



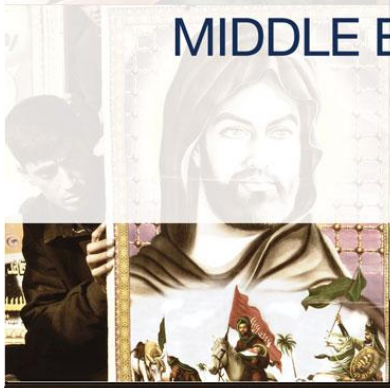
ORSAM
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

www.orsam.org.tr

- * **Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset**
Domestic Policy in the Middle East countries
- * **Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci**
The Restructuring Process of Iraq
- * **Enerji Güvenliği**
Energy Security
- * **Ekonomi Haberleri**
Economy News
- * **Barış Süreci**
Peace Process
- * **Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar**
Ethnic and Sectarian Groups
- * **Devlet-dışı Aktörler**
Non State Actors
- * **Batı'yla İlişkiler**
Relations with the West





MIDDLE EAST BULLETIN

12 JANUARY 2012

NO: 1304

1. IRAQ.....	2
• US troops 'told to lie' about Iraqi killings	2
• Al-Maliki does not deserve to be Iraqi Prime Minister – Saleh al-Mutlaq	4
• McCain expects Iraq government to collapse and split into three different States	7
• Iraqiya won't attend crisis meeting without Barzani	8
• Sadrists reject holding the national conference outside Baghdad	9
• Barzani will not boycott national conference, says official	11
2. IRAN	11
• Covert actions used against Iran by Israel, U.S., instead of overt strike: experts	11
• U.S. wins Japan's consent to cut Iran's oil imports but India stays in as an importer	14
• US condemns Iranian nuclear scientist killing	18
• China envoy to UN urges US to hold constructive talks with Iran.....	21
• Kremlin opposes oil embargo against Iran.....	22
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	23
• Israeli-Palestinian couples: Supreme Court influenced by wave of Israeli racism	23
• Hamas leader to visit Iran in new trip	24
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	25
• Egypt to celebrate revolution that toppled Mubarak in public holiday.....	25
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	27
• Second Jordanian dies after setting himself ablaze	27
6. SYRIA.....	28
• Second Arab monitor may quit Syria because of violence.....	28
• Biden raises Syria with Qatari premier; U.S. to reduce embassy staff in Damascus.....	33
• French reporter killed in Syria violence.....	35
• President al-Assad: "We are Victorious against Conspiracy"	38
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	45
• Saudi banking official downplays seriousness of hacking scandal	45
• U.S. judge drops Saudi Binladin Group in Sept. 11 lawsuits.....	46
• Bahrain GP reinstates sacked staff.....	47
• China to discuss Arab Spring with Gulf leaders	49
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	50
• Clinton says no deal yet for Taliban office in Qatar	50
• Taliban say Marine abuse tape won't hurt talks	52
• Pakistani PM defends sacking of top defense official	55
• 16 Pakistan soldiers killed in bomb attack, firing	57

1. IRAQ

- **US troops 'told to lie' about Iraqi killings**

US soldier says his commander killed five Iraqi civilians in Haditha in 2005 and asked him to lie about it.



A US soldier has told a military jury in California how his commander killed five Iraqi civilians in the western al-Anbar province in 2005 and then asked him to lie about it.

At a trial stemming from one of the Iraq war's most controversial episodes, Sergeant Sanick Dela Cruz testified on Wednesday, the third day of Staff Sergeant Frank Wuterich's court martial.

Wuterich was Dela Cruz's squad leader, who Dela Cruz said gunned down the Iraqis after they pulled up in

a car near the scene of a bombing in which a US marine had died.

In all, 24 Iraqi civilians including women and children were killed in the revenge attacks - 19 in several houses along with the five men who pulled up in a car in the town of Haditha on November 19, 2005.

Victims unarmed

At the military trial in Camp Pendleton, California, Dela Cruz told prosecutor Lieutenant Colonel Sean Sullivan that he saw the men outside the car on the side of the road.

He testified that the Iraqis did not appear to have any weapons and were not making any quick moves toward the car. He said he then saw a man drop to the ground.

"That's when I saw Staff Sergeant Wuterich kneeling with his gun aimed at the Iraqi. He was by the road holding the weapon in a firing position," said Dela Cruz,

demonstrating that position in the courtroom.

He said he could not recall how many gunshots he had heard. Dela Cruz also said that when he looked back in the direction of the car he did not see any of the men anymore.

"I run through there and crouched on the side of the vehicle. I saw four to five Iraqis dead near the trunk area of the car," he said.

"I saw Sergeant Wuterich approach the bodies, he shot at them," said Dela Cruz, adding that Wuterich went around to each corpse and shot it in the upper body from close range.

Revenge killings

"Sergeant Wuterich approached me and told me if anyone asks, the Iraqis were running away from the car and the Iraqi army shot them," Dela Cruz said.

Dela Cruz, a veteran of three combat deployments, said he later urinated on

the mangled head of one of the bodies, adding that he was "regretful" of his actions.

"I was pissed, sir, about what happened (the bombing)," he said.

The Haditha victims included women and children who were shot dead at point-blank range. Six people were killed in one house, most shot in the head, including women and children huddled in a bedroom.

Seven other marines charged in the case have been exonerated through various legal rulings, fueling anger in Iraq, where authorities had pushed for US troops to be subject to Iraqi justice before the US pullout in December.

Defence lawyer Haytham Faraj questioned Dela Cruz's credibility, contending that he had a record of lying numerous times to military investigators in Iraq about what had happened the day of the killings.

Faraj also argued that Dela Cruz signed statements "fed" to him by investigators, saying the government had "bought" Dela Cruz's testimony by dismissing murder charges against him and granting him immunity.

Dela Cruz testified that he believed the squad was disciplined in general and also disciplined under fire. He told Faraj that he decided to tell the truth after speaking with a lawyer in Iraq in April 2006.

"My conscience is clean, sir," he said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/01/201211242715642773.html>

- **Al-Maliki does not deserve to be Iraqi Prime Minister – Saleh al-Mutlaq**

London, Asharq Al-Awsat – In a telephone interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq acknowledged that the “political and security situation in Iraq today is extremely complicated” but asserted his hope that “the results of the meetings between the political

blocs will [show] light at the end of the tunnel and draw a roadmap for the forthcoming political process”.

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq, who heads the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue – part of Iyad Allawi’s Iraqiya bloc – revealed that “the general [political] atmosphere clearly reflects a lack of collective satisfaction with the approach and performance of the Iraqi government that is led by Nuri al-Maliki, due to his monopolization of the decision-making process and power on one hand, and the consecration of his dictatorial behaviour by some elements on the other.”

Al-Mutlaq, who was speaking to Asharq Al-Awsat from Kurdistan Region capital Erbil, indicated that “this is a frightening prospect, and the people feel frustration having sacrificed themselves over many long years. The current approach to political operations must be changed”.

In previous comments, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq had described al-Maliki as being “a dictator worse than Saddam Hussein”, which caused a political storm and prompted the Iraqi Prime Minister to demand that parliament issue a vote of no confidence against al-Mutlaq, a prelude to securing his dismissal.

In response to a question concerning how he expected al-Maliki to react to his comments, al-Mutlaq told Asharq Al-Awsat “certainly I knew his reaction and I knew he would be displeased, but if I did not say that then al-Maliki would remain in power and be able to monopolize power to the point where there would be no going back. Therefore I told the truth and this served as a rallying cry to alert the leaders and members of political blocs to the depressing reality the country is experiencing, and that we must take action to find an alternative”.

In a press statement issued earlier this week, State of Law coalition MP Abdul Salam al-Maliki revealed that “the

leaders of the parliamentary blocs will meet soon to reach an agreement to withdraw confidence from Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq”.

He indicated that “Iraqi National Alliance leader Ibrahim al-Jaafari has put forward several options for al-Mutlaq” which include “offering his resignation, apologizing, or [the Iraqiya bloc] can choose a replacement”.

However Iraqiya bloc MP Hamid Zobaie has stressed that the Iraqiya bloc has not nominated any alternative to al-Mutlaq for the position of Deputy Prime Minister. He also warned that the Iraqiya bloc “would not put forward the name of any individual from its ranks to replace al-Mutlaq as Deputy Prime Minister”.

For his part, al-Mutlaq explained “I still hold my position as Deputy Prime Minister, and I am working from an office outside of the parliamentary building”.

He added that “the Kurdistan Alliance bloc has refused to participate in a vote of no confidence against me in parliament, just as the Iraqiya bloc has refused to vote or nominate a replacement for me as Deputy Prime Minister”.

In response to al-Jaafari’s proposals, the Deputy Prime Minister told Asharq Al-Awsat “I did not do anything or say anything that merits an apology. I was not appointed to my post by al-Maliki. I was appointed as the result of a political consensus; this is the same way that al-Maliki was appointed Prime Minister. I represent 91 members of parliament, whilst al-Maliki represents 89”.

Al-Mutlaq pointed out that “when al-Maliki says that he cannot work with al-Mutlaq, then he (al-Maliki) has to offer his resignation. I did not ask for my position, and I am not the one clinging on to it”.

He went on to say that al-Maliki has “become strongly attached to his

position, and is clinging on to it at the expense of Iraq’s stability, the development and construction of the country, and the welfare of the people. He does not deserve to be the Prime Minister of Iraq”.

The Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister also warned that “it has become difficult to work with al-Maliki. He is a man who has created crises which have not yet been resolved or contained. This is what our experience of working with him in government and his practices over the past four years have illustrated. Our people are suffering from a crisis and this does not serve the process of building and consolidating constitutional institutions”.

Regarding the potential solutions for the political crisis currently afflicting the country, al-Mutlaq said: “This government came to power in accordance with certain agreements, and when these agreements are not met it is only right for the relevant parties to sit and discuss the situation,

to decide whether to form a new government, headed by Dr. Iyad Allawi for example - although he has not put himself forward for this position - or any other figure from the National Alliance, with the exception of al-Maliki”.

He indicated that “our Kurdish brothers have the same feelings of concern with regards to what is happening today and the monopolization of power [by al-Maliki]. This is a problem that must be solved by changing the government”.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28055>

- **McCain expects Iraq government to collapse and split into three different States**

US Senator John McCain expected, on Tuesday, that Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki’s government would break down leading to the country’s disintegration into three different states. Militias and death squads operating in Iraq, increased tensions between Kurdish areas and the rest of

Iraq, and the hiding out of Iraqi Vice-President in Erbil are clear signs of the country’s eventual disintegration, McCain pointed up, a source told Alsumaria.

“The situation in Iraq is unraveling which threatens lives of thousands of American civilians in the country,” US Senator John McCain told a TV interview. “Iraq will likely break up which would eventually lead to the formation of three different States,” he expected.

“The 15 thousand American civilians in Iraq are not safe,” presidential candidate for Republican Party John McCain uttered. “The US would be forced to pull these civilians out of Iraq if security collapsed and chaos prevailed”, he noted.

“Iraqi government is close to breakdown,” McCain indicated adding that tension is rising between Kurdish areas and the rest of Iraq.

“Obama’s administration is to be blamed for the deteriorating situation

in Iraq because it refrained from leaving a US force behind, Senator John McCain who lost 2008 presidential elections to Barack Obama accused.

"What Defense Secretary Leon Panetta may not understand, and I have great admiration and respect for him, is that the situation is unraveling," McCain said. "Iraqi Vice-President is hiding out in Erbil, and militias and death squads are operating in the country," he stressed.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and his Parliament Speaker Osama Al Nujaifi agreed, in a meeting in Sulaymaniyah on December 27, upon holding a national congress for all Iraqi political parties in order to deal with state governance issues and bring forth related solutions.

The US officially ended its presence in Iraq, in December 2011, by virtue of 2008's agreement between both countries. This agreement was concluded after 9 years of US invasion

to Iraq when Saddam Hussein's regime was tossed following the resolution of former US President Georges Bush.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72634-McCain-expects-Iraq-government-to-collapse-and-split-into-three-different-States.html>

- **Iraqiya won't attend crisis meeting without Barzani**

BAGHDAD, Jan. 12 (AKnews) - Iraqiya List has said they will not go to the emergency meeting of Iraq's political elite if the President of Kurdistan Region does not go.

The meeting called by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani is to calm the tensions caused by disputes between Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Iraqiya, led by Maliki's rival Ayad Allawi.

The country has been mired in political turmoil since the U.S. forces withdrew. Maliki has sacked his Iraqiya deputy Saleh al-Mutlag and an arrest warrant has been issued for Iraqiya member and Iraqi Vice President Tareq al-

Hashemi on terrorism charges. In addition Iraqiya members boycotting the Councils of Representatives and Ministers saying Maliki is trying to turn Iraq into a sectarian, one-party state.

Within the past few days different statements over Barzani's participation were made. Fuad Hussein, head of Barzani's office told AKnews that Barzani will not attend the meeting if it is to be held in Baghdad. Later he said Barzani will send his representative if the meeting is in Baghdad.

Maysun al-Damluji, spokesperson for Iraqiya List, told AKnews that her list's position is clear and won't change.

"Our participation in the conference depends on the presence of the political leaders who played a great role in eliminating the previous regime and play a great role in the political process now."

A proposal by Barzani for a power sharing government led to the current political arrangement following almost

nine months of standoff. Under Barzani's agreement Maliki was reinstated as PM and Allawi, whose party won the election, were placated with the leadership of a new national council for strategic polices.

Failure to constitute the Council triggered accusations that Maliki was in violation of the constitution and the Erbil Agreement, as the power sharing accord is known.

Damluji said: "Iraqiya will not participate in the meeting if Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani does not participate. Iraqiya does not see any benefit in holding the conference if the conditions of its success are not met."

By Haidar Ibrahim

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/4/283834>

- **Sadrists reject holding the national conference outside Baghdad**

BAGHDAD, Jan. 11 (AKnews) - The Sadrist movement led by Muqtada al-Sadr has rejected any idea of holding the national

conference outside Baghdad, noting that the Kurdish Blocs Coalition agreed on holding the conference in the capital.

An official source in the presidency office of the Kurdistan Region said yesterday that President Massoud Barzani will not participate in the national conference if it was held in Baghdad.

The Iraqi President Jalal Talabani has convened a national conference to resolve the crisis that is gripping Iraq. He called on all political parties to to put an end for the political disputes. The conference is expected to take place at the end of this month.

The debate over where to hold the conference arose after the leader of Iraqiya List Ayad Allawi preferred to hold it in Kurdistan.

Deputy Jawad al-Shuhaili, leader in the movement told AKnews that Baghdad is the capital of the federal government and the capital of Iraq and any initiative must start from there.

Shuhaili expressed his surprise at the recent remarks of the Iraqiya leader who

demanded the conference convene in Sulaimaniyah, saying there is a big problem and everyone must stay away from self-interest.

The political tension escalated in Iraq after an arrest warrant was issued for Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi. He was indicted on terrorism offenses, accused of using his bodyguards as a kill squad to assassinate high profile targets from 2009

Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq was sacked by Maliki, following which Mutlaq called Maliki a worse dictator than Saddam Hussien which did little to improve things. Mutlaq is unrepentant, repeating his statement in an exclusive interview with AKnews today.

The Iraqiya leader Ayad Allawi gave a per-condition to showing up at the conference - Barzani, and the two Shiite leaders Moqtada al-Sadr and Ammar Hakim must be present as well, and a political committee must be formed to oversee the integrity of the investigation into the Hashemi case.

The federal interior ministry officially demanded its Erbil counterpart hand

Hashemi over, along with 14 members of his personal security detail.

Hashemi, who is in the Kurdistan region, denies the charges against him and has accused the Iraqi judiciary of being "politically motivated".

By Yazn al-Shemmari

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/4/283656>

- **Barzani will not boycott national conference, says official**

ERBIL, Jan. 11 (AKnews) – The President of Kurdistan Region will not boycott the national conference if it is held in Baghdad, says his chief of staff, but he will send his representative in his stead.

Fouad Hussein’s statement come after he said yesterday that Barzani will not participate in the national conference that is expected to bring political leaders together to solve political contention in Iraq.

Since a Kurdish leader, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, called for the conference there has been a disagreement over where to hold the conference, Erbil or Baghdad. Kurds and the Sunni-backed Iraqiya List

support holding the meeting in Erbil, other mainly Shiite forces want it to be held in Baghdad.

“Not attending the meeting does not mean that he is boycotting it,” Hussein said. “Because boycotting is not one of Barzani’s practices”

He will send his representative to the conference if the date of the conference and location are set.

By Rebin Hasan

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/4/283684>

2. IRAN

- **Covert actions used against Iran by Israel, U.S., instead of overt strike: experts**

Experts believe that covert actions that include a campaign of assassinations, bombings, cyber attacks and defections are the modus-operandi used mainly by Israel to weaken the Iranian regime and to halt the country’s attempts to develop nuclear capabilities.



The latest strike against Iran came in the form of the assassination of a 32-year-old nuclear scientist, Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, on Wednesday, when a magnetic bomb was placed on his car.

Roshan, who is at least the fifth Iranian scientist with nuclear knowledge to be killed since 2007, was working as a department supervisor at the Natanz uranium enrichment plant. Natanz is considered by the West to be a location at which Iran is working on the technology to develop nuclear weapons.

“Sabotage and assassination is the way to go, if you can do it,” Patrick Clawson, director of the Iran Security Initiative at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told The New York

Times in an interview published on Thursday.

Clawson said that a covert campaign was far preferable to overt airstrikes by Israel or the United States on suspected Iranian nuclear sites.

“It doesn’t provoke a nationalist reaction in Iran, which could strengthen the regime. And it allows Iran to climb down if it decides the cost of pursuing a nuclear weapon is too high,” he added.

On Wednesday, the United States condemned the killing of the scientist and denied Iran’s accusations that it was behind the assassination. Iran also blamed Israel and the U.S. for the Stuxnet computer virus that attacked Iran’s nuclear program in 2010.

Meanwhile, a former senior Israeli security official, who would speak of the covert campaign only in general terms and on the condition of anonymity, told The New York Times that uncertainty about who was

responsible was useful. “It’s not enough to guess,” he said. “You can’t prove it, so you can’t retaliate. When it’s very, very clear who’s behind an attack, the world behaves differently.”

The former Israeli official said that Iran carried out many assassinations of enemies, mostly Iranian opposition figures, during the 1980s and 1990s, and had been recently accused of plotting to kill the Saudi ambassador to the United States in Washington.

It has been said that Iran has killed people it considered enemies outside of the Islamic republic. In 1992, four Iranian dissidents were killed in a Berlin restaurant, and it is believed by many that Tehran was behind the murders.

At the same time, historians say that Israel used assassination as a statecraft tool to aid its creation, in 1948. According to analysts, Israel has killed dozens of Palestinian and other fighters and a small number of foreign scientists, military officials or people

accused of being Holocaust collaborators.

The founder of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, was assassinated in an Israeli airstrike in 2004 inside Palestinian territories in Gaza.

But Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, believes that at least some of the murdered scientists could have been killed by the Iranian government, he told the Times. Some of them had shown sympathy for the Iranian opposition, he said, and not all appeared to have been high-ranking experts.

“I think there is reason to doubt the idea that all the hits have been carried out by Israel,” Mr. Sadjadpour said. “It’s very puzzling that Iranian nuclear scientists, whose movements are likely carefully monitored by the state, can be executed in broad daylight, sometimes in rush-hour traffic, and their culprits never found.”

Meanwhile, Mousa Sharififarid, an Iran expert, told Al Arabiya.net that it is true that some analysts blamed the Iranian government for the killing of one scientist in 2009, as he was a sympathizer with the anti-Iran regime Green Movement, but Roshan was working for the Natanz site, at which only highly loyal pro-regime individuals are employed.

Sharififarid said there was an explicit condemnation from the U.S. over Roshan's assassination, but Israel did not voice the same political sentiment.

On Wednesday, an Israeli military spokesman, Brigadier General Yoav Mordechai, wrote on his official Facebook page that "I don't know who took revenge on the Iranian scientist, but I am definitely not shedding a tear."

On Thursday, Iran accused the IAEA of giving information to Israel and the U.S. to facilitate the killing of its scientists.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/12/187866.html?PHPSESSID=oi0q4798ofdvc1jmt7f3ss69g5>

- **U.S. wins Japan's consent to cut Iran's oil imports but India stays in as an importer**

Japan said Thursday it will cut imports of Iranian oil, marking a victory for U.S. diplomatic efforts to pressure Tehran into giving up its nuclear program after Washington's knockback from China.

The pledge was made during a visit by U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, who came to Tokyo after receiving short shrift from Beijing for the campaign to smother Iran's vital oil exports and head off its atomic drive.

"In the past five years, we have reduced... the amount of oil imported (from Iran)," Finance Minister Jun Azumi said during a joint news conference with Geithner.

"We wish to take planned and concrete steps to further reduce this

share, which now stands at 10 percent.”

Geithner came away empty handed from Beijing, which refused to bow to U.S. pressure to add its economic might in the campaign to isolate Iran.

EU

However, the U.S. moves have gained traction in the West, with the EU looking to add its not inconsiderable weight.

Denmark, which holds the EU presidency, said Wednesday it was confident European sanctions would be finalized later this month.

The EU decided in principle at the beginning of the month to introduce an oil embargo against Iran, but numerous details remain unresolved.

Europe is collectively the second-biggest destination for Iranian oil exports after China, taking in some 450,000 barrels per day, and the countries most dependent on Iranian

oil, like Greece, Italy and Spain, want to delay the start of the sanctions while they search for other sources.

Azumi, whose resource-poor country is heavily dependent on Middle East oil and has maintained relations with Iran in the face of pressure to ostracize the country, said the atomic issue needed to be dealt with.

“The nuclear problem is a problem that the world cannot ignore,” he said. “In this respect, we fully understand actions taken by the United States.”

A statement from Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda’s office after a meeting with Geithner later Thursday said the two men shared concerns over the Iranian nuclear issue.

But Noda cautioned if implemented wrongly, U.S. sanctions could have a serious impact on the health of Japan’s economy and that of the world.

The statement gave no further details.

The mass circulation Yomiuri Shimbun reported Thursday that Tokyo's move was an effort to persuade the U.S. to exempt Japanese banks from sanctions.

The paper did not offer any figures on the reduction, but said in exchange for telling oil importers to change suppliers, Tokyo will ask the United States to allow Japanese banks to continue dealing with Iranian authorities.

Under Washington's measures, foreign firms will have to choose between doing business with the Islamic republic or the United States. Japanese megabanks would be badly hurt if they are hit with sanctions.

The Japanese government believes it would be difficult to impose a total ban on Iranian oil imports, the Yomiuri said.

Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba is currently on an eight-day trip to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the

United Arab Emirates for talks expected to focus on the Iranian oil problem.

The pressure from Washington and the European Union to boycott Iranian crude comes at a time when Japan must make greater use of thermal power plants after a massive earthquake and tsunami sparked a nuclear power crisis last March.

The vast bulk of Japan's 54 nuclear reactors are now shut down, amid public distrust of the technology and increased safety calls.

India second largest importer

Meanwhile, an Indian oil ministry official denied on Thursday that the government had asked refiners to reduce Iranian oil imports, adding an existing mechanism through Turkey to pay for the shipments was working despite U.S. sanctions against Tehran.

"We have not asked companies to cut imports from Iran," Sudhir Bhargava, additional oil secretary, told reporters.

He added India was looking for alternative supplies and that an existing payment mechanism was working. He didn't explain why India was looking for alternative supplies.

India, Iran's largest oil buyer after China, imports about 12 percent of its oil needs, or 350,000-400,000 barrels per day, (bpd) from Iran. The shipments are worth \$12 billion annually.

Industry sources told Reuters on Wednesday that the government had told refiners to reduce Iranian oil imports and find alternative supplies. They said New Delhi may not seek a waiver from the latest U.S. sanctions.

India has been struggling to pay for Iranian crude owing to sanctions on dealings with Iran, government officials have said previously.

New U.S. laws authorized on December 31 impose sanctions on financial institutions dealing with Iran's central bank, the main clearing house

for the country's oil payments. That is widely expected to make it even tougher for importers to pay for Iran crude.

India currently pays for Iran crude through Turkey's Halkbank, a mechanism government officials have said may be cut off by the latest U.S. sanctions.

An Indian delegation will visit Tehran from Jan. 16-21 to explore alternative routes of payment to try to ensure supplies without breaching sanctions, government officials said on Wednesday.

A government source said on Thursday that India had not sought a waiver from the U.S. sanctions.

"We will decide on the basis of what happens during our upcoming trip to Iran, and whether other suppliers can supply more," the source said.

Japan and South Korea intend to seek waivers on the sanctions from the United States.

Indian refiners have gradually started raising supplies from other sources such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates.

Iran, which insists its nuclear program is for exclusively peaceful purposes, has repeatedly said it will not abandon uranium enrichment despite four rounds of U.N. Security Council sanctions demanding it desist.

Tehran has threatened to block the strategic Strait of Hormuz if sanctions are imposed.

Geithner on Thursday said Washington was in the early stages of consulting with allies on how best to isolate Iran.

“We very much appreciate the support Japan has provided, standing with us and the international community in support of this very important strategic objective.”

Meanwhile, Russia said on Wednesday that it opposes U.S., and possible European oil sanctions against Iran, even if Tehran presses ahead with uranium enrichment which Western powers say serves military goals.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/12/187852.html?PHPSESSID=oi0q4798ofdvc1jmt7f3ss69q5>

- **US condemns Iranian nuclear scientist killing**

Tensions rise as Hillary Clinton denies any US role in apparent bomb attack while Iran calls for strong UN condemnation.



US officials have denied any role in the apparent killing of an Iranian nuclear scientist, and condemned the bomb attack which Tehran said was linked to Washington and Israel.

"I want to categorically deny any United States involvement in any kind of act of violence inside Iran," Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, told reporters on Wednesday when asked about Iranian allegations over the attack.

Tommy Vietor, a National Security Council spokesman, added: "The United States had absolutely nothing to do with this. We strongly condemn all acts of violence, including acts of violence like this."

Victoria Nuland, Clinton's spokeswoman, said the state department condemned "any assassination or attack on an innocent person and we express our sympathies to the family".

This comes following the death of Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, a nuclear scientist who supervised a department at the Natanz uranium enrichment facility. He was killed on Wednesday in

an explosion outside a university campus in Tehran.

In a letter, Iran's government demanded the UN Security Council strongly denounce the killing.

Mohammad Khazaei, Iran's UN ambassador, called on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the 15-nation Security Council and UN General Assembly president Nassir Abdulaziz al-Nasser to condemn the killings "in the strongest terms".

"There is firm evidence that certain foreign quarters are behind such assassinations," Khazaei said.

The country's powerful Revolutionary Guards were also adamant that "the terrorist actions against our nuclear scientists and experts is a US-Zionist plot," the AFP news agency reported.

War of words

Wednesday's attack has deepened a war of words between Washington

and Tehran already raging over Iranian nuclear ambitions and maritime tensions.

Iranian officials noted that the manner of the attack on Roshan - two men on a motorbike attaching a magnetic bomb to the target's vehicle - bore similarities to the killings of three other scientists over the past two years.

At least two of those scientists had also been working on nuclear activities. Those attacks were viewed by Iranian officials as assassination operations carried out by Israel's Mossad intelligence service, possibly with US assistance.

Mohammad Reza Rahimi, Iran's vice president, on Wednesday blamed Israeli agents for the attack, but said they could not "prevent progress" in what Iran claims are peaceful nuclear efforts.

He said the killing was "evidence of [foreign] government-sponsored

terrorism" but vowed it would not stop Iran's nuclear programme.

"Today those who claim to be combating terrorism have targeted Iranian scientists," he said. "They should know that Iranian scientists are more determined than ever in striding towards Iran's progress."

The US and Israel say Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapons technology. Iran denies the allegations, saying that its programme is intended for peaceful purposes.

In Israel, a senior official said he was unaware who carried out Wednesday's attack which he called an act of "revenge".

"I don't know who took revenge on the Iranian scientist, but I am definitely not shedding a tear," Brigadier General Yoav Mordechai, a military spokesman, wrote on his official Facebook page.

Aircraft carrier deployed

The increased tension over the attack comes as a second US aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, arrived in the Gulf region, the Pentagon said on Wednesday, in a move it called "routine".

The Carl Vinson was due to relieve another aircraft carrier, the USS John Stennis, which is in the region, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

"Her deployment in that area is routine, long-planned - there's nothing unusual about that," Kirby explained.

Despite the Pentagon's denials of a build-up in the region, the USS Abraham Lincoln was in the Indian Ocean and en route to join the Carl Vinson, according to the US Navy.

"The fact that there are two carriers in that AOR [area of responsibility] is not an indication of anything specific in respect to Iran," the spokesman stressed, insisting: "There is no change to force posture in the region."

The military buildup comes with the US steadily ratcheting up sanctions on Iran with the aim of fracturing its oil-dependent economy in a bid to halt its nuclear programme.

Iran has responded by saying it could close the Strait of Hormuz, the gateway to the Gulf, potentially blocking the maritime flow of 20 per cent of the world's oil if it is attacked or if sanctions halt its petroleum exports.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/01/201211244648837585.html>

- **China envoy to UN urges US to hold constructive talks with Iran**

New York, Jan 12, IRNA – Permanent Representative of China to UN Li Baodong has urged US to hold constructive talks with Iran as imposing sanctions against the country would have no effect.



It would be better for Washington to try constructive talks with Tehran, Li told IRNA during an exclusive interview which was made on the sidelines of a UN meeting Wednesday.

The Chinese envoy reiterated Beijing's opposition to the US sanctions against Iran's oil industry, stressing that such restrictions would have no effect.

China believed that sanctions would change nothing, Li said adding that the two sides should remove problems and replace tensions through negotiations that he believed was the only solution to the problem.

The US treasury secretary who was in Beijing to garner China's support for imposing further sanctions on Iran,

faced strong reaction by Chinese officials towards the idea.

A similar situation had lately occurred when US officials sought support of Turkish officials for imposing further unilateral sanctions on Iran. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu expressed Ankara's disagreement on the issue.

<http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NIID=30762232&SRCH=1>

- **Kremlin opposes oil embargo against Iran**

Russia opposes U.S. and possible European oil sanctions against Iran, even if Tehran presses ahead with uranium enrichment, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on Wednesday, Reuters reported.

"Regardless of any conditions ... be those the conditions in which the Iranian nuclear program expands or others, we are against the application of such measures against Iran," he was

quoted by state-run Itar-Tass news agency as saying.

He said new sanctions would not strengthen nuclear non-proliferation.

The United States imposed additional sanctions on Iran last month and the European Union is expected to agree a ban on imports of Iranian oil later this month.

According to the Washington Post, U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner also received no specific assurances from Chinese officials Wednesday on his request that China reduce its oil imports from Iran.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israeli-Palestinian couples: Supreme Court influenced by wave of Israeli racism**

Supreme Court ruling to uphold Citizenship Law ends hope for a normal life for thousands of families in Israel.

By Jack Houry

Thousands of families of Israeli Arabs and Palestinians have been waiting for years for a Supreme Court decision rejecting Israel's Citizenship Law. Wednesday's ruling to uphold the law puts an end to their hope of obtaining citizenship for their spouses and receiving permanent status in Israel.

Taysar Hatib and his wife Lana of Acre married six years ago. Up to this day Lana, originally from Nablus, has been denied an Israeli citizenship. She receives a temporary permit to live with her husband in Acre annually, but doesn't hold the legal rights extended to permanent Israeli residents.

Taysar, who is writing his anthropology doctorate at Haifa University and is employed as a lecturer at the Western Galilee College, wasn't surprised by the court ruling. "The decision is proof that one shouldn't have any faith in the Israeli judicial system. It is clear that the Supreme Court is influenced by the wave of fascism and racism

sweeping Israel and the judges weren't expected to act in any other way."

Hatib explained that though his wife holds a permit of temporary residence, the court ruling puts an end to any hope for advancement or a normal life. "She can't develop a career – She can't even drive a car, though she holds a Palestinian driver's license."

Hatam Ataya, a lawyer from Kfar Qara, married his wife Jasmine, 12 years ago. Since the two wed, they have been trying to obtain a citizenship for Jasmine, who was born in Nablus, but have faced the repeated refusal from Israeli authorities.

Hatam heard about the court ruling from Haaretz, late on Wednesday night and had a hard time swallowing the bitter news. According to him: "If Michaeli spilled water on Majadele and people said that it wasn't racist or offensive, then the Supreme Court spilled a large bucket of water on Israel's Arab citizens."

The Citizenship Law is temporary legislation that only allows reunification in Israel of Palestinians with an Israeli spouse if it involves a Palestinian husband who is at least 36 years of age or if it involves a Palestinian wife who is at least 26.

The decision to refuse to allow couples to live together in Israel was initially taken by the government in May 2002. The Knesset affirmed the policy the following year and has since extended its initial expiration date twice. The extensions came despite petitions filed in the High Court of Justice challenging the provision.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/israeli-palestinian-couples-supreme-court-influenced-by-wave-of-israeli-racism-1.406886>

- **Hamas leader to visit Iran in new trip**

Hamas PM Ismail Haniyeh recently returned to Gaza Strip from tour of Egypt, Sudan, Turkey and Tunisia; Hamas says visits indicate growing

international recognition of the movement.



By The Associated Press

An adviser to Hamas' prime minister said the leader will visit Iran, Qatar and other Muslim countries at the end of the month.

Yusef Rizka says the militant group's Ismail Haniyeh will embark on his second international trip outside the Gaza Strip. He returned this week from a tour of Egypt, Sudan, Turkey and Tunisia.

It was the first time Haniyeh had left Gaza since Hamas seized control of the territory from the rival Fatah movement in 2007.

Hamas said the visits indicate the movement's increased international

recognition, and the growing influence of Islamic groups in the region.

The internationally-recognized Palestinian Authority, which is dominated by Fatah, has been concerned by the warm welcome Haniyeh has received. It says his visits should be coordinated through Palestinian embassies.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/hamas-leader-to-visit-iran-in-new-trip-1.406896>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt to celebrate revolution that toppled Mubarak in public holiday**

Egypt will celebrate with pomp and parade the revolt that unseated president Hosni Mubarak, making January 25 an official public holiday, a member of the ruling military council said on Wednesday.



ORSAM

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION



“The armed forces will organize a big celebration on January 25 in line with the momentous event,” General Ismail Etman said.

January 25 – when protesters took to the streets across the country to call for democratic change and the downfall of Mubarak’s regime – will now be considered a “national day,” he said.

Etman described last year’s 18-day revolution as “the biggest and greatest event” in Egypt’s contemporary history, and equal to the July 23, 1952 revolution led by military officers that ended the monarchy.

Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, Mubarak’s long-time defense minister who now heads the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF),

has vowed to hand power to civilian rule as quickly as possible.

But activists accuse the military of trying to maintain its grip on power. The SCAF has also come under fire for heavy-handed tactics during clashes between anti-military protesters and security forces that left dozens dead in October and November.

“Five months only remain before power is handed over, on a golden plate, to an elected civilian regime,” said Etman, referring to presidential elections due in June.

He also insisted that for Egypt’s military rulers, “stability is the main goal until the wheel of investments, tourism and economy starts turning.”

According to Etman, three major celebrations will mark the revolution, symbolized by the protests in Cairo’s iconic Tahrir (liberation) Square on January 25.

They will be as important as “anniversaries for the October (6, 1973) victory against Israel and the July 23 (1952) Revolution” that toppled the monarchy, Etman said.

One celebration will be “totally undertaken by the youth in Tahrir Square” while the second will be an official event and the third will be organized by businessmen on February 10, when the SCAF first addressed the nation, he said.

Mubarak stepped down on February 11, 2011.

The armed forces will organize parades, air shows and fireworks displays across Egypt, and military helicopters will drop prize certificates in 19 governorates.

In addition, “all the leaders of the armed forces who witnessed the January revolution will also be honoured,” added Etman.

According to Etman, a third of army recruits over the past year hail from revolutionary youth ranks, and some confronted protesters in the clashes that shook the capital last October and November.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/11/187801.html?PHPSESSID=oi0q4798ofdvc1jmt7f3ss69q5>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Second Jordanian dies after setting himself ablaze

A 54-year-old Jordanian man died on Wednesday after setting himself on fire, in the second such death in as many days, a security official said.



“Yassin Falah Zubi set himself on fire in the Nazzal neighborhood, east of Amman. He was rushed to hospital but died there,” the official told AFP. “According to his son, the man suffered from mental problems.”

On Tuesday, 52-year-old Ahmad Matarneh died in hospital after setting himself on fire the previous day because of his economic woes, his family said.

The former Amman municipality employee's contract was terminated in July. The municipality said Matarneh received about \$11,000 as end-of-service compensation and a \$42,000 housing loan, "expressing regret over his death."

In April, a man killed himself the same way after police refused to erase his criminal record.

Meanwhile, an 18-year-old activist was arrested on Wednesday after torching a large picture of King Abdullah II in the southern city of Madaba, near Amman, local news websites reported.

Jordan faces chronic economic challenges and people have been protesting since January last year to demand economic and political

reforms as well as an end to corruption.

The Arab Spring began in Tunisia in December 2010 after unemployed graduate Mohamed Bouaziz's self-immolation set off a wave of protests that toppled long-standing dictators and dramatically changed the Arab world.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/12/187826.html?PHPSESSID=oi0q4798ofdvc1jmt7f3ss69q5>

6. SYRIA

- **Second Arab monitor may quit Syria because of violence**

An Arab observer delegation in Syria is running into further difficulties, with two members either quitting or threatening to do so within 24 hours because their mission is proving ineffectual in ending the suffering of civilians.



An observer who declined to give his name said on Wednesday he was ready to walk out, exposing rifts in an Arab peace effort a day after Anwar Malek, an Algerian observer, told Al Jazeera TV he had quit Syria because the peace mission was a “farce.”

Both men, clearly appalled by what they had seen, spoke of continued violence, killings and torture, saying the bloodshed had not abated as a result of the presence of the Arab League mission. Both described Syrians’ suffering as “unimaginable.”

Malek’s departure was a blow to the mission, already criticized by Syria’s opposition as a toothless body that only served to buy President Bashar al-Assad time.

Its work has already been hampered by an attack on monitors in the western port of Latakia this week that lightly wounded 11 and prompted the League to delay sending new observers to Syria to join about 165 already there.

Another resignation would further undermine its credibility.

Asked if he agreed with Malek’s characterization of the mission as a failure, the monitor said: “It is true, it is true. Even I am trying to leave on Friday. I’m going to Cairo or elsewhere... because the mission is unclear.... It does not serve the citizens. It does not serve anything.”

“The Syrian authorities have exploited the weakness in the performance of the delegation to not respond. There is no real response on the ground.”

The monitor, speaking by telephone from Syria, asked not to be named, as he was not authorized to speak to the media.

“The military gear is still present even in the mosques. We asked that military equipment be withdrawn from the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq mosque in Deraa and until today they have not withdrawn.”

The Arab League monitoring mission began work on December 26. Its task is to verify if Syria is complying with an agreement to halt a crackdown on 10 months of protests against Assad in which the United Nations says more than 5,000 people have been killed.

A U.N. official told the Security Council on Tuesday that Syria had accelerated its killing of protesters after the Arab monitors had arrived.

Assad mocked the Arab League in a speech in which he said that it had failed for six decades to promise to take a position in Arab interests. He said he would strike down a revolt he criticized as a foreign plot.

The choice of a Sudanese general to head the mission had already alarmed opposition activists, who say Sudan’s own defiance of a war crimes tribunal means the monitors probably would not recommend strong action against Assad.

The unnamed monitor said the Syrian authorities had shown little genuine willingness to comply with the plan while the observers lacked the expertise to do their mission justice.

“There is oppression. There is strong oppression and there is suffering, a lot of suffering, more than you imagine,” he said, describing one part of the central city of Homs he had visited.

“This is a very big problem and it is related firstly to the general will of the Syrian authorities to cooperate with the delegation in a genuine manner and without maneuvering,” he said.

“Secondly, it is related to the expertise of the delegation ... It needs experts in

the fields of monitoring, of diplomacy, of international law.”

While an Arab League meeting on Syria said on Sunday it remained committed to the mission, the observer said that individual monitors were thinking of quitting, either fearing for their lives or frustrated at failing to make a difference.

Malek said Syrian authorities had not withdrawn their tanks from the streets, but had simply hidden them.

“The snipers are everywhere shooting at civilians. People are being kidnapped. Prisoners are being tortured and no one has been released,” the Algerian former observer said on Al Jazeera. “Those who are supposedly freed and shown on TV are actually people who had been randomly grabbed off the streets.”

Earlier, a posting by Malek on Facebook was taken down, but his words were quoted on the page of

Adib Shishakly, a member of the opposition Syrian National Council.

“Bloodshed in Syria hasn’t stopped,” Malek reportedly said. “Every day, we see bodies in conditions that are unimaginable. Violence is increasing and we are unable to do anything for the victims of snipers, bombardments and assassinations.

“Kidnapping continues, and torture has exceeded all boundaries. Syria is headed towards destruction and civil war.”

He said the monitors were “ruled by restrictions imposed by their governments,” but did not go into details.

“I am now clearing my conscience to the heroic people of Syria ... The truth is gone and the right path is gone. And the sun of the Arabs has set in the alleyways of sad Syria.”

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the League monitoring mission in Syria could not continue indefinitely.

Adnan Khodeir, head of the League's monitoring operations room, said the observers could resume work on Thursday after not going out for two days following the Latakia attack. "All the monitors are well, and there are no problems," he said.

Under the Arab peace plan, Syrian authorities were supposed to stop attacking peaceful protests, withdraw troops and tanks from the streets, free detainees and open a political dialogue.

The unnamed monitor said those promises had not been met, with the Syrian military still present in cities, even in residential areas, while it was difficult to verify, for instance, if political prisoners had genuinely been released.

"There are lots of detainees who are not detained officially. Are they with

air force security? Are they with military security? Are they with political security?" he said.

Malek accused Syria of war crimes and torturing prisoners. The Arab League, which suspended Syria in November for failing to halt the crackdown, disputed Malek's account, saying illness had stopped him carrying out his work.

The unnamed monitor said Malek may have had contacts with Syrian opposition members, but they had visited Homs together.

Monitors had been allowed to visit any area they chose, but Syrian authorities had refused to accompany them in particularly tense neighborhoods, forcing them to make a decision to either stay away or take the risk of going in alone, the monitor said.

He arrived in Syria on December 27 and has visited Homs, Damascus and Deraa. The Bab Amr area of Homs was in a particularly dire way, he said.

Syria has barred most independent media, making it difficult to verify conflicting accounts of events on the ground.

The country says it is facing a wave of terrorism by Islamists and conspirators who are armed and manipulated from abroad and have killed 2,000 members of the security forces.

But the monitor said he had seen no evidence of this.

“We did not feel afraid or threatened while talking to them. In all the areas we went to, we did not meet any gunmen, unless they had hidden their guns,” he said. “What we found were citizens in their homes who spoke of their suffering.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/12/187861.html?PHPSESSID=oi0q4798ofdvc1jmt7f3ss69q5>

- **Biden raises Syria with Qatari premier; U.S. to reduce embassy staff in Damascus**

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden on Wednesday met the prime minister of crucial Gulf ally Qatar at the White House, and discussed the deepening violence in Syria, officials said.



National Security Advisor Tom Donilon also joined the meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani, which also touched on key regional issues amid maritime tensions between the United States and Iran.

“In particular, they condemned the ongoing violence in Syria perpetrated by the Assad regime and noted the significance of the Arab League observer mission’s final report due on January 19,” a White House statement said.

“The Vice President and Mr. Donilon also reaffirmed the longstanding commitment of the United States to the security of our partners and allies, and agreed with the Prime Minister on the need to maintain stability in the region.”

Earlier, President Bashar al-Assad vowed to defeat a “conspiracy” against Syria, as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton branded a rare speech he delivered the day before as “chillingly clinical.”

And the Assad regime’s deadly 10-month crackdown on dissent showed no signs of abating, with a rocket attack killing at least seven people in the flashpoint central city of Homs, including a French reporter and six Syrians.

Meanwhile, the United States said on Wednesday that it would reduce the number of staff at its embassy in Damascus amid fears for their safety over the Syrian government’s deadly

crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

The orders were contained in a new U.S. State Department travel warning, an update to one issued in October in which staff were restricted and family members asked to leave.

“The department has decided to further reduce the number of employees present in Damascus, and has ordered a number of employees to depart Syria as soon as possible,” the State Department said.

With the cutback, it said, the embassy’s consular section will no longer have regular public opening hours and visitors will be required to make appointments in advance.

“Our ability to assist U.S. citizens in an emergency is extremely limited and may be further constrained by the fluid security situation,” the State Department said.

In December, the U.S. ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, returned to Damascus, where he has championed protesters facing a deadly crackdown, after he was abruptly pulled out in October due to threats.

The United States has repeatedly called for al-Assad to step down over his regime's violent crackdown on protesters that U.N. officials say has so far cost the lives of more than 5,000 people.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/12/187822.html?PHPSESSID=oi0q4798ofdvc1jmt7f3ss69q5>

- **French reporter killed in Syria violence**

French journalist among nine people killed in Homs, state media reports, as Arab League delays sending more monitors.

Deaths of civilians are being reported from continued violence across Syria, amid more defiance from President Bashar al-Assad and criticism of the

Arab League's observer mission by one of its own monitors.

At least nine people, including a French journalist, were killed and several more were wounded in an explosion that struck a government-organised media trip to Homs, an opposition stronghold.

The news of the deaths came just hours after Assad appeared at a rally in Damascus on Wednesday to show popular support and a government in control.

Separately, the Arab League announced that it was delaying sending more monitors to the country after an attack on its team this week.

The Arab League currently has 165 observers in Syria, and recently said it would increase the numbers.

One observer who has just resigned told Al Jazeera on Wednesday the Arab League mission was a farce.

Anwar Malek, an Algerian national, said he resigned because of what he saw, and that the mission was falling apart.

Journalist killed

Gilles Jacquier of France 2 television became on Wednesday the first Western reporter to be killed in 10 months of unrest in the country.

Syrian state media said nine people were killed in an apparent mortar attack in the city of Homs, while a Belgian reporter was among 25 others injured.

According to an AFP news agency reporter at the scene, Jacquier was fatally wounded when a shell exploded as the group of journalists were covering demonstrations in the city.

Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, and Alain Juppe, the French foreign minister, condemned the killing and called on Syrian authorities to shed "full light" on the circumstances of his death.

In Hama, another Syrian dissident area, military forces on Wednesday killed 13 people as they stormed the province hunting for army defectors, a leading opposition activist in Damascus told DPA.

Earlier, Assad, in his second speech in as many days, reiterated his accusations that the "homeland was reeling under the brunt of conspiracy".

Nevertheless, "the Syrians will undoubtedly triumph over the conspiracy, which is nearing its end," Assad told thousands of cheering supporters at a rally in Damascus' Umayyad Square.

Late on Wednesday, the Arab League said it was postponing a decision to send more observers to Syria after 11 of its monitors were injured in an attack earlier this week.

"The Arab League will not send more observers to Syria for the time being until the situation calms down," an

unnamed official of the regional bloc told Al Jazeera.

Monitor's account

In his interview to Al Jazeera, Anwar Malek, the former Arab League observer in Syria, said: "What I saw was a humanitarian disaster. The regime is not just committing one war crime, but a series of crimes against its people

"What I saw was a humanitarian disaster. The regime is not just committing one war crime, but a series of crimes against its people," he said.

"The snipers are everywhere shooting at civilians. People are being kidnapped. Prisoners are being tortured and none were released."

Malek said that security forces did not withdraw their tanks from the streets, but just hid them and then redeployed them after the observers left.

Syria says it is continuing to provide security for the observers and has

condemned any act that obstructed their work.

Walid al-Moallem, the Syrian foreign minister, repeated on Wednesday that Syria would protect the observers.

Speaking after a meeting in Damascus with the head of the mission, Sudanese General Mohammed al-Dabi, Moallem pledged "full co-operation", according to the official SANA news agency.

But Malek told Al Jazeera that the Assad government was not assisting observers with their requests.

"The regime didn't meet any of our requests, in fact they were trying to deceive us and steer us away from what was really happening, towards insignificant things," he said.

Malek said those who were supposedly freed and were shown on TV, were actually people who had been randomly grabbed off the streets.

"They were detained for four or five days in tough conditions and later released as if they had been real prisoners," he said.

Malek said that he had seen snipers on top of buildings: "On one, there were even army officers in front of the building, while snipers were on the roof.

"Some on our team preferred to maintain good relations with the regime and denied that there were snipers," he said.

He said Assad's government "has gained a lot of time that has helped it implement its plan ... Therefore I've decided to withdraw from this mission".

The UN has said more than 5,000 civilians have been killed since protests against Assad began last March. Assad says "terrorists" have killed 2,000 members of his security forces.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/20121111976555870.html>

- **President al-Assad: "We are Victorious against Conspiracy"**

DAMASCUS, (SANA)_ H.E. President Bashar al-Assad reiterated here Wednesday Syria's determination to steadily go ahead with the ongoing reform process.



In a spontaneous word to the tens of thousands of the Syrians, who gathered since the early hours of the morning at Umayyad Square, President al-Assad underscored that Syria is also to steadily go forward in fighting terrorism.

"We are to be victorious ,with and by you, against the conspiracy," said President al-Assad to the jubilant

Syrians, who hoist the Syrian flag, his posters, and national banners.

"I met you to derive the power in the face of what Syria is being exposed to," added President al-Assad, highly lauding the Syrians' awareness, power, and strength as the "compass" leading to the correct path.

"I have strong desire to be here with you at al-Umayyad Square , in the heart of Damascus, the capital of the Umayyads, Resistance, Civilization, the blessed Bilad al-Sham, which they wanted for to be transferred from the land of harmony, amity, and peace to a land which they plant with destruction, killing, and wreckage," said H.E. President al-Assad to the high applauses, chants and slogans of love, loyalty and allegiance to his leadership.

"I do feel the same love to you as you feel towards me. I wish that God would have granted me a very big heart capable to give the more of amity and love to this great people,"

President al-Assad emotionally addressed the Syrians.

President al-Assad voiced pleasure at his meeting and direct talk to the Syrian citizens, appreciating the Syrians' pride, strength, steadfastness, dignity, which "give high morale to every official".

"I salute you while you get out from Mosques, churches, schools and universities as to stand against westernization and to support Arabization, and assert the role of your institutions, on top of which the institution of the Army and Armed Forces, whose martyrs are every day martyred so that we are secure and free," underscored President al-Assad.

"we do trust the future, put trust in you, and through you we are to be victorious against the conspiracy," added President al-Assad, lashing out at the conspirators who are in the final phase of their conspiracies.

In a splendid show of awareness and national feeling, huge masses on Wednesday flocked to the Syrian squares to express support to the speech of President Bashar al-Assad and to building the renewable Syria.

The participants affirmed the national unity, rejecting all forms of foreign interference and affirming determination to go forwards to reach the aspired-for Syria whose features were outlined by President al-Assad's speech.

Since the early morning, a huge number of citizens have started to flock to the squares of Umayyad in Damascus, Saadallah al-Jabri in Aleppo, al-Muhafaza in Lattakia, Sabaa Bahrat in Deir Ezzour, Late President Square in Hasaka, Post Crossroads in Daraa, Sutan Basha al-Atrash in Sweida and the main squares in Salqin, Jisr al-Shughour and Abu al-Dohour Town in Idleb.

The participants chanted slogans reflecting the civilized image of the

Syrian people whose awareness and solidarity with their leadership enabled them to face all the pressures and misleading campaigns which aim at undermining Syria's security and stability and dissuading it from its pan-Arab approach through which it works on preserving the rights and interests of the Arab nation.

The participants also held the national flag and banners affirming the Syrians' support to their leadership and hailing the sacrifices of the army.

They called for discarding the sedition and rejecting the misleading campaigns led by some mass media through falsifying the facts and fabricating lies aiming at spreading chaos and undermining Syria's security and stability.

In Damascus, the huge masses in Umayyad Square expressed support for the speech of President Bashar al-Assad and the vision outlined in this speech on building the renewable Syria, affirming their rejection of

foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs and their adherence national unity, chanting a vow of allegiance to President al-Assad.

In statements to SANA, participants in the gathering said that President al-Assad's speech restored hope and confidence in his strength in the face of the situations in Syria, calling on the observer mission to relay the reality of what is happening with objectivity, credibility and professionalism to the international and Arab communities.

They stressed that the conspiracy targeting Syria has failed despite the pressure and sanctions leveled against it, and that President al-Assad's speech on Tuesday constitutes a map for the upcoming stage in which reform plays a strategic role.

The participants said that Syria's strength lies in its people who managed to confront the conspiracy thanks to its rallying around its leadership and adherence to national unity, noting that the masses that

gathered on Wednesday came to express their rejection of the conspiracy and that no-one can speak on behalf of the Syrian people who came to show their support for President al-Assad.

They said that President al-Assad's presence among them made them more determined to confront the suspect plots and pursue reforms.

They also denounced the crimes committed by armed terrorist groups, saying that those who want to isolate Syria are isolating themselves, and that the sanctions imposed against Syria are part of the conspiracy and target the Syrians' confidence.

The participants said that the conspiracy is no longer a secret to anyone, affirming that Syria will be victorious thanks to its people's strength and belief in its leadership, adding that this gathering expresses the Syrians' commitment to its national choices and rejection of foreign interference and that the

Syrians never relinquished their dignity throughout their long history.

In Aleppo, the masses gathering in Saadallah al-Jabri Square expressed adherence to national unity and utter rejection of any foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs, stressing that Syrians support the reform course of President al-Assad.

The participants said that they gathered to show support for what President al-Assad outlined in his speech, saying that the speech was comprehensive and reassured Syrians and restored hope to them, adding that all Syrians would sacrifice their lives for their country and that there is no place among them for traitors who murder innocents.

In Sweida, the people gathering in Sultan Basha al-Atrash and Tishreen Squares voiced pride in being Syrians, saying that President al-Assad's speech sent a message telling the whole world that Syria is immune to conspiracies, adding that the speech expressed the

heartbeat of the Syrian street and reassured the Syrians.

They expressed rejection of all forms of relinquishing sovereignty and independent national decision, affirming that the Syrians' determination will not weaken no matter how many lies the biased channels fabricate.

In Idleb, the people of Salqin, Jist al-Shughour and Abu al-Zuhour rallied to show support for the reform process and express rejection of foreign interference and malicious channels who fabricate events.

Participants in the rallies that this is the least they could do to express their love for their country and their leader, calling for holding the biased channels accountable for their distortion of facts and misguiding of public opinion, stressing that these channels broadcast mere lies with the aim of undermining Syria's security and

stability, adding that the Syria media played a vital role in uncovering the conspiracy.

They affirmed that the conspiracy was foiled by the awareness of the Syrian people and their solidarity, stressing that freedom doesn't come through murder, bloodshed, vandalism and terrorizing innocents, but rather through national dialogue.

The participants also lauded the role of the Syrian army in confronting armed terrorist groups.

In Deir Ezzor, the people gathering in Sabaa Bahrat Square said that they want to send a message to the whole world that Syrians are committed to national unity and the reform program outlined by President al-Assad whose speech on Tuesday strengthened the Syrians' confidence that Syria is heading towards a new stage in which it will become a model of democracy and progress.

The gathering citizens denounced the terrorist carried out by tools of external forces, noting that Syrians are now aware of the misleading nature of the biased channels.

In Daraa, citizens gathered at the Dawwar al-Barid Square, saying that the people of Daraa are announcing their support for Syria's unity and stability and that the crisis is receding thanks to the resilience of Syria, the awareness of its people and the rallying of honest people behind Syrians and their leadership.

They stressed that the conspiracy against Syria cannot come to pass due to the massive popular rallying around President al-Assad, saying that the gatherings across Syria on Tuesday is the best proof that the Syrian army is not standing alone in the face of the conspiracy.

In Raqqqa, the masses gathering in front of the Governorate Building said that they came to tell all those who conspire against Syria that the people

will continue to support reform and that Syria will remain dignified and a bastion of Arab steadfastness.

They pointed out that President al-Assad's speech on Tuesday offered new concepts such as the definition of Arabism as an affiliation and mutual history, hopes and aspirations, instead of being merely an ethnic concept, and that the speech reassured all faithful Syrians who would rather die before selling themselves to those who seek to control people and achieve colonial plans.

The participants affirmed their utter rejection of all forms of foreign interference and their support of free, independent decision-making, adding that they reject any decision that undermines Syria's national sovereignty.

In Homs, the people who rallied in al-Ahram Street and marched across the city said that they gathered on this day to affirm their support to reforms and show that the people of Homs are

Syria's faithful soldiers, stressing that President al-Assad's speech prompted them to take to the streets and show their support for him.

They said that the President's speech shows the while world that the Syrians are a deep-rooted people and cannot be broken by conspiracies and betrayals, voicing pride in being Syrians and citizens in the country of resistance and civilization.

In Lattakia, masses gathered in al-Muhafaza Square to show their support for President al-Assad's speech and their rallying around his leadership, with participants stressing that they came to support the decisions of Syria's political leadership and the independence of national decision.

They said that President al-Assad's speech focused on the concepts of dignity and national sovereignty which no Syrian can possibly sell, noting that the speech shows President al-Assad's great confidence in Syria's future and

its ability to overcome the crisis, which reflected positively on the entirety of the Syrian people.

The participants said that the speech also delivered a firm and clear message to all conspirators against Syria which says that the Syrians will always rise to their responsibilities and duties as dictated by their national sense.

They pointed out that their gathering expresses clearly the Syrian people's faith in their country and leadership who proved to be a man fit for hard times and resilient in the face of pressure, calling for striking down those who try to tamper with the safety of Syria and its citizens.

The participants also swore an oath to continue to preserve national unity, protect Syria's borders, liberate the Golan, and remain on the course set by President Bashar al-Assad.

<http://sana.sy/eng/21/2012/01/12/393580.htm>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Saudi banking official downplays seriousness of hacking scandal

Secretary-general of the Media and Banking Awareness Committee of Saudi Banks, Talat Hafith, told Al Arabiya that credit card numbers allegedly compromised by Israeli hacker do not belong to Saudi banks.



Issa Buziyad, a banking customer whose information was hacked, said data pertaining to his name, email and telephone number was all correct, but that the credit card number was not his.

The secretary-general, who warned people to be more vigilant when using their credit cards, made his statement after Saudi banks revised all of the financial data released by the hacker.

“We cannot blame banks or individuals, as we are dealing with a big network, and these cards come in an intertwined web involving 100 sides and on an international level,” Hafith said, adding “banks apply international standards to protect information, and there is an international system called BCI which offers protection to all banks.”

Saeed al-Shaikh, an economist with al-Ahli bank, said that the banking sector in Saudi would not be affected even if the hacker published correct information. Al-Shaikh said loans given to credit cards is miniscule in comparison to the wider banking loans given to individuals and companies; the first stands at 8 billion riyals, while the later totals 800 billion riyals.

“There needs to be cooperation between the banking sectors and security in Saudi to confront the problem and to escape fear and not to turn this into an electronic war,” Shaikh said.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/12/187851.html?PHPSESSID=oi0q4798ofdvc1jmt7f3ss69q5>

- **U.S. judge drops Saudi Binladin Group in Sept. 11 lawsuits**

A Saudi construction firm founded in the 1930s by the father of the late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden cannot be sued for damages over the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, a U.S. judge ruled on Wednesday.



Manhattan federal court judge George Daniels ruled against plaintiffs who said the Saudi Binladin Group, one of the largest construction firms in Saudi Arabia, helped fund bin Laden’s militant activities leading up to the 2001 attacks.

The move dismisses claims against the Binladin Group in six different lawsuits in which survivors, relatives and others

are seeking damages from defendants they accuse of aiding the attacks.

The judge ruled that the Binladin Group's "alleged support of Osama bin Laden before 1993 is too temporally remote to establish jurisdiction."

Any activity a subsidiary of the Binladin Group may have had in the United States prior to the Sept. 11 attacks, which killed close to 3,000 people, was also too thin to justify jurisdiction over it, the judge ruled.

Bin Laden, who was killed by U.S. forces last May in Pakistan, was removed as a shareholder of his family's construction business in 1993, the court order said.

Bin Laden, who was stripped of Saudi citizenship and whose family ultimately disowned him, was born in Saudi Arabia in 1957, one of more than 50 children of millionaire Saudi Binladin group founder Mohammed Binladin. The family became

prominent thanks to an oil-fuelled construction boom.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/12/187818.html?PHPSESSID=oi0q4798ofdvc1jmt7f3ss69q5>

- **Bahrain GP reinstates sacked staff**

Gulf state takes step closer to hosting Grand Prix by reinstating staff sacked following last year's protests.



The Bahrain GP is scheduled as the fourth race of the season to take place on April 22 [GALLO/GETTY]

Bahrain's Formula One circuit, which is scheduled to host a Grand Prix again in April after last year's was cancelled, said on Wednesday it had reinstated employees dismissed in the 2011 civil unrest.

The move comes amid a 'national dialogue' in the Gulf state after pro-

democracy protests and continuing calls from campaigners for the glamour sport, whose teams are mostly British-based, to stay away.

"The reinstatement of our BIC (Bahrain International Circuit) colleagues is part of an important initiative towards national reconciliation and unity for the kingdom as a whole," said circuit chief executive Sheikh Salman bin Isa Al-Khalifa in a statement.

"I therefore welcome back our colleagues into the BIC family as we now look to focus on the future and the important job at hand.

"The Bahrain International Circuit, and in particular the Formula One Grand Prix, is of huge significance to our country, acting as a strong unifier, given the support it receives from all sections of Bahrain society," he added.

Protests

The statement said the circuit had contacted the relevant staff and hoped they would return as soon as possible.

However, it did not say whether all had accepted their jobs back.

A number of circuit employees were dismissed after being deemed to be in breach of their contracts during the protests in February and March last year.

Thousands of mainly Shi'ite Bahrainis took to the streets then demanding curbs on the power of the ruling Sunni Muslim al-Khalifa family and an end to perceived discrimination.

At least 35 people, including five members of the security forces, were killed in the unrest.

The Grand Prix, which would have been last year's season-opener, was postponed and then finally cancelled due to the situation and the reluctance of teams, despite Bahrain's considerable investment in the sport.

Bahrain's sovereign wealth fund Mumtalakat are major shareholders in McLaren.

The race has been reinstated on the 2012 calendar for April 22, as the fourth round of 20, and Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone is keen for it to go ahead.

"I hope we go to Bahrain and there's no trouble, the race goes on, the public are happy and there are no dramas," he said last month.

Right groups have however been urging Formula One not to return to Bahrain.

"We will campaign for... drivers and teams to boycott. The government wants Formula One to tell the outside world that everything is back to normal," Nabeel Rajab, vice-president of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, said.

"Formula One, if they come, they are helping the government to say (it is normal). We would prefer it if they didn't take part. I am sure the drivers and teams respect human rights."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/sport/formulaone/2012/01/2012111121727877493.htm>
!

- **China to discuss Arab Spring with Gulf leaders**

BEIJING (AP) — China's premier will discuss the Arab Spring with leaders of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar during a visit to those countries later this month, a Chinese official said Wednesday.

Wen Jiabao's visit from Jan. 14-19 will be the first by a Chinese premier to Saudi Arabia in 20 years and to the other two Gulf countries since diplomatic relations were established in the 1980s.

In addition to strengthening relations with the countries — Saudi Arabia is China's biggest oil supplier — Wen will talk about the recent upheavals as well, Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun told reporters.

The uprisings throughout last year toppled longtime strongmen in

Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and fueled a continuing uprising in Syria, which has turned into one of the bloodiest of the Arab Spring. Bahrain and Yemen also experienced major protests and unrest.

The Arab Spring protests appeared to worry China's rulers, who used disappearances, house arrests, lengthy prison terms and other means to prevent Chinese activists from emulating the unrest in the Middle East. It was one of China's broadest campaigns of repression in years, with authorities rounding up dozens of bloggers, lawyers and intellectuals. Most have since been released.

Zhai said China's views on how the Middle East unrest should develop were "clear-cut."

China hopes the countries will solve their own issues and carry out dialogues with relevant parties in a peaceful manner, he said. "China hopes the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of these

countries will be respected by the international community," Zhai said.

He said the countries were capable of identifying "development models to suit their own national conditions."

Zhai said Wen will sign a series of cooperation agreements during his visit, including economic, trade, culture and education agreements in Saudi Arabia, and agreements covering finance, energy and sports in the U.A.E.

Wen will also speak at the opening ceremony of the 5th World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28050>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Clinton says no deal yet for Taliban office in Qatar

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Wednesday that Afghan and Taliban statements show there is support for a Taliban political office in

Qatar, but said nothing has been concluded yet.



“Positive statements” from Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the Taliban demonstrate “there is support for such discussions, for the (Taliban) political office to open in Qatar,” Clinton said.

“Nothing has been concluded. We are still in the preliminary stages of testing whether this can be successful,” Clinton said in a press conference with Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani.

The Taliban announced last week that it planned to set up a political office in Qatar, a move seen as a precursor to peace talks with Washington.

At the same time, the hardline Islamists demanded the release of

prisoners from the U.S. military detention center at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Clinton said: “We have not made any decisions about releasing any Taliban from Guantanamo.”

Clinton said Washington backs Afghan-led reconciliation talks.

She added that reconciliation can only occur if the Taliban renounces violence, breaks with Al-Qaeda and support the Afghan constitution, which protects the rights of women and minorities.

“I have made it clear to President Karzai that we will work with him, under his leadership,” she said.

She said she has dispatched U.S. special regional envoy Marc Grossman to travel to Afghanistan next week to continue U.S. consultations with the Afghans and also to visit Qatar to continue “consultations” there.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/11/187802.html?PHPSESSID=oi0q4798ofdvc1jmt7f3ss69q5>

- **Taliban say Marine abuse tape won't hurt talks**

KABUL,(Reuters) - A video showing what appear to be American forces urinating on dead Taliban fighters prompted anger in Afghanistan and promises of a U.S. investigation on Thursday, but the insurgent group said it would not harm nascent efforts to broker peace talks.

The video, posted on YouTube and other websites, shows four men in camouflage Marine combat uniforms urinating on three corpses. One of them jokes: "Have a nice day, buddy." Another makes a lewd joke.

It is likely to stir up already strong anti-U.S. sentiment in Afghanistan after a decade of a war that has seen other cases of abuse, and that could complicate efforts to promote

reconciliation as foreign troops gradually withdraw.

"Such action will leave a very, very bad impact on peace efforts," Arsala Rahmani, a senior member of the Afghan government's High Peace Council, told Reuters.

The administration of U.S. President Barack Obama, seeing a glimmer of hope after months of efforts to broker talks, is launching a fresh round of shuttle diplomacy this weekend.

Marc Grossman, Obama's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, will fly into the region for talks with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and top officials in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

His immediate goal is to seal agreement for the Taliban to open a political office in the Gulf state of Qatar.

Despite concerns when the video first emerged that it would not help his

efforts build confidence among the warring parties, a Taliban spokesman said although the images were shocking, the tape would not affect talks or a mooted prisoner release.

"This is not the first time we see such brutality," said spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid.

"We know that our country is occupied...This is not a political process, so the video will not harm our talks and prisoner exchange because they are at the preliminary stage."

The U.S. Marine Corps has said it will investigate. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan described the acts depicted in the video as "disrespectful" and "inexplicable."

"This behavior dishonors the sacrifices and core values of every service member representing the 50 nations of the coalition," ISAF said in a statement, adding that a U.S. criminal investigation had been launched.

Karzai's office declined immediate comment.

"ILLEGAL, AGAINST HUMANITY"

News of the footage had yet to spread in Afghanistan -- a country where a minority have access to electricity and the Internet is limited to an tiny urban elite -- but Afghans who were told about what the tape appears to show were horrified.

"The Afghan government has to discuss with the U.S. government how to prosecute these soldiers, so in the future nobody will be able to make a joke of Afghans," said middle-aged merchant Qaisullah, who has a shop near the Kabul's Shah-e-dushamshera mosque.

"It may start with just video footage, but it will end with demonstrations around the country and maybe the world."

Anti-American feeling has boiled over, or been whipped up, into violence

several times in Afghanistan in recent years. Protests over reports of the desecration of the Muslim holy book have twice sparked deadly riots.

"They've committed a crime. We don't want them in our country," said Feda Mohammad, a middle-aged man in jeans, a jacket and a woolen hat, when told about the tape. "We don't like foreigners in our country and they have to leave."

DEEPLY TROUBLED

In the United States, two military officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the video appeared to be authentic, but Reuters could not verify it or its source independently.

The U.S. military has been prosecuting soldiers from the Army's 5th Stryker Brigade on charges of murdering unarmed Afghan civilians while deployed in Kandahar province in 2010.

At the Pentagon, Captain John Kirby said the defense department was

"deeply troubled" by the video, which was released at a critical time for what U.S. officials hope might become authentic talks on Afghanistan's political future.

In Kabul, Grossman will seek approval from Karzai -- whose support for a U.S. effort he fears will sideline his government has wavered -- to move ahead with a series of good-faith measures seen as an essential precursor to negotiations that could give the Taliban a shared role in governing Afghanistan.

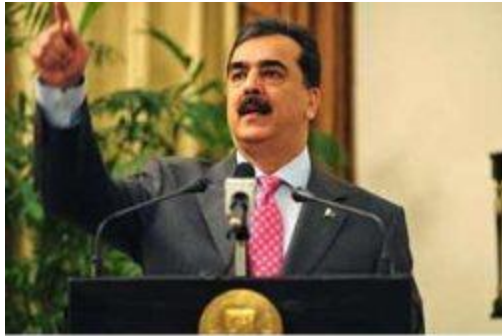
The diplomatic initiative includes a possible transfer of Taliban prisoners from the Guantanamo Bay prison.

A breakthrough would mark a milestone for the Obama administration, struggling to secure a modicum of stability in Afghanistan as it presses ahead with its gradual withdrawal from a long and costly war. The United States and its allies aim to withdraw combat troops by the end of 2014.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28057>

- **Pakistani PM defends sacking of top defense official**

Islamabad, Jan 12, IRNA - Pakistan Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani defended his decision to dismiss the country's top defense official amidst increasing tension with the military over an alleged memo.



Gilani told reporters that the army and intelligence chiefs had not followed rules in submitting replies to the Supreme Court on the Memogate scandal.

The Prime Minister said his government was left with “no choice” but to take action against Defence Secretary Lt Gen (retired) Khalid

Naeem Lodhi as he had filed an affidavit in the apex court on the memo issue without getting the consent of the defence minister.

The government acted against Lodhi after conducting an inquiry and obtaining the views of the Law Ministry, Gilani said. The defence minister, too, sought Lodhi's reply on charges levelled against him, he said.

“After receiving the comments (of the Law Ministry), we were left with no choice because under the rules of business, he (Lodhi) did not follow the rules of business,” Gilani told reporters after he inaugurated sports channel of the state-run television.

Asked if he stood by his remarks that the army and intelligence chiefs had acted in a “unconstitutional and illegal” manner by submitting replies on the memo issue to the apex court without seeking the government's approval, Gilani said the rules of business clearly stated that the

military officials should have obtained the approval of the defence minister.

“Under the rules of business, a summary (formal proposal) has to be moved. The summary has to be signed by the minister and no summary was signed by the Defence Minister,” he said.

The army and intelligence chiefs “did not get a confirmation” from the defence minister for their replies to the apex court and also “bypassed” the Law Ministry, Gilani said.

The military reacted angrily to the charges levelled by Gilani against the army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chiefs, saying his remarks could have “grievous consequences”.

The military refuted Gilani’s allegations in a strongly worded statement. Minutes after the statement was issued, Gilani sacked the defence secretary, who is considered to be very close to army chief Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani.

Gilani said the army chief had spoken to him on phone before issuing the statement. “He (Kayani) said he wanted to give a clarification, and I told him he should do so if he wanted to,” the premier said.

The government is at a visible confrontation both the military and judiciary over the alleged memo that sought US help to stave off a military coup in Pakistan and the reopening of graft cases against Zardari.

The government has convened a special session of the National Assembly or lower house of parliament on Thursday to discuss the apex court’s warning that action could be taken against the President and Prime Minister for failing to revive the corruption cases. The army chief has convened a meeting of his top commanders tomorrow to discuss the standoff with the government over the Memogate scandal.

<http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NID=30762139&SRCH=1>

- **16 Pakistan soldiers killed in bomb attack, firing**

Islamabad, Jan 12 – At least 16 Pakistani paramilitary soldiers were killed in a bomb attack and firing in the volatile southwestern Balochistan province, officials said Thursday.



Officials said that gunmen attacked a convoy of security forces late Wednesday with bombs and automatic guns in Turbat district, some 700 kilometers from Quetta, the provincial capital.

Two officers were among those killed, an official said.

They said that 15 more soldiers from the Frontier Corps were injured in the deadly attack.

A nationalist Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) claimed responsibility. A spokesman for

BLF, Goram Baloch called local media men and claimed responsibility.

Officials said that two vehicles came under the remote control bomb attack when the convoy was passing through Buleda area of Turbat district. Two vehicles of the paramilitary force were destroyed.

Officials said both sides exchanged firing after the attack. There was no report about casualties of the militants. The injured security personnel were shifted to a military hospital in the region. Several injured were registered critical.

More security personnel were sent to the area to join the under attack men to fight the insurgents.

The forces laid a siege to foil the insurgent attempt to flee. There had been no report of any arrest. Security sources later said the insurgents escaped to the nearby mountains in the darkness.

The BLF spokesman had claimed that 40 security men were killed in the attack.

Goram Baloch said that three vehicles were also destroyed in the attack. He added that the militants snatched 17 rifles from the soldiers.

ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.

Baloch insurgents routinely attack the security personnel in their bloody campaign in Balochistan province.

<http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NI D=30762151&SRCH=1>

**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.*

**Bu bülten ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcıları Nebahat Tanrıverdi O ve Sercan Doğan tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge*