1900GMT on Wednesday, the first of a two-day voting process, which saw Egyptians turning out in large numbers, but still far less than what was seen during the first round.

Voters poured into polling stations in Giza; Beni Sueif, south of the capital; the Nile Delta provinces of Menufiya, Sharqiya and Beheira; the canal cities of Ismailiya and Suez; and the southern cities Sohag and Aswan.

At one polling station on the outskirts of Cairo, seven people were detained after security forces stepped in to stop supporters of rival candidates from firing upon one another. Otherwise, reports indicated that voting progressed fairly smoothly.

The second round of voting, which continues through Thursday, will decide 180 seats in the 498-seat lower house. The third and final round is scheduled for early January.

Some 18.8 million Egyptians are eligible to cast their ballots with voting taking place over two days followed by run-off votes where necessary a week later.

'Humble' turnout

Al Jazeera's correspondents in Giza and Suez reported that fewer voters had turned out for the second round of elections than the first.

Rawya Rageh, reporting from a polling station in Giza, described the turnout as "humble" but steady.

She said round two was likely to be a much tougher race than the previous round, especially in the Muslim Brotherhood's heartland, the Nile Delta.

"This is going to be a very important test, especially for the liberals ... Will they be able to make a comeback?" Rageh said. "For the first time, we've seen the liberals come together in a semi-formal coordination [in the lead-up to the second round]."

Islamist parties dominated the first round of voting, which started last month, with

the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm taking 47 per cent of the contested seats and the ultra-conservative al-Nour party taking 21 per cent.

With round two, the Islamist parties are seeking to boost their already overwhelming lead, while liberal voters are concerned that the outcome will push the country in a more religious direction.

The secular and liberal forces that largely drove Egypt's uprising were trounced in the first round, failing to turn their achievement into a victory at the polls. The liberal Egyptian Bloc took just nine per cent of the vote in the first round.

The final two rounds are not expected to dramatically alter the result and could strengthen the Islamists' hand.

"We have to try Islamic rule to be able to decide if it's good for us," said 60-year-old voter Hussein Khattab, an accountant, waiting to vote at a polling station near the famous pyramids in Giza province.

"If not, we can go back to Tahrir," he said, referring to the Cairo square that was the

focus of the uprising in January and February that ousted Mubarak.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/2011121417297978263.html>

- **Lawmaker urges U.S. pursue trade pact with Egypt**

A top Republican lawmaker urged President Barack Obama's administration Wednesday to pursue trade talks with Egypt to help shape the nascent democracy after a tumultuous year.



"Engagement is now more important than ever," Representative David Dreier said in a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, which has issued a report recommending the two countries establish a path toward negotiation of a free trade agreement.

Dreier, a member of the House leadership who was in Egypt in September for the first round of parliamentary elections, endorsed that idea and said the United States and Egypt should start by updating “a very outdated bilateral investment treaty.”

We are actively pursuing initiatives and activities with countries in the Middle East and North Africa region - with particular focus on transition countries such as Egypt and Tunisia - designed to achieve the best results in terms of trade and investment growth and integration

David Dreier, a top Republican lawmaker

The California Republican said he believed the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups which captured about two-thirds of the vote in the first round were primarily interested in creating jobs.

“They weren’t campaigning on a platform of abrogating agreements, treaties with Israel. They weren’t campaigning on an anti-West platform. ... They were campaigning on one thing and one thing only, and that is they made a commitment that they would get the economy growing,” Dreier said.

Setting a goal of a free trade agreement could help rival groups within Egypt agree on a common vision for their country, while promoting economic reforms that would open new opportunities for American business, he said.

At a time of tight U.S. budgets, it would also provide an alternative way of helping Egypt, which is currently the second largest recipient of U.S. aid after Israel, Dreier said.

The European Union announced on Wednesday its plan for trade talks with Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco. The United States already has trade pacts with Jordan and Morocco, as well as Israel, Oman and Bahrain.

A U.S. trade official, speaking on the condition she not be identified, did not rule out the possibility of bilateral free trade talks with Egypt but said no decision had been made.

“We are actively pursuing initiatives and activities with countries in the Middle East and North Africa region - with particular focus on transition countries such as Egypt and Tunisia - designed to achieve the best

results in terms of trade and investment growth and integration,” she said.

“We are not prejudging the ultimate outcome, but it is important that we consult carefully with all stakeholders, both here and in the region, to determine which specific initiatives and activities will do the most good.”

A leading U.S. business group said it was eager for the Obama administration to pursue trade talks with Egypt, the most populous country in the Arab world.

The CSIS “report is simple in its message: closer trade relations between the United States and Egypt can bring growth and jobs for both countries,” said Lionel Johnson, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's vice president for the Middle East.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/15/182698.html?PHPSESSID=g2vra8dik8lbleo1ea3ljgqc60>

- **Egyptians elect their parliament again while army drafts rules for presidential vote**

Egyptians were headed to the polls again on Thursday in a phased election to choose the first post-revolution

parliament, as liberals faced an uphill battle to compete with Islamist parties.



Ten months after a popular uprising ended Hosni Mubarak’s 30-year rule, the country’s new political landscape looks set to be dominated by Islamist parties which clinched two thirds of the votes in the opening stage of the election.

Polling stations are due to open at 8:00 am (0600 GMT) in a third of the country’s 27 provinces.

Three ballots

We tried the liberals and the secularists and they did nothing for us
Mohammed Rashad, voter

Voters are required to cast three ballots: two for individual candidates and one for a party or coalition, in the assembly’s 498 seats. The ruling military council which took power when Mubarak was ousted in

February will nominate a further 10 deputies.

The second round of the three-stage polls takes place in Cairo's twin city of Giza; Beni Sueif south of the capital; the Nile Delta provinces of Menufiya, Sharqiya and Beheira; the canal cities of Ismailiya and Suez and the southern cities Sohag and Aswan.

Balloting began on Wednesday with a "large voter turnout," said Hamdi Badeen, a member of the ruling council.

Parties affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and the ultra-conservative Salafi movements won 65 percent of all votes in the first phase, trouncing liberal parties which managed 29.3 percent.

"We tried the liberals and the secularists and they did nothing for us," said one voter, Mohammed Rashad, on Wednesday, referring to Mubarak's party. "The Islamists have God's law."

The Muslim Brotherhood had been widely forecast to triumph as the country's most organized political group, well known after decades of charitable work and its

endurance through repeated crackdowns by the Mubarak regime.

But the good showing from Salafist groups was a surprise, raising fears of a more conservative and overtly religious 498-member new parliament.

The Muslim Brotherhood has been at pains to stress its commitment to multi-party democracy, inclusiveness and civil liberties, while also advocating the application of sharia Islamic law.

Nevertheless, the prospect of an Islamist-dominated parliament raises fears among liberals about religious freedom in a country with the Middle East's largest Christian minority.

Much remains unclear about how the new parliament will function and whether it will be able to resolve a stand-off with the armed forces over how much power they will retain under a new constitution to be written next year.

After the voting for the lower house of parliament, which will end in January, Egyptians will then elect an upper house in a further three rounds of polls.

Drafting rules for presidential vote

Meanwhile, candidates seeking to run in Egypt's presidential election will need the support of 30 members of parliament or 30,000 citizens, according to a draft of a presidential election law, details of which were published by the state news agency on Thursday.

The draft also allows any party with at least one elected seat in parliament to field one of its members for the post, the Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported, citing the draft.

The new rules for the election due in June will replace old conditions in place during Mubarak's era and which effectively ruled out any realistic challenge to his rule.

The army council, which has ruled Egypt since Mubarak was ousted in February, has pledged to hand over powers to the elected president by the start of July and return to barracks.

MENA said the draft had been presented to the army's newly appointed consultative council for review.

The 30,000 signatures supporting a presidential candidate must include people from at least 15 of Egypt's 27 provinces, MENA said.

Mubarak, now being tried over the killing of protesters and abuse of power, was serving his fifth six-year presidential term when he was ousted by a popular uprising.

For most of his three decades in office, his presidential terms were preceded by a single candidate referendum, which he always won with crushing majorities.

Egypt held its first multi-candidate race in 2005, which Mubarak won, although the rules meant there was no significant challenger and the vote was marred by widespread abuses.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/15/182696.html?PHPSESSID=g2vra8dik8bleo1ea3ljgqc60>

- **Tunisia's new president asks for 6-month political truce, warns of 'collective suicide'**

Tunisia's new president on Wednesday asked for a six-month political truce and a moratorium on strikes and protests,

warning that otherwise the country would be committing “collective suicide.”



Tunisia electrified the Arab world when it overthrew its autocratic leader in January, but since then the caretaker authorities have been buffeted by social unrest, political turmoil and rows over the role of Islam in the political system.

“I appeal to all the Tunisian people to give us a political and social truce, just for six months,” Moncef Marzouki, a former political prisoner installed as president this week, said in a interview on state television.

“A political truce including all the political parties ... (and) a social truce by immediately stopping all sit-ins and strikes,” said Marzouki. “If we continue like this, it will be a collective suicide.”

“If things aren’t working out within six months, I will submit my resignation,” said Marzouki.

In Tunisia’s first ever democratic election, in October, voters handed victory to the moderate Islamist Ennahda party. Its nominee, Hamadi Jbeli, will be prime minister, the most powerful post.

Other top positions will be shared out among Ennahda’s two junior coalition partners, Marzouki’s Congress for the Republic and the left-wing Ettakatol party.

The new leaders will hold power for a year while a new constitution is drawn up and fresh elections are prepared.

A cabinet line-up is expected to be announced in the coming days. Three sources within the coalition said the finance ministry would go to Khayam Turki, a businessman who was put forward by Ettakatol.

Impatient for change

Since its revolution, Western leaders have hailed the former French colony as a beacon of democracy in the Middle East, but the new authorities are struggling to

appease Tunisians who are impatient for change.

There have been hundreds of protests in the past few months, most of them over poor living standards and high unemployment. Some have turned into riots, forcing security forces to fire into the air and impose curfews.

There has also been mounting tension between hardline Islamists, who want to ban the sale of alcohol and the mixing of the sexes in public places, and secularists who believe their liberal way of life is under threat.

Turki, the man tipped to become finance minister, was educated in Tunisia and France and studied at business school, his friend Jamel Touri told Reuters.

And though Ettakatol is known for its socialist foundations, Touri, who is also an official in the party, said the 40-year-old diplomat's son was an economic liberal.

“He is for economic openness and he is in favor of economic reforms to promote openness,” Touri said.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/15/182678.html?PHPSESSID=g2vra8dik8lbleo1ea3ljgqc60>

- **We must respect the ballot box results, no matter what - Egyptian MP Amr Hamzawy**

By Mona Madkour

Cairo, Asharq Al-Awsat – Described as Egypt’s “liberal star”, Dr. Amr Hamzawy is a leading Egyptian liberal who withstood an Islamist landslide in the first phase of Egypt’s elections to emerge as a leading light for the country’s civil and liberal proponents. The 44-year-old academic won the parliamentary seat for the wealthy Cairo district of Heliopolis, trouncing his main rival, a candidate from the Muslim Brotherhood’s Justice and Freedom party with 53.7 percent of the vote. This victory had a symbolic value for the foreign-educated professor at the University of Cairo; particularly as Islamist parties picked up 113 of 168 seats up for grabs in the first round of voting for the new parliament. However, one of the 55 seats not to go to the Islamists is reserved for the Egyptian liberal, Dr. Amr Hamzawy.

Hamzawy was a research director at the Carnegie Endowment for International

Peace, and was the spokesman for the “Board of Wise Men” set up during the Egyptian revolution to offer negotiations and potential solutions to the protesters and government. He is a founding member of the Freedom Egypt Party.

In an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, Dr. Hamzawy spoke about his election campaign, his hopes for the second and third phases of the Egyptian parliamentary elections, as well as his larger hopes for the future of the country.

The following is the full text of the interview:

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How were you able to win a parliamentary seat for the Cairo district of Heliopolis with three times as many votes as the [Muslim Brotherhood affiliated] Freedom and Justice Party candidate, particularly when considering the strong performance of Islamist political parties in these parliamentary elections?

[Hamzawy] I think that people voted for me with such a high percentage [of the vote] because I was defending a political project in a clear manner, and that is the

project for a civil state...a state of citizenship, equal civil rights, and the transfer of power. This is in addition to my stances in the political arena in the past, which have convinced a wide segment of people that I hold firm and specific positions. People are looking for competent MPs who can perform their duties well within parliament, and not reduce their duties to merely providing special services for some. Furthermore, some voted in favor of the civil project I announced in protest against the invasion of religious projects and the tide of political Islam.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] A number of smear campaigns were launched against you during the election period, yet you remained silent about this. Why?

[Hamzawy] Indeed I was subjected to dishonest and unethical campaigns, and throughout my electoral experience I declined to enter into the realm of these campaigns, expose myself to this senseless war, or comment upon them. I preferred to focus on the election campaign in a positive manner, and I refused to get involved in talking about others in any way. I did not utter a single

word about any other candidate, because elections are never won through spreading negative publicity about rival candidates, but rather through communicating with the people on the ground.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] One of these campaigns attempted to use details of your personal life. What's your opinion about this?

[Hamzawy] Yes, unfortunately [this happened], and was a major source of concern for me. This was after I was the victim of a crime [an attempted car-jacking of a vehicle on the motorway to 6th October City] along with Egyptian singer Basma. Some then tried to use this incident against me, but I told the public the facts at the time in all honesty, and they accepted this. If I cannot defend my personal rights, then I cannot defend the people's rights.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Who were behind these smear campaigns against you?

[Hamzawy] One source is the hardline religious currents that claim the monopoly with regards to talking in the name of religion in the political arena, and they

classify anyone outside of their own political project as being contrary to religion. This war has been raging against me since 12 February, using the religious satellite television channels affiliated to these religious channels. These channels even had sheikhs appear to tell the public to declare others as unbelievers and betray anybody who is not with them [their religious current], explicitly calling on voters not to vote for anyone else. This represents a blatant interference in the will of the people, and unethical calls used against me. Likewise, my professional background was also the subject of scrutiny as I had worked in the United States and Germany for a period of time, and this was presented to the public as evidence that I was not suitable and not religious.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] There has been much debate about the definition of a civil state. How would you define it?

[Hamzawy] A civil state is the state of citizenship, a state of equal rights, a state of laws, a state that does not distinguish between Egyptian Muslims and Egyptian Christians, and where both are guaranteed the same rights. This is a non-

military state where everyone, including the military and the security services, are subject to civil supervision, and the relationship between politics and religion is regulated.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] However your recent statements about civil [non-religious] marriages have resulted in some of the Egyptian public misunderstanding your view of civil society. Do you regret these comments?

[Hamzawy] I admit that I did not explain myself well when talking about civil marriage on a television program. I said that I wanted civil marriages to be permissible under Islamic Sharia law, but I never meant to infringe upon the borders of Islam or Islamic Sharia law. However, this was used against me to an alarming degree, in an attempt to promote the idea that my beliefs were somehow shocking to the Egyptians, and their culture and traditions.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Did you consider responding to these claims following your election victory?

[Hamzawy] I refuse to trade on religion, and mix religions with politics...but I am a religious person. Some of my friends asked me to display my commitment to religion [during the election campaign] by revealing the fact that I had performed the Hajj last year for example, or the fact that my mother and sister both wear the hijab, but I completely refused this...because the people must evaluate me in accordance with my political project, and not through my commitment to religion, because this commitment is something that only affects myself and those closest to me.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Following the sweeping victory achieved by the Islamist parties during the first phase of the elections, how will the liberal and left-wing trends coordinate to combat this during the second and third electoral phases?

[Hamzawy] We have been able to reach a state of complete coordination regarding individual seats for the civil camp, and party lists for the Kutla al-Masriya [the Egypt bloc], the Al-Thawra Mostmara Alliance [the Revolution Continues Alliance], the Justice Party, the Awareness Party, and the Reform and Development

Party. They will have one candidate for the individual seat, and another for the worker [or farmer] seat. [In Egyptian parliamentary elections, every district contains two seats and voters are given two votes; at least one seat in each district is reserved for a “worker” or “farmer”]. This is our attempt to internally restructure, and I hope that the Wafd party chooses to join us, because up until now they have not taken part in such coordination, but they have a major opportunity to achieve good results [if they coordinate with us].

[Asharq Al-Awsat] However all signs say that Egypt’s liberal and left-wing parties are facing a difficult task to overhaul the Islamists?

[Hamzawy] I admit that the task is difficult for the civil trend, but we must respect the results of the ballot box no matter what. The more important question here is “Is the political Islam bloc a coherent one?” I do not think so, I believe there is a margin of difference between them, and this margin should be exploited positively in favor of the civil trend. I hope the civil camp is able to achieve a share of one third plus one (the percentage of

parliamentary seats required to have a deciding vote), and we will strive to obtain this in the coming two election phases.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Is it possible, in politics, to easily transform a popular base into an electoral one?

[Hamzawy] No, this is indeed rare in the political world. It is interesting actually that they [the Islamists] were able to convert their social base into an electoral base for the elections. The analytical perspective would suggest there are two fundamental factors here. Firstly, the religious television channels which unfortunately promotes them in a forceful and powerful manner, by specifically referring to voting in favor of such and such [candidate], and not voting for such and such [candidate]. Secondly, the Islamists targeted a large section of voters in Egypt...those who are trapped economically and socially, who strongly responded to their clear and sharp religious rhetoric, believing that [these candidates] have the support of God.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you believe that the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) forming an advisory council,

made up of 30 individuals – comprising party leaders and public figures – is nothing more than an attempt to appease the civil masses after numerous failures? Or do you believe they are sincere in this?

[Hamzawy] I do not know the function of the advisory council formed by SCAF recently, and its relationship to the constitution. According to the current constitutional declaration, this council does not have any constitutional legitimacy with regards to drafting the new constitution, and if it were to receive some parallel powers this would be completely undemocratic. I completely oppose this advisory council, I think it is an unjustifiable institution, and we have wasted a lot of time in forming it. I hope that its powers relate only to SCAF, in the management of executive affairs for the remainder of SCAF's time in charge of the country.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Some people have accused you of working in accordance with an American agenda, especially in light of your work at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace institution. What is your view of such accusations?

[Hamzawy] The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is an independent institution funded from within [the institution itself], with no external financing, clearly meaning that it is not funded by external political parties such as the U.S. Congress. It has a commendable international reputation and is not linked to US administration or any American pressure groups of any kind. The accusation that I am adopting an American agenda, and that I will work to implement this if I enter parliament, is nothing more than a cheap rumor, and is like many of the other cheap rumor that have circulated during the past period.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Is there any truth to the claims that you withdrew from the Kutla al-Masriya due to the presence of the Free Egyptians Party, headed by Egyptian businessman Naguib Sawiris?

[Hamzawy] My withdrawal from the Kutla al-Masriya had nothing to do with the presence of the Free Egyptians Party, headed by Naguib Sawiris, although there were reports of differences between us. My withdrawal stems from the fact that the Kutla al-Masriya, when it was first

established, consisted of 23 parties, then one withdrew after another until only 3 remained, because there were some differences over the management of its electoral campaign.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you expect the electoral mood in Egypt to change following the announcement of the new electoral blocs?

[Hamzawy] The Egyptian electoral mood will not change easily, and my belief is that we must study matters academically. We must analyze the Egyptians' voting behavior in various districts and how this relates to the results. This is a task that rests with academic researchers over the coming period so that we can produce an electoral map, through which we can know the [popularity of] electoral blocs and voter preferences. I blame the media for promoting the "landslide victory" of the Islamist current, based on the results of the first electoral phase, as this is a big mistake, because we must wait for the election results of the second and third phases.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you believe that the powers granted to the government of Dr.

Kamal el-Ganzouri could save Egypt in the coming phase?

[Hamzawy] We want a real government, not a secretariat for SCAF, and these powers must be translated into action on the ground, through immediate steps to salvage the situation in all social and economic aspects, and not only the political side.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27695>

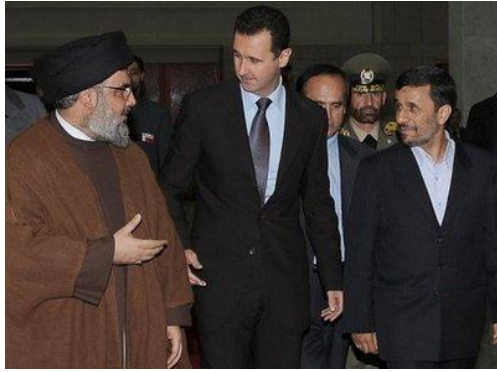
5. JORDAN and LEBANON / ÜRDÜN

• Analysis: How the Syrian protests affect Hezbollah

Editor's Note: This is an edited version of an article from the 'Oxford Analytica Daily Brief'. Oxford Analytica is a global analysis and advisory firm that draws on a worldwide network of experts to advise its clients on their strategy and performance.

What does a worsening of the Syria conflict mean for the Shia militant group Hezbollah, as it struggles to maintain its fragile coalition government in Lebanon and contain sectarian tensions there?

The Syrian uprising poses a significant challenge to Hezbollah's political influence and military capabilities in Lebanon. The possible demise of the government in Damascus threatens the three-way anti-Israeli strategic alliance of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. This alliance underpins Hezbollah's central role in Lebanese politics.



Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah made a rare public appearance last week in which he reiterated his support for the government in Damascus. Indeed, without Assad, Hezbollah would lose a major source of military assistance and political support. This in turn would significantly reduce its ability to threaten Israel.

For these reasons, there is a risk that Hezbollah could engage in covert activities inside Syria to assist pro-regime forces in repressing protest and fighting army

defectors. However, it faces something of a dilemma given its public posture as a resistance movement supporting oppressed populations. Any such action would also place Hezbollah under greater international scrutiny.

In this context, would Hezbollah instead look for conflict with Israel? This might reinvigorate Hezbollah's hard-core supporters and reinforce its resistance credentials. But the likelihood of an imminent new conflict remains low.

The Hezbollah leadership is aware that sparking a conflict with Israel could leave the group seriously weakened. Unlike before, it may not be able to rely on Iranian and Syrian backers to send the necessary military, logistical and financial support.

Still, along with heightened Israel-Iran tensions over Iran's nuclear project, instability in Syria raises the risk that a miscalculation by any of the players could spark renewed Hezbollah-Israeli fighting. Indeed, it is not impossible that if the Assad regime believes its collapse is imminent, it could resort to igniting limited hostilities with Israel in the Golan

Heights. This could quickly escalate, dragging in Hezbollah. Yesterday, France said that it believes that Hezbollah was behind a December 9 attack on U.N. peacekeepers in south Lebanon.

Meanwhile, as Syria draws closer to civil war, intercommunal tensions in Lebanon are rising. The crackdown in Syria by Assad's Alawi-led forces against largely Sunni areas has divided opinion in Lebanon along sectarian lines, raising the risk of armed conflict between its own Sunnis and Shias.

Hezbollah is keen to avoid this. Since Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, it has resisted attempts to disarm, partly by reaching out to old foes, building electoral alliances and adopting a more conciliatory approach. It now has significant representation in the cabinet and parliament. It has felt forced to make substantial recent concessions to reinforce its fragile coalition.

However, Lebanon's political players sense that the Syrian crisis is weakening Hezbollah and are seeking to gain maximum benefit. As Assad's government falters, Hezbollah will probably become

less conciliatory in government and reassert itself. The present situation could also embolden Hezbollah's Sunni political opponents and encourage them to provoke a confrontation with Hezbollah militants in Beirut. Hezbollah might find itself dragged into a conflict with Sunni groups whatever its own tactical stance.

<http://www.yalibnan.com/2011/12/14/analysis-how-the-syrian-protests-affect-hezbollah/>

- **New taxes as Cabinet cancels the VAT on Diesel**



Lebanon's Finance Minister Mohammad Safadi said Wednesday evening that the 2012 state budget will "include new taxes " to make up for the cancellation of Value Added Tax on fuel oil.

The finance minister's comments came after the cabinet decided to cancel the Value Added Tax on red diesel fuel oil.

The cabinet also decided to subsidize red diesel by LL 3,000 (\$2 per 20 liters) starting Monday until a decree lifting the VAT is approved, according to OTV.

VAT in Lebanon is 10 % and the current retail price of 20 liters is around 30,000 LL (\$20)

<http://www.yalibnan.com/2011/12/15/new-taxes-as-cabinet-cancels-the-vat-on-diesel/>

- **Syrian army gunfire wounds two in Lebanon**

Two people were wounded on Wednesday when a Syrian military patrol entered Lebanese territory and opened fire on a border town, a local official said.

“Syrian troops entered Lebanese territory today and opened fire on the village of Khirbat Daoud in Aarsal,” said Bakr Hujairi of the municipality of Aarsal, a border region that has witnessed deadly gunfire in recent months.

Hujairi identified the those wounded as Khaled and Mohammed al-Fleeti, adding that they had been transferred to a nearby hospital where their condition was stable.

At least three people have been killed since October as Syrian troops staging incursions into Lebanon opened fire on border villages.

Lebanon's Western-backed opposition, Washington and the United Nations have condemned the incursions.

But the Lebanese government, largely dominated by Hezbollah, a strong ally of the Syrian regime, has for the most part stayed silent on the issue.

Lebanon and Syria share a 330-kilometre (205-mile) border but have yet to agree on official demarcation.

Syria has also planted land mines along its border with Lebanon in a bid to prevent weapons smuggling and dissidents from fleeing a fierce crackdown by the regime in Damascus against a nine-month revolt.

Beirut is bitterly divided between pro- and anti-Damascus camps, and there are growing fears the bloodshed in Syria could spill over the border.

The Lebanese opposition and France have also accused the regime of Bashar al-Assad of involvement in a bombing that wounded five French UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon last week.

Syria has denied the allegations.

<http://www.yalibnan.com/2011/12/15/syrian-army-gunfire-wounds-two-in-lebanon/>

6. SYRIA / SURİYE

• Syrian troops 'ordered to shoot to kill'

Human Rights Watch report accuses dozens of officials and commanders over crackdown, based on defectors' testimonies.

The United Nations says that more than 5,000 people have been killed in the uprising, which began in March [Reuters]

More than 70 Syrian army commanders and officials have been named by former

soldiers as having ordered attacks on unarmed protesters in that country, a US-based rights group says.



The report from Human Rights Watch names 74 commanders and military and intelligence officials as having allegedly "ordered, authorised, or condoned widespread killings, torture, and unlawful arrests" during the country's nine-month uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's government.

The group urged the United Nations Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and to impose sanctions against officials implicated in the report.

Those named should be investigated "for their command responsibility for crimes against humanity," the report said.

Senior officials mentioned include Imad Dawoud Rajiha, the country's defence minister; Imad Fahed al-Jasem el-Freij, the army chief of staff; and the heads of various intelligence agencies, Abdul Fatah Kudsiyeh, Jamil Hassan and Ali Mamlouk.

Syria's government has not yet responded to the report.

The report is based on more than 60 interviews conducted with defectors from the Syrian military and intelligence services.

'By all means necessary'

"Defectors gave us names, ranks, and positions of those who gave the orders to shoot and kill, and each and every official named in this report, up to the very highest levels of the Syrian government, should answer for their crimes against the Syrian people," said Anna Neistat of Human Rights Watch, one of the authors of the report.

The UN says more than 5,000 have died in the uprising but can the figures be accurately assessed?

The defectors' statements suggested that their commanders had given them orders to control the largely peaceful protests "by all means necessary" during regular briefings and prior to deployments.

They said that they understood this phrase to be an authorisation of lethal force, an understanding bolstered by the fact that they were issued live ammunition rather than rubber bullets or other means of crowd control.

The rights group says that about half of the former soldiers and officials it spoke to had been given direct orders to fire on protesters.

Navi Pillay, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has termed the situation in Syria "intolerable", putting the death toll since March at more than 5,000. The Syrian government has disputed this figure, saying the country is the victim of a "huge conspiracy", according to its ambassador to the UN.

The government has consistently said that the violence is the result of "armed groups" sowing unrest and attacking security forces.

HRW said it had documented "several incidents" where anti-government demonstrators or neighbourhood groups had engaged in violence, and that attacks on Syrian security forces by defectors had increased significantly since September.

In the latest such incident, 27 members of the Syrian military and security forces were killed in a series of clashes in the restive province of Deraa on Thursday.

Allegations of torture

Defectors also told HRW of their involvement in "large-scale arbitrary arrests" during protests and at checkpoints, in addition to carrying out "sweep" operations in neighbourhoods across the country.

They said that they had routinely beaten and mistreated detainees, including with electric cattle prods, and that they were encouraged to do so by their commanders.

"My unit was also involved in beating people. My heart was boiling inside, but I couldn't show it because I knew what

would happen to me," said Hani (not his real name), a member of the Air Force Intelligence's Special Operation Branch.

Defectors also alleged that soldiers and security forces personnel had been killed for refusing to follow orders to act against protesters and described alleged incidents of summary executions and deaths from torture in which 19 people were killed.

Lieutenant-Colonel Ghassan (not his real name), who served in the Presidential Guard, said that around August 7 he was witness to the summary execution of a detainee at a checkpoint in Douma.

"Seven soldiers were beating the man whom they had arrested. When I came, he was still alive. He was screaming, and the soldiers were swearing and laughing. It lasted for about five minutes longer, and then he died. He stopped moving, and I saw blood coming out of his mouth," Ghassan told HRW.

Local activists say that more than 197 people have been killed in detention by security forces.

Witness testimony in the HRW report alleges that Syrian intelligence services physically abused prisoners (at both detention centres and hospitals), and that soldiers had been involved in looting homes.

Some also alleged that intelligence agents had sexually assaulted female detainees by "touching [them] inappropriately".

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/2011121554026147645.html>

- **Deserters kill 27 of Syrian troops; HRW says forces were ordered to shoot at protests**

Syrian army deserters killed at least 27 soldiers and members of the security forces during clashes in the southern province of Deraa on Thursday, a rights group said.

The deaths occurred during three separate clashes at dawn, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in a statement sent to AFP in Nicosia.

Meanwhile, Syrian army commanders have ordered troops to halt protests

against President Bashar al-Assad "by all means necessary," often giving explicit instructions to fire on demonstrators, Human Rights Watch said on Thursday.



In a report based on dozens of interviews with army and intelligence defectors, it quoted one special forces soldier saying his brigade was told to "use as many bullets as you want" on protesters in the southern province of Deraa in April.

A sniper in the city of Homs said his commanders ordered that a specific percentage of demonstrators should die. "For 5,000 protesters, for example, the target would be 15 to 20 people," he told Human Rights Watch (HRW).

The United Nations says 5,000 people have been killed in Assad's crackdown on protests which erupted in March, inspired by uprisings which have brought down three Arab leaders.

Assad denied last week that orders were issued “to kill or be brutal.” Syria’s Foreign Ministry spokesman said security forces were clearly instructed not to use live ammunition.

But HRW said all defectors it spoke to said their commanders ordered them to stop the protests “by all necessary means” - a phrase they understood to authorize lethal force.

About half of the defectors said officers also gave direct orders to fire at protesters or bystanders, and assured them that they would not be held accountable, it said.

“Our general orders were to kill, destroy stores, crush cars in the streets and arrest people,” HRW quoted a soldier who defected from the Syrian army’s 5th Division as saying.

“Systematic abuses”

As well as ordering the use of lethal force against protesters, military commanders and intelligence officials also gave orders “to unlawfully arrest, beat and torture detainees,” the Human Rights Watch report said.

“The defectors’ statements leave no doubt that the Syrian security forces committed widespread and systematic abuses, including killings, arbitrary detention, and torture, as part of a state policy targeting the civilian population.

“These abuses constitute crimes against humanity,” Human Rights Watch said, calling on the United Nations Security Council to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Syrian authorities blame the violence on armed groups they say have targeted security forces and civilians. Authorities say 1,100 soldiers and police have been killed.

HRW said armed attacks on security forces had increased significantly since September, but that the majority of protests since March had been largely peaceful.

Several defectors said that senior commanders told them they had received specific orders from Assad, including a brigade commander who said his

instructions to attack the town of Rastan came directly from the president.

HRW said the former soldiers had named 74 commanders and officials who ordered, authorized or condoned killings, torture and unlawful arrests during the anti-government protests.

The group's findings echo those of a U.N.-backed independent investigation which said in a report last month that Syrian forces had committed crimes against humanity and soldiers had been given "shoot to kill orders."

An earlier U.N. fact-finding mission said it had drawn up a confidential list of 50 suspects linked to alleged crimes against humanity in Syria.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/15/182692.html?PHPSESSID=g2vra8dik8bleo1ea3ljgqc60>

- **U.S. envoy says Syrian opposition might have a plan for Assad guaranteeing his immunity**

The U.S. State Department's special coordinator on Middle East affairs, Frederic Hof, said in testimony before the

House Foreign Affairs Committee that the Syrian opposition might have a plan that guarantees political asylum to President Bashar al-Assad.



Hof, who urged the opposition to come up with a feasible plan for running the country post-Assad, said that the opposition told the administration it hopes to present the regime, including Assad, with a way out of Syria that would prevent further bloodshed. Hof said that plan might include a "distasteful price" in immunizing regime elements from prosecution, "but if it gets this clique out of country before it takes the country down, is it a price worth paying? It is not for us to decide," he said.

Hof said the U.S. administration's goals were to prevent a civil war in Syria, and rejected calls by Republicans on the committee, including chairman Steve

Chabot, who urged the administration to support armed factions of the opposition.

“No one, least of all the U.S., is seeking to militarize the situation,” he added.

“The Syrian regime is like a man sentenced to death,” he said, adding “there is no question whether the man will die, because he will die.”

He said that the U.S. is trying to convince Russia and China in adding further punitive measures against Damascus, as both do not want to see a “new Libya” in Syria. Recently, the Russia foreign minister said that the West has ignored graves crimes committed by the Syrian opposition.

“We have to redouble our efforts with Moscow and make clear that its backing of the regime will not just mean a human catastrophe, but it’s not in [their interest] either.”

Hof also said that Assad himself has turned Syria into “Pyongyang on the Levant,” referring to the heinous crimes targeting protesters and dissident.

In its meetings with the Syrian National Council, the administration has encouraged the opposition group to include minorities, such as Allawites and Christians, in its leadership, and urged them to assuage the fears of minorities regarding their place and freedoms in a future Assad-free country.

Hof said during his testimony that one of the biggest reasons cities like Damascus and Aleppo were quiet was that the regime managed to convince minorities that they had much to fear in the opposition.

Hof also called Syrians who were on the fence to reconsider their support for the regime. Referring to an interview Assad conducted recently in which he denied ordering the killings and abuses documented by human rights groups, Hof said: “Your president claims to see nothing. If you are a minister or a private, your president will put blame squarely on you.”

Meanwhile, a Syrian opposition activist based in Washington, Mohammed Abdullah, expressed his concern that the U.S. is not doing enough to help the Syrian people and that he is worried that

President Barack Obama, who called on Assad to step down, might finish his term in office before Assad leaves.

“The the U.S. wants to play more of a direct leadership position ... but the presence of Washington at the back and the EU at the front does not make up an effective clout to help the Syrian people, especially since the Syrian regime’s stance is that of a stubborn one,” he said.

“There is not enough pressure from the Arab League either; it is still hesitant about whether it should transfer the Syrian issue to that of the Security Council.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/15/182680.html?PHPSESSID=g2vra8dik8lbleo1ea3ljgqc60>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA / ARAP YARIMADASI VE BASRA KÖRFEZİ

• **Afghanistan recalls envoy from Qatar**

Kabul recalls ambassador for "consultations" amid separate reports of a Taliban office to be opened in the Gulf state.

Western diplomats hope the opening of a Taliban office will push forward the prospect of peace talks [Reuters]



Afghanistan has recalled its ambassador from Qatar for "consultations," the Afghan foreign ministry announced, amid media reports over the opening of a Taliban office in the Gulf state.

In a statement on Wednesday, the foreign ministry thanked Qatar for help with reconstruction, but said the Afghan ambassador had been recalled to Kabul. It did not give any reason for the recall.

"Considering the recent developments in Afghanistan and the region, including the relations between Afghanistan and Qatar, the Afghan government has decided to recall Khalid Ahmad Zakaria from Doha for some consultations," the ministry said in the statement.

"Diplomatic relationship between the two countries will continue through the Embassy and Afghanistan's charge d'affaires in Doha."

The ministry did not respond to calls seeking comment on why the ambassador had been recalled.

However, The Hindu newspaper in India, citing unidentified Indian diplomatic sources, said that final arrangements had been put in place for a Taliban office in Qatar that would have "the privileges but not the formal protection of a diplomatic mission".

Details were agreed by a senior Taliban representative close to the group's leader, Mullah Omar, together with officials from Qatar and the US, the newspaper said.

Plans for peace talks

The US has discussed plans for the Taliban to open an address in Qatar by the end of the year in a move designed to allow the West to begin formal peace talks with the group, the AFP news agency reported.

The AFP quoted a high ranking Afghan government official, who spoke to the news agency anonymously, saying that the Afghan government was aware that Qatar had held talks with the US and Germany on allowing a Taliban office to open, and supported the move as a means of facilitating the peace process.

But he said: "The ambassador has been recalled as a protest over why they did not allow the Afghan government into these talks while there are official diplomatic relations between the two countries."

He added that the opening of such an office "should not be seen as a concession" to the Taliban, the AFP reported.

The office of the self-styled Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan would be the first internationally recognised representation for the Taliban since it was ousted from power by the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

Western diplomats have said it is hoped the opening of a Taliban office would push forward the prospect of talks intended to reconcile the group with the Afghan

government and bring an end to the decade-long war.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/20111214154823662303.html>

- **Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques decrees cabinet mini-reshuffle**

Riyadh, Asharq Al-Awsat – Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud today announced a Cabinet mini-reshuffle, appointing a number of senior officials to new posts.

In a series of royal decrees issued by the Saudi Arabian Royal Court and read out on Saudi state television, King Abdullah relieved Dr. Fu'ad bin Abdulsalam Farsi of the post of Minister of Hajj, replacing him with Dr. Bandar bin Mohammed bin Hamza Asaad Hajjar. For his part, Dr. Hajjar quit his job as Deputy Speaker of the Shoura Council, being replaced by Dr. Mohammed bin Ameen bin Ahmed Al-Jeffery, who was also appointed the rank of Minister.

Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Qusaibi was relieved of his post as Minister of Economy and Planning, replaced by Dr.

Mohammed bin Sulaiman bin Mohammed Al-Jasser. Dr. Al-Jasser, in turn, was relieved of his post as Governor of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), being replaced by Dr. Fahd bin Abdullah bin Abdullatif Al-Mubarak, who was also appointed the rank of Minister.

Mohammed bin Ali Al-Fayez was relieved of his post as Minister of Civil Service and replaced by Dr. Abdulrahman bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Albarak. Dr. Albarak quit his current post as Assistant Speaker of the Shoura Council, being replaced by Dr. Fihad bin Mu'tad bin Shafaq Al-Hamad.

Abdullah bin Ahmed Zenel Ali Redha left the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with this portfolio being taken over by Dr. Tawfeeq bin Faozan bin Mohammed Al-Rabee'a.

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz also relieved Faisal bin Abdulrahman Al-Muammar of his post as Deputy Minister of Education, appointing Dr. Khalid bin Abdullah bin Ibrahim Al-Sabti as his replacement, who was also granted the rank of Minister. Bin Muammar was transferred to the post of Advisor to the Custodian of the Two Holy

Mosques and Secretary General of King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue at the rank of Minister.

King Abdullah also appointed Dr. Hamad bin Mohammed bin Hamad Al Al-Sheikh as Deputy Minister of Education for Boys Affairs, and Dr. Abdulrahman bin Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Ibrahim as Governor of the Saline Water Conversion Corporation.

All the above changes and appointments will go into force with immediate effect, according to the statement.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27688>

- **Kuwaiti emir swears in new cabinet**

KUWAIT CITY, (AFP) — Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Wednesday swore in the new cabinet with only minor changes to the government that resigned in November over allegations of corruption.

Sheikh Sabah urged Kuwaiti voters to abandon factional, sectarian and tribal allegiances while choosing representatives

in an upcoming general election which he said would usher in a new era for the oil-rich Gulf state.

Former prime minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammad al-Ahmad Al-Sabah resigned on November 28 over allegations of corruption and after mass rallies demanding his ouster organised by the opposition.

One week later, the emir dissolved parliament for the fourth time in under six years.

The new cabinet, which includes only minor changes, is headed by former defence minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Sabah, and is comprised of just 10 ministers, all of whom held posts in the previous cabinet.

Interior minister Sheikh Ahmad al-Humud Al-Sabah, a senior member of the ruling family, has been entrusted with the defence portfolio, while the foreign affairs, oil, finance, electricity and water ministries remain unchanged.

The newly appointed cabinet is the eighth to be formed in Kuwait since February

2006. All previous cabinets were forced to resign over political disputes.

A decree for the upcoming election -- which must be held within 60 days of the dissolution of the 50-seat parliament -- was expected to be issued later Wednesday.

The new compact cabinet will serve for several weeks as stipulated by Kuwaiti law, which calls on the government to resign after declaring election results.

Kuwait has been rocked by a series of almost non-stop political disputes since Sheikh Nasser, a nephew of the emir, was appointed premier in February 2006.

Kuwait is OPEC's third largest producer, pumping about 3.0 million barrels of oil per day. It has a native population of 1.2 million and 2.4 million foreign residents.

Despite accumulating massive assets exceeding \$300 billion from high oil prices, development projects have been stalled because of the political turmoil.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27687>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN / AFGANİSTAN - PAKİSTAN

• Panetta: US Winning War in Afghanistan

Leon Panetta

VOA News

December 14, 2011

U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said Wednesday that the U.S.-led coalition is winning the war in Afghanistan as foreign troops continue to transfer security of the country to Afghan forces ahead of a 2014 deadline.

Panetta told U.S. troops stationed in the eastern Afghan province of Paktika that they face significant challenges in the “very tough conflict.” But he promised to establish a safe, self-governing country where the Taliban and al-Qaida cannot find refuge.

The defense secretary is on a two-day visit to Afghanistan to check on the progress of U.S.-led counterinsurgency efforts, which he says reached a “turning point” this year after a decade of fighting the Taliban.

Panetta is expected to meet later Wednesday with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Secretary Panetta has been meeting with U.S. military commanders and Afghan officials to discuss the ongoing transfer of security to Afghan forces.

U.S. President Barack Obama announced earlier this year that 33,000 American troops would withdraw from the country by next October. All international combat troops are set to leave the country by 2014.

The second stage of security transition officially started last month, with Afghan forces set to take charge of six provinces, seven provincial capitals and more than 40 districts. The first stage of the transition began earlier this year.

The transition process has been complicated by worsening U.S. relations with Pakistan, after a NATO air strike last month killed 24 Pakistani soldiers along the country's border with Afghanistan.

Pakistani officials have closed two supply lines into Afghanistan and forced U.S.

troops out of a Pakistani airbase following the incident.

The top allied commander in Afghanistan, General John Allen, said Tuesday he was making efforts at resolving the issue during his recent talks with Pakistani officials.

Panetta again said on Tuesday that the U.S. believes healthy U.S.-Pakistan relations are vital for ending the conflict in Afghanistan.

In the latest violence, Afghan officials say a local government official was killed after his vehicle struck a roadside bomb in the restive southern province of Helmand.

U.S. officials reported in October that the number of Taliban attacks in Afghanistan decreased for the first time in five years. However, the United Nations said earlier this year the number of civilians killed went up by 15 percent in the first half of 2011, with nearly 1,500 deaths due mostly to insurgent attacks.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **US orders Pakistan to secure border**

Press TV

December 14, 2011

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has accused Pakistan of not controlling its border with Afghanistan and allowing militants to carry out operations in the country.

During his visit to Afghanistan, Panetta said it was important to make sure Pakistan could secure its side of the border.

"The Haqqanis [militants] that you fight here in this area come across the border, attack here and go back into the safe havens over there," he told troops at Forward Operating Base Sharana in Paktika on Wednesday.

"They (the Pakistanis) have a responsibility to deal with those safe havens," he was quoted as saying by AFP.

"Ultimately, we've got to make sure that if we're going to secure this country (Afghanistan), the Pakistanis better damn

well secure their country as well," Panetta told the troops.

In September, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen accused Pakistan's intelligence agency of "exporting" violence to Afghanistan. Islamabad denied the accusations.

US-Pakistan relations are deeply in crisis after US-led airstrikes that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers near the Afghan border on November 26.

Pakistan has shut the US supply line into Afghanistan and forced Americans to leave an airbase widely reported to have been a hub for CIA drones.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **NATO to stay in Afghanistan after 2014**

Press TV

December 14, 2011

NATO has decided to keep around 15,000 troops in Afghanistan beyond the end of 2014, the organization's chief of staff in Europe, General Manfred Lange said.

Lange added that the decision will be implemented after all combat troops leave Afghanistan, DPA reported.

"There will be no more combat operations against the Taliban,

that's what we want to achieve," Lange said on Tuesday.

He further said that it is important to leave some soldiers behind to provide training and technical support to Afghan troops.

There are currently around 150,000 troops from the NATO-led

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

The United States and the NATO leaders had set 2014 as the date to hand over security to local authorities in Afghanistan.

The security situation remains fragile in Afghanistan despite the presence of the US-led foreign forces.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Iran ready to help Afghan military: minister**

TEHRAN, Dec. 14 (Xinhua) -- Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi said his country is ready to offer assistance to Afghanistan in its efforts to establish a more sophisticated military force, the local satellite Press TV reported on Wednesday.

Vahidi made the remarks in a meeting with visiting Afghan Deputy Defense Minister Mohammad Homayoun Fawzi in Tehran on Tuesday. It was the first meeting of Iran-Afghanistan joint defense cooperation commission.

Vahidi said the commission should assume an effective role in expanding mutual defense ties and reinforce the capabilities of Afghan defense forces, according to the report.

The West does not want Afghanistan to become a developed country, but the Afghan nation will not allow the U.S. forces to undermine their national sovereignty, Vahidi was quoted as saying.

Fawzi, for his part, pointed to the numerous common interests of the two

nations and voiced Kabul's willingness to bolster mutual ties.

Iran's Foreign Minister Ali-Akbar Salehi said Tuesday that the Islamic republic is against any treaty that would enable the U.S. forces to remain in Afghanistan.

Referring to the existence of foreign military as the cause of instability in the region, Salehi said Iran believes in the competence of Afghan forces in providing security for their own country.

Vahidi said in June that the U.S. military bases in Afghanistan were against its national integrity and the progress of the regional states.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **US May Freeze \$700 million in Aid to Pakistan**

VOA News
December 14, 2011

The U.S. Congress is expected later this week to pass a measure that would freeze up to \$700 million in aid to Pakistan because of fears that Islamabad is not

doing enough to combat the spread of homemade bombs.

U.S. lawmakers are concerned that militants in Afghanistan are using fertilizer produced in Pakistan to develop improvised explosive devices – one of the militants' most effective weapons against U.S.-led forces there.

State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland said Tuesday that the proposed suspension would not automatically cut the funding, but will make it dependent on making progress with Pakistan on the issue of homemade bombs.

“We have not cut 700 million [U.S. dollars] in aid to Pakistan. What we have is something on the defense authorization bill, which is currently moving in the Congress, which would require the Department of Defense to continue providing a strategy on how we will use certain military systems and measure its progress, in particular, on progress that we are making on the IED issue.”

The aid suspension is part of a larger defense spending bill that U.S. lawmakers are expected to pass later this week.

Several Pakistani officials criticized the move on Tuesday, saying it would only lead to worse relations with Washington.

U.S.-Pakistani ties have suffered since a secret U.S. strike killed al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in early May.

Relations reached a new low following a NATO airstrike in November that killed 24 Pakistani troops along the border with Afghanistan.

In response to the airstrike, Islamabad ordered the United States to vacate a Pakistan airbase and has indefinitely closed the two main overland routes NATO uses to send supplies to Afghanistan.

But the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, General John Allen, said Tuesday that he achieved progress during talks with Pakistan on rebuilding cross-border security cooperation after the incident.

“I do have a sense of progress, and, in fact, I have had a conversation with [Pakistani] General [Ashfaq Pervez]

Kayani. The intent of the conversation, the outcome of the conversation, was that we stated our mutual commitment to address any shortfalls that might have caused this event, but also to ensure that we work closely together, because the border is always going to be there.”

Allen said he spoke on the phone Monday with Pakistan's army chief Ashfaq Pervez Kayani.

Many in the U.S. have become increasingly frustrated with what they see as Islamabad's lack of cooperation in fighting Pakistani-based militant groups who attack U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Earlier this year, the U.S. suspended \$800 million of the \$2.7 billion in annual military aid it gives to Pakistan.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Known Afghan Taliban commander killed in Kandahar**

KABUL, Dec. 14 (Xinhua) -- A known Afghan Taliban commander, namely Arab, was killed in a joint Afghan and NATO-led Coalition forces operation in country's Kandahar province on Tuesday, the

provincial government said on Wednesday.

"Based in accurate intelligence reports, a joint unit of Afghan and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) forces carried out an operation on Tuesday afternoon in Zhari district to capture a known Taliban commander namely Arab," the local government said in a press release Wednesday morning.

A gunfight broke out as troops arrived in a compound in Pashmol area of the district, resultantly Arab and three of his men were killed in the province with Kandahar city as its capital, some 450 km south of capital city of Kabul, the release reads.

Arab was responsible for organizing attacks on security forces in Zhari district and surrounding areas besides terrorizing local people in the area, it added.

The Taliban-led insurgency has been rampant since the militant group announced it would launch a rebel offensive starting from May 1 against Afghan and NATO-led troops in Afghanistan.

The killing of the Taliban commander in Kandahar province, the birthplace of Taliban, is another setback for the Taliban as over 380 fighters of the outfit have been killed and nearly 500 detained by ISAF and Afghan army troops since beginning of November this year.

Currently around 130,000 NATO troops with majority of them Americans have been stationed in Afghanistan.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Blast kills Afghan govt. official**

Press TV

December 14, 2011

An Afghan local government official and two of his bodyguards have been killed in a roadside explosion in southern Afghanistan, an official says.

The Reg district chief, Massoud Khan, was killed when he was returning from a visit to a neighboring district on Wednesday, Helmand Province spokesman Daoud Ahmadi said.

Khan had been meeting tribal elders and other officials of the Dishu district on efforts to curb drug trafficking, the Associated Press reported.

The blast also wounded three other bodyguards who were traveling with Khan, Ahmadi added.

Local Afghan officials have frequently been targeted by bombing attacks and shootings in recent years.

The security situation remains fragile in Afghanistan despite the presence of nearly 150,000 US-led foreign forces.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

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**This media summary is prepared by ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Nebahat Tanrıverdi O and Sercan Doğan. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*