



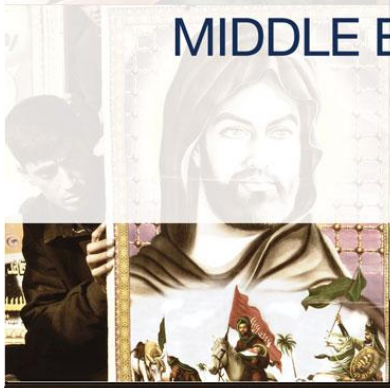
ORSAM
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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- * **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
17 JANUARY 2012
NO: 1307

1. IRAQ	2
• Where? Not bothered really - no red lines for Allawi on conference location.....	2
• Kirkuk to recruit 1,400 policemen.....	2
• Consortium 26 companies to construct Kirkuk plant.....	2
• 21 killed and wounded in Iraq Anbar terrorist attacks.....	3
• President Barzani receives Hakari's governor.....	4
2. IRAN	5
• Energy not a political issue, Mehmanparast.....	5
• Salehi advises Saudi officials to avoid unwise remarks.....	5
• Official: Russia welcomes resumption of Iran-G5+1 talks.....	6
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	7
• Israel says cyber war did not harm vital systems; Saudi hacker vows 'stronger' attacks.....	7
• Britain brands Israel settlements 'deliberate vandalism' amid Abbas visit.....	10
• Gaza Shiites claim Hamas persecution.....	12
• Cyber attack against Israeli websites used local computers, security expert says.....	13
• Source: Khaled Meshal to resign as Hamas chief after upcoming vote.....	15
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	16
• Mubarak's defense team to take the stage in Cairo; hearing to last until Feb. 16.....	16
• U.N. says Russia considers withdrawal from South Sudan force.....	18
• Mubarak trial adjourned until Wednesday.....	20
5. JORDAN and LEBANON	22
• Gemayel against Lebanon "barging itself into Syrian affairs".....	22
• Egypt's military leader heckled in Tripoli over Qaddafi fugitives.....	23
6. SYRIA	25
• Russia presents new Syria resolution at U.N. after weeks of criticism.....	25
• West confused by new Russian Syria draft; U.N. to start training Arab observers.....	29
• Syrian legislators join anti-Assad uprising.....	31
• Ministry of Foreign and Expatriates Affairs: Syria Surprised by Qatari Officials' Statements Which Call for Sending Arab Forces to It.....	34
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA	35
• Yemen's FM says he has doubts about holding presidential vote on time.....	35
• Saudi Arabia and Iran spar over oil embargo.....	37
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	40
• Pakistan PM to appear after court summons.....	40

1. IRAQ

- **Where? Not bothered really - no red lines for Allawi on conference location**

Leader of Iraqiya List, head of the National Accord Movement and former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi does not mind where the much vaunted national conference is held.

Not wanting to be stood-up, Allawi has said he will attend the conference only if the leaders of the main political blocs also attended.

Allawi said Sulaimaniya would be suitable for holding the political confab. President Jalal Talabani is keen to get all the political parties round a table to talk out their difficulties and try to ease the tension that hangs over Iraq.

The unity government has been something of an uneasy marriage for the last year. The fighting has turned into a feud that has the potential to turn really ugly. To that end Allawi wants the discussions to take place in Kurdistan so tanks are not stationed outside the meeting room.

By Yazn al-Shummari

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/4/284843>

- **Kirkuk to recruit 1,400 policemen**

KIRKUK, Jan. 17 (AKnews) - Iraqi Interior Ministry has agreed to a demand from Kirkuk police to recruit 1,400 more policemen in order to better safeguard citizens.

Speaking to AKnews, Col. Turhan Abdul-Rahman said the agreement came after several letters were sent to the Ministry. He added Kirkuk had demanded 2,000 more policemen but Baghdad agreed only on 1,400.

The official added the new staff will be chosen from the three major components of Kirkuk, Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, respectively.

By Abdullah Ameri

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/3/284797>

- **Consortium 26 companies to construct Kirkuk plant**

KIRKUK, Jan.17 (AKnews) - Up to 26 foreign companies are engaged in preparations to build a 500 megawatt power plant in Kirkuk.

Kirkuk can only provide 450 MW, 240 MW from the national grid and 225 MW through a contract with Kurdish investor. The Province falls short of the 880 MW power demand.

Deputy head of Kirkuk Provincial Council, Rebwar Talabani, told AKnews that American, British and Turkish as well as some Arab companies are among the companies building the 500 MW plant the Council voted for last year.

President Jalal Talabani said the project will be built soon and will help settle the issue of electricity supply.

The location for the project will be decided in coordination with the power distribution and transportation offices.

A new power plant with a limited capacity was built in December in Darman village of Kirkuk.

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/2/284814>

- **21 killed and wounded in Iraq Anbar terrorist attacks**

Iraqi Interior Ministry announced that armed attacks, in Anbar Province on Sunday, led to the death and injury of 21

person including 6 gunmen and 7 police members. These attacks intended to smuggle a dangerous detainee, Interior Ministry revealed.

“Anbar Security forces managed, on Sunday, to foil an attack targeting a big number of civilians, and intending to spread chaos and fear in the province,” Interior Ministry told Alsumarianews on Sunday. “Six terrorists blew up a wheel near Al Sahwa Command Center and a motorcycle near Al Kabir Mosque before taking refuge in the under construction governorate building of Al Ramadi city,” the ministry indicated.

“These two explosions intended to smuggle a dangerous terrorist called Ghanem Hashem that was transferred from Hit to Al Ramadi city,” Interior Ministry declared noting that the operation led to the death of the 6 terrorists, 3 civilians and 7 police members in addition to the injury of 5 civilians and while the terrorist was recaptured, a source told Alsumaria.

“Al Ramadi city witnessed on Sunday 5 explosions with 2 car bombs and 3 explosive devices,” a source in Anbar Province police told Alsumarianews earlier

on Sunday. “Clashes broke out between gunmen carrying explosive belts and Al Ramadi police directorate’s security forces following gunmen attempts to break into the building,” the source added noting that these clashes led to the death of 12 people and the injury of 25 mostly from security forces.

“Anbar Province’s administration announced, after the clashes, that the province’s situation was under control,” the source announced indicating that security forces carried out crackdowns to arrest gunmen and terrorists in the province.

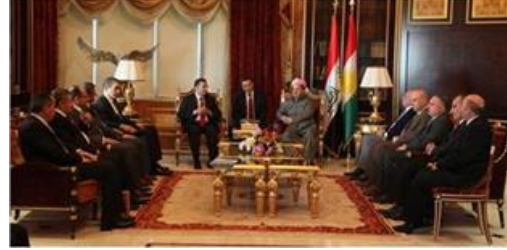
Security forces imposed a curfew in Haditha District, western Ramadi following information about a car bomb, the source revealed.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72792-21-killed-and-wounded-in-Iraq-Anbar-terrorist-attacks.html>

- **President Barzani receives Hakari's governor**

PNA-On Monday President Barzani received the Governor of Hakkari Mu'amar Turker and his accompanying

delegation that included the Turkish Consul in Kurdistan Region.



In the meeting, which was also attended by the Governor of Erbil Nawzad Hadi, the opening of two new border gates between Hakari province and Erbil and Duhok was talked about. Mr. Turker urged President Barzani to help the implementation of the projects which will legalize the trade and family relations that exist on each side of the border.

President Barzani said the Kurdistan Region will be able to assist and facilitate in opening of the two gates after finalizing the legal procedures and emphasized that opening the two gates will develop the economic, social and commercial ties between Turkey and Kurdistan Region.

<http://peyamner.com/English/PNAnews.aspx?nID=263273>

2. IRAN

- **Energy not a political issue, Mehmanparast**

Tehran, Jan 17, IRNA – Spokesman for the Foreign Ministry Ramin Mehmanparast said Tuesday that energy is a technical issue on which only experts can comment.



Mehmanparast made the remarks in reaction to the recent statement by Saudi Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi who said that his country would increase oil production and make up for Iran's absence in the market if sanctions are imposed on Tehran.

On talks with 5+1, he said Tehran welcomes dialogue but the exact date of the talks is not fixed yet.

The exact date for the talks will be announced as soon as it is fixed, Mehmanparast noted.

He added that Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili and

the EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton are debating the issue.

<http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NIID=30769531>

- **Salehi advises Saudi officials to avoid unwise remarks**

Tehran, Jan 17, IRNA – Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi advised Saudi Arabian officials to avoid making unwise remarks.



Talking to IRNA here on Tuesday, he made the statement in reaction to the recent remarks of the Saudi oil minister who said that his country will increase oil production and make up for Iran's absence in the market only within a few days if sanctions are imposed on Tehran.

He said Iran expected all Persian Gulf countries especially Saudi Arabia – with which Tehran has always stressed its will to have good relations – to avoid inappropriate remarks.

He said such remarks will certainly remain in the history of bilateral relations and might cause problems later on.

The foreign minister said the remarks of the Saudi minister, if really reflect Riyadh's official views, are not a friendly sign to Tehran.

Tehran advises the Saudi officials to react to regional issues in a more rational way, he noted.

Salehi said he believed the Saudi oil minister's remarks reflected only his own personal views and that the country did not certainly support them.

Iran has always acted as a basic element in establishing and maintaining stability, peace and security in the Persian Gulf region, the foreign minister added.

He said that the Persian Gulf security was a matter of collective efforts and could not be established or maintained by ultra-regional forces.

Since Iran has the longest coastline in the Persian Gulf among the regional states, it

naturally considers itself at the top of the list in such issues as peace and security, he reiterated .

As for the talks with 5+1, Salehi said the exact date of the talks is not fixed yet, noting that the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili and the EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton are debating the issue.

<http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NIID=30769358&SRCH=1>

- **Official: Russia welcomes resumption of Iran-G5+1 talks**

Moscow, Jan 17, IRNA – Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said Moscow welcomed resumption of talks between Iran and group 5+1.



He made the remark in reply to a question by IRNA correspondent here on Tuesday.

He said Russia appreciated Iran's readiness to resume talks with group 5+1 in Turkey and supported the idea.

The Russian official noted that his country has always been in favor of resumption of negotiations.

Stressing the importance of settling the Iranian nuclear issue through negotiations, Gatilov said the time was ripe now for resumption of talks and the opportunity should not be missed.

<http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NIID=30769529&SRCH=1>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Israel says cyber war did not harm vital systems; Saudi hacker vows 'stronger' attacks**

None of Israel's vital online systems were compromised in the recent series of cyber-attacks on Israeli websites, Israel's Shin Bet sources told Ynet news website on Monday as the Saudi hacker vowed "stronger" attacks.



The statements came after hackers disrupted online access to the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange, El Al Airlines and three banks on Monday in what the government described as a cyber-offensive against Israel.

The attacks came just days after an unidentified hacker, proclaiming Palestinian sympathies, posted the details of thousands of Israeli credit card holders and other personal information on the Internet in a mass theft.

Stock trading and El Al flights operated normally despite the disruption, which occurred as Israeli media reported that pro-Palestinian hackers had threatened at the weekend to shut down the TASE stock exchange and airline Web sites.

The hackers, calling themselves 'Nightmare', have not been able to penetrate any of Israel's strategic infrastructure systems, such as the Water

Authority, Israel Electric Co. and communication bodies, according to the Ynet report.

Unlike private websites or even those used by credit card companies, vital infrastructure systems enjoy a higher level of encryption and protection. Strategic bodies are defined by the government and though each body is in charge of its own security, they are constantly monitored and guided by the Shin Bet, in an effort to thwart terror attacks – cyber and otherwise – and espionage attempts, the report explained.

Meanwhile, the Saudi hacker known as “OxOmar” vowed in an email sent to Israel’s Ynet news website on Monday that the cyber-attacks on Israel will only grow stronger.

“I want to hurt/harm Israel in any way possible. I can harm them in Cyber world so I would do anything for this world. I’ll let Israeli authorities cry and suffer,” he told Ynet.

While apparently confined to areas causing only limited inconvenience, Monday attacks have caused particular

alarm in a country that depends on high-tech systems for much of its defense against hostile neighbors. Officials insist, however, that they pose no immediate security threat.

“They have demanded an apology for Israel’s defensive measures,” Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon said on his Facebook page, alluding to the conflict with Palestinians, according to Reuters.

“I am using this platform to send a clear message that ... they will not silence us on the Internet, or in any forum.”

The First International Bank of Israel (FIBI) and two subsidiary banks, Massad and Otzar Hahayal, said their marketing sites had been hacked but that sites providing online services to clients were unaffected.

Israel’s third-largest bank, Discount, said it had been spared attack, but that it was temporarily shutting down foreign access to its website as a precaution.

The Tel Aviv bourse website could only be accessed intermittently, but screen-based trading was not hit.

“There has been an attack by hackers on the access routes to the website,” said Orna Goren, deputy manager of the exchange’s marketing and communications unit. “The stock exchange's trading activities are operating normally.”

El Al said it had taken precautions to protect the company site and warned of possible disruptions to its online activity.

There was no claim of responsibility for Monday’s incidents.

Ynet reported that major banks and financial institutions in Israel are currently considering blocking online access for overseas users – a move First International Bank of Israel and Discount Bank have already applied. A banking system official was quoted as saying that such drastic measures were necessary, even at the expense of inconveniencing clients.

Minister of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs Yuli Edelstein was quoted by Ynet as saying that "an escalation in cyber-attacks can become a real threat to

Israel’s stability. The virtual war on Israel is a concrete threat to Israel’s security.”

“Today it’s hacking credit card companies and tomorrow it will be stealing security information and harming infrastructures. Some say that lending this too much importance is paranoia, but as we saw this morning – these are anti-Israel acts of violence and outright anti-Semitism that aim to destabilize Israel,” he said.

However, Minister of Improvement of Government Service Michael Eitan (Likud) attempted to downplay the seriousness of the situation by saying that there was no need to panic. “Israel’s strategic infrastructure was not harmed,” he was quoted as saying by Ynet.

“Israel is an advanced technological state and as such it may be more vulnerable to such attacks, which means that the government and State authorities tasked with maintaining information security for vital infrastructure must exercise extra caution.”

The Islamist group Hamas, which governs the small Palestinian territory of Gaza, welcomed the attacks as a blow against

the Jewish state, which it refuses to recognize.

“This is a new field of resistance against the Occupation and we urge Arab youth to develop their methods in electronic warfare in the face of (Israel's) crimes,” Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said in Gaza.

Israel opened an agency to tackle cyber-attacks earlier this month. A founding member of the unit, Isaac Ben-Israel, said the country’s most vital systems were already protected, but that incidents like the ones seen recently would only increase.

“As long as the systems are not guarded, any hacker anywhere in the world can break into them and do damage,” Ben-Israel said on Israel Radio. “I believe that, done right, in a year or two, we will be able to wipe out all these hackers' threats.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/17/188776.html?PHPSESSID=j50kdo1fm783ivm3igd4d59iq1>

- **Britain brands Israel settlements ‘deliberate vandalism’ amid Abbas visit**

The ongoing construction of Israeli settlements has been condemned by British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg on Monday, labeling Israel’s actions as “deliberate vandalism” of efforts to establish a Palestinian state.



Clegg’s comments came as Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas began a European tour.

“It is an act of deliberate vandalism to the basic premise on which negotiations have taken place for years and years and years,” Clegg said in a joint press conference with Abbas.

“Once you place physical facts on the ground which make it impossible to deliver what everyone has for years agreed is the ultimate destination, then you do immense damage,” he said, referring to settlements interfering with the two-state solution.

“If there was any time for real progress, then it is now at a time when so much change and transformation has taken place throughout the region,” Clegg added in reference to the Arab Spring.

Abbas, who is also scheduled to visit Germany and Russia as part of a week-long tour, welcomed Clegg’s comments.

“This is exactly what we wanted to hear officially from the government of the United Kingdom,” he said through a translator.

The Palestinian president has also met British prime minister David Cameron earlier.

“We will do everything we can to help promote these discussions,” Cameron said as he met Abbas at 10 Downing Street, the British premier’s official residence.

“We think that time, in some ways, is running out for the two-state solution unless we can push forwards now, because otherwise the facts on the ground will make it more and more

difficult, which is why the settlement issue remains so important.”

Settlements have proved a consistent sticking point in talks between Israel and the Palestinians, and caused the breakdown in the direct talks that began in September 2010.

Envoys from both sides have since met twice under the auspices of Jordan and the peacemaking Quartet, which comprises the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia, in an attempt to kickstart the talks.

The Palestinians say they will not negotiate while Israel builds settlements and they want clear parameters for any new talks, including an acceptance by Israel of the lines which existed before the 1967 Six-Day War as a basis for negotiations on borders.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that the two sides were still at odds over the Quartet’s deadline for new proposals on borders and security.

He said Palestinian negotiators wanted to break off talks on January 26 when they say a three-month deadline set by the Quartet falls.

Israel, however, is working from the last face to face talks on January 3 and says the deadline expires on April 3, Netanyahu said.

Last week, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, a hardline coalition partner to Netanyahu who is often sidelined in statecraft, dismissed the newly rekindled diplomatic contacts.

“They (the Palestinians) are preparing a groundwork of excuses to shift responsibility for the talks’ failure to Israel,” he said, according to an official transcript of a parliamentary briefing.

The number of Israeli settlers living in the West Bank at the end of 2011 rose by 4.3 percent compared with the previous year to 342,414, an Israeli lawmaker said on Sunday.

Ban Ki-moon calls for end

On Sunday, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for an end to

Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, saying the illegal building of settlements worked against a two-state solution.

“The Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories must end. So must violence against civilians,” Ban said in a keynote address at a conference in Beirut on democracy in the Arab world.

“Settlements, new and old, are illegal. They work against the emergence of a viable Palestinian state,” the U.N. secretary-general said.

“A two-state solution is long overdue. The status quo offers only the guarantee of future conflict,” Ban added.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/16/188701.html?PHPSESSID=j50kdo1fm783ivm3igd4d59iq1>

- **Gaza Shiites claim Hamas persecution**
GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — A member of Gaza's tiny Shiite minority says followers were beaten by Hamas police during a religious ceremony last week.

The man said police burst into a house of a fellow Shiite during a gathering to commemorate the suffering of the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Imam Hussein. The man says about 15 worshippers were beaten and briefly detained. He declined to be identified fearing further harassment.

Interior Ministry spokesman Ihab Ghussein said Tuesday that the men were planning "criminal acts."

It's the first time Gaza's Shiite community, believed to number several dozen, has claimed harassment by the territory's Sunni Muslim rulers.

Despite theological differences, Hamas has traditionally had warm ties with Shiite Iran.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28124>

- **Cyber attack against Israeli websites used local computers, security expert says**

Gil Shwed, founder of computer security firm Check Point, says most recent in a wave of cyber attacks used thousands of local devices used as remote 'bots.'

A recent string of cyber attacks against Israeli credit card companies, banks, and government websites was aided by thousands of Israeli computers operated by remote assailants, a top Israeli software security expert on Tuesday.

Hackers shut down both the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange (TASE) and El Al's respective websites on Monday, one day after a hacker network threatened to carry out attacks on both sites.

The network, which goes by the name "nightmare group," was able to cause severe problems for both sites. By 10 A.M., TASE's website was only partially functioning, while El Al's website did not function at all.



Box code.

Photo by: AP

Following the attack, Israeli Bank ordered to block IP addresses from Saudi Arabia,

Iran and Algeria, fearing hackers could penetrate databases of Israeli banks. Even before Israel Bank gave the order, Discount bank and Bank Leumi blocked international access altogether.

The hack comes in the wake of a series of cyber attacks over the past two weeks, and only a day after Hamas called for harsher hacking attempts against Israeli websites.

Speaking on the subject on Tuesday, Gil Shwed, the founder and leader of top computer security firm Check Point Software Technologies said that "when we're looking at the attack yesterday, this isn't a strike by one computer in Saudi Arabia, it's thousands of computers around the world."



Gil Shwed.

Photo by: Ofer Vaknin

"A considerable part of the computers that attacked us originated in Israel. That's

precisely what a bot is. Unlike traditional viruses, these bots do a good job of hiding themselves, which is why we developed the anti-bot," Shwed said.

Concerning the magnitude of Monday's hack, the Check Point chief said that the attacks involved thousands, maybe tens of thousands, and almost half of which are in Israel. They're operated by someone abroad, who cannot recognize. "

"These recent attacks have been sophisticated. While the assailant was probably not Israeli, he did use Israeli computers. It's similar to what happened last year with Sony. There were some significant attacks on Sony, with a 'small squad' stealing information off the side," Shwed said, referring to the hacking of PSN (the Sony PlayStation website) led to the theft of 77 million credit cards.

Shwed said that hak It was a combination of several kinds of attacks, most of which can be stopped and were stopped."

"From what I know, there wasn't much cooperation between these sources. If the attack was similar, then it could be that one group that spent time in figuring a

way in can then give that information to another group," he added.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/cyber-attack-against-israeli-websites-used-local-computers-security-expert-says-1.407820>

- **Source: Khaled Meshal to resign as Hamas chief after upcoming vote**

Senior Hamas analyst praises Hamas leader for passing organization reigns to next generation of leaders.

By Jack Khoury

Khaled Meshal will step down as Hamas chief following an upcoming election to determine the group's new political leader, a senior Hamas analyst said in an article that has been garnering much attention in the Arab Media on Tuesday.

In the online article, widely quoted in the Arab press Tuesday morning, Mustafa Lidawi wrote that Meshal would be letting other Hamas leaders run for the leadership of the organization' political bureau and steer the movement's policy, after he retires, in the next few months.



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hamas political leader Khaled Meshal.

Photo by: AP

Lidawi is a well-known and long standing member of the Hamas with strong ties to its leadership. In the past he had been the organization's representative to Lebanon.

Hamas declined to respond.

Meshal was elected head of Hamas's political bureau in 1997, after Dr. Mousa Abu Marzook was arrested.

Shortly after his assent to Hamas leadership, Meshal was the target of a botched assassination attempt by agents from Israel's Mossad espionage agency operating covertly in Jordan.

His life was saved when Israel agreed to hand over the antidote to the toxin used on him, in return for the release of the two Mossad agents caught and held in Jordan during the assassination attempt.

Hamas is a militant and political Islamist group operating in the West Bank and Gaza. It is designated as a terrorist organization by much of the international community, but enjoys wide support from Palestinians as a legitimate force against Israel.

Long-standing tensions between Hamas and the secular Fatah came to a head following the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, which gave Hamas a decisive victory and put it in charge of the political regime in the Palestinian territories.

Hamas' Gaza chief, Ismail Haniyeh, was named Palestinian prime minister, but Hamas' status as a terror group resulted in immediate sanctions from Israel and other Western countries. The group rejected demands to adhere to previously signed peace agreements, renounce violence and accept Israel's right to exist, and the sanctions were upheld.

Meanwhile, tensions with Fatah grew as the two factions attempted to cooperate with the framework of a unity government, but when the attempt failed and Palestinian Authority President

Mahmoud Abbas dissolved the government, bloody clashes erupted between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza, resulting in the seizure of the area by Hamas in June 2007.

There have been numerous attempts by neighboring Arab countries to end the Hamas-Fatah rift, and form a unified Palestinian leadership. The failure of the two groups to come together has perpetuated the continuing division within the Palestinian Authority, with Fatah as de facto rulers in the West Bank, and Hamas firmly in control in Gaza.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/source-khaled-meshal-to-resign-as-hamas-chief-after-upcoming-vote-1.407790>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Mubarak's defense team to take the stage in Cairo; hearing to last until Feb. 16**



Mubarak – who is detained in a military hospital for a heart condition – went on trial on Aug. 3, after protesters stepped up demonstrations calling on the ruling military to try him and ex-regime officials.

(Al Arabiya)

By AL ARABIYA

The trial of Egypt’s former president Hosni Mubarak, his two sons Alaa and Gamal, former interior minister Habib al-Adly and six of his aides, will be resumed in Cairo on Tuesday.

The defense team will begin its arguments to the Cairo court. The Kuwaiti lawyers who came to defend Mubarak will be present only as auditors, according to Mubarak’s lawyer, Farid al-Deeb.

The first five days will be dedicated to the team defending Mubarak and his sons, with the remainder to lawyers representing Adly and his six top security chiefs.

The last hearing is set for Feb.16. The court is then expected to recess for deliberation after which the judge will set a date for the verdict.

“I asked to speak for five sessions, given the complexity of the case,” Deeb was quoted as saying by Egypt’s al-Masry al-Youm.

Deeb said that he will present reports by the disbanded State Security and Investigations Service on the Jan. 25 protests.

“Why were the defendants brought to trial in the first place if the prosecution said it could not collect evidence as the competent bodies refused to collaborate?” Deeb asked.

Mubarak – who is detained in a military hospital for a heart condition – went on trial on Aug. 3, after protesters stepped up demonstrations calling on the ruling military to try him and ex-regime officials.

A medical source said last week that Mubarak was in no condition to be carried to the court room every day and that he was expected to miss some sessions.

Earlier this month, the chief prosecutor in the trial demanded the death sentence for Mubarak and other defendants, including the former interior minister, for their role

in the killing of protesters in the uprising that swept him from power early last year.

No official has yet been convicted over the killing of protesters during the 18-day revolt. Mubarak and the other defendants deny any responsibility for the deaths.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/17/188797.html?PHPSESSID=j50kdo1fm783ivm3ig4d59iq1>

- **U.N. says Russia considers withdrawal from South Sudan force**

Russia is considering withdrawing its military helicopters servicing the U.N. peacekeeping force in South Sudan after voicing alarm at attacks on Russian personnel there, a senior U.N. official said.



The statement by Susana Malcorra, undersecretary-general of the U.N. Department of Field Support, came during a recent increase in tribal violence in a remote area of South Sudan that caused some 60,000 people to flee.

“My sense is that at this point in time, Russia is seriously considering whether to stay or to leave South Sudan,” Malcorra told Reuters in an interview.

The departure of Russia, which provides key services for the U.N. Mission in South Sudan, or UNMISS, could complicate matters in Africa's newest country, an impoverished oil-producing state struggling to establish a functioning security sector that is under the control of the Juba government.

Until recently, Russia had eight helicopters that were being used by UNMISS, Malcorra said. After its utility helicopters were attacked by South Sudanese security forces last autumn, Russia decided in December to withdraw four of them and now appears to be contemplating the withdrawal of the other four, she said.

Russia's U.N. mission acknowledged that Moscow was concerned about the poor security in South Sudan but said there was no point in speculating about its future plans with UNMISS, which has a mandated full strength of 7,000 military personnel, while negotiations with the United Nations were under way.

In a statement to Reuters, the mission said Russia was “alarmed” by attacks on utility helicopters operated by the Russian military for UNMISS.

“Recently the situation in providing security to the Russian helicopter crews has been deteriorating,” the mission said.

“Administrative matters pertaining to a new letter of assist (contract with the U.N.) are being discussed by the parties and any speculation about Russia’s participation in the U.N. mission for the future is inappropriate,” the spokesman said.

South Sudan declared independence in July under a 2005 peace agreement with Khartoum that ended decades of civil war. But the nation has been struggling to end tribal and rebel violence that killed thousands last year.

Fighting broke out recently between members of the Lou Nuer tribe and the rival Murle tribe. Some 6,000 armed Lou Nuer members attacked the town of Pibor in Jonglei state bordering north Sudan. It

remains unclear how many people were killed.

After the Lou Nuer campaign lasting several days, Murle men attacked two villages in Akobo county in northern Jonglei, killing at least 24, according to the government.

U.N. diplomats and officials told Reuters that one of the reasons for the slow deployment of UNMISS troops to Pibor at the time of the clashes was the Russian refusal to fly its helicopters there.

Russia, U.N. officials say, has been refusing to fly its helicopters without a new “letter of assist” to replace the previous one, which expired at the end of November. But Malcorra said the real reason Russia had grounded its choppers appeared to be security, not administrative bottlenecks.

If a country’s contract for providing military assets with a U.N. mission expires, the expired contract traditionally remains in force until a new one is signed, Malcorra said.

“Even though there are administrative hurdles, I do not believe the

administrative hurdles are the cause of this problem,” she said. “I believe it was a safety and security ... question.”

One senior U.N. official, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity, was highly critical of Russia, saying the grounding of its helicopters was “outrageous” and that U.N. peacekeepers needed to be prepared to put up with a certain amount of risk in the interest of protecting civilians.

Malcorra was careful not to criticize Moscow, which provides civilian and military air services for many U.N. missions worldwide.

“It is clear that the reason why Russia has (grounded) the helicopters is based on the threat and the risk the troops have faced,” she said. “And I can fully understand that.”

South Sudan’s government has apologized to Russia for the attacks on its helicopters last year and vowed to take steps to ensure there were no new attacks on Russian aircraft by South Sudanese. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has also spoken with senior Russian officials, as has Malcorra.

To cover for the shortage of helicopters in South Sudan, Malcorra said UNMISS would be temporarily using helicopters from the U.N. mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo and a separate Ethiopian stabilization force, called UNISFA, currently in the disputed Abyei region bordering north and South Sudan.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/17/188788.html?PHPSESSID=j50kdo1fm783ivm3igd4d59iq1>

- **Mubarak trial adjourned until Wednesday**

The trial of Hosni Mubarak, the deposed Egyptian president, has been adjourned until Wednesday hours after it began, with defence lawyers putting up their arguments saying, former leader was "a victim of malicious accusations".



Farid el-Deeb, Mubarak's chief defence lawyer on Tuesday portrayed the former Egyptian president as a "clean" leader

who placed the law above all else and worked tirelessly for his nation.

"Mubarak is neither a tyrant or a bloodthirsty man. He respects the judiciary and its decisions. A clean man who could say no wrong," al-Deeb said.

Lawyers for Mubarak have been given five sessions to state their case in defence of the former Egyptian president, facing charges of corruption and unlawfully killing protesters during the 18-day uprising that ended his decades-long rule almost one year ago.

Mubarak returned to a Cairo courtroom for the resumption of a trial in which his two sons and eight of his former officials are also accused.

The prosecutor has called for Mubarak to face the death penalty if convicted. Both he and the other 10 defendants have pleaded not guilty to the charges against them.

Chief prosecutor Mustafa Suleiman said at a previous hearing that the ailing 83-year-old must have ordered police to open fire on protesters.

Mubarak "must have agreed on the killings," Suleiman told the court on January 5.

Mubarak's sons, Gamal and Alaa, also face corruption charges, while Habib al-Adly, a former interior minister and head of security services, is charged with murder and attempted murder.

Six security officials face the same charges. Hussein Salem, a business associate of Mubarak, is charged with corruption.

State television showed the ailing Mubarak lying on a stretcher being wheeled into the Police Academy in northern Cairo for Tuesday's session.

Al Jazeera's Sherine Tadros, reporting from Cairo, said: "We are expecting a big day for their defence. The lawyer for Mubaraks, Farid al-Deeb, will be kicking off his presentation, outlining the case for the defence."

"He [al-Deeb] has one month to try and prove two things. First, there were no orders given by any of the defendants to

security forces for the killing of protesters," she said.

"Secondly, that Mubarak was unaware of the killings that were taking place, and that's why he didn't intervene to stop it."

Autopsy reports

A judge ruled in August that the case against Mubarak should not be televised.

Defence lawyers have called for hundreds of witnesses to testify in the case, including the head of Egypt's ruling military council, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, who was Mubarak's defence minister for two decades.

"It's a big task, and what we have seen so far in the previous months in this case is that the prosecution has successfully managed to show that there were protesters killed as a result of live ammunition. They did that by showing autopsy reports to the judges," Al Jazeera's Tadros said.

"Secondly, the live ammunition was fired by police officers.

"Where the prosecution case has faltered is in trying to make that link to Mubarak, his aides and of course, former interior minister Habib al-Adly."

Mubarak is the first Arab head of state to stand trial in person amid a wave of popular uprisings across the Middle East.

His trial opened on August 3, after protesters stepped up demonstrations calling on the ruling military to try him and ex-regime officials.

About 850 people were killed in the uprising against Mubarak which culminated in his resignation from office on February 11, 2011.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/20121177105666569.html>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Gemayel against Lebanon "barging itself into Syrian affairs"

Kataeb Party leader Amine Gemayel said in an interview published on Tuesday that his party and other March 14 parties "do not agree on how to deal with the Syrian crisis file."

Gemayel told As-Safir newspaper that the Kataeb Party supports “the change” but that “we do not think it is in Lebanon’s interest to barge itself into Syrian affairs.”

“First because the objectives behind the uprising are still foggy, and second, because we do not want the Syrian crisis to [cause] conflict between the Lebanese,” he added.

Gemayel also said that support by Lebanese political parties for the Syrian uprising “does not make any difference to it.”

The Kataeb Party leader also criticized the March 14 General Secretariat.

“The March 14 General Secretariat must represent all March 14 political parties, including civil society bodies. However, the secretariat is not open to other [parties],” he said.

Gemayel also said that his party “fears the emergence of the radical wave [in the Arab world].”

“If dictatorial regimes will be replaced with radical regime, then the change will

not have achieved its objectives,” he added.

Asked about the possibility of holding dialogue with Hezbollah, Gemayel said that “dialogue is possible when the situation is ripe and when it becomes possible to find common ground between the two parties.”

According to the United Nations, more than 5,000 people have been killed in the crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Syria.

Lebanon’s political scene is split between supporters of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime, led by Hezbollah, and the pro-Western March 14 camp.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=353462>

- **Egypt’s military leader heckled in Tripoli over Qaddafi fugitives**

Protesters forced their way into a Tripoli hotel where Egypt’s military leader was meeting Libyan officials on Monday and lambasted him for failing to extradite supporters of ousted leader Muammar Qaddafi who have fled to Egypt.



The angry reception for Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, head of the ruling military council, will add to his problems at home, where opponents accuse him of being out of step with the "Arab Spring" revolutions which last year forced out the rulers of Egypt and Libya.

As Tantawi walked through the lobby of the Corinthia Hotel in central Tripoli, surrounded by Libyan and Egyptian security details, about a dozen protesters held up placards demanding Cairo hand over "symbols of the former regime."

Ashour bin Khayal, foreign minister in Libya's new government, tried to persuade the protesters to leave the building. But one of them shouted at him: "Fifty thousand Libyans were killed for the sake of freedom!"

Civil society activists say a number of Gaddafi lieutenants have been harbored in Egypt since the former Libyan leader

was overthrown in August last year. They want them handed over to face trial.

Later, after Tantawi had left, a different group of protesters blocked the road near the hotel, preventing a bus carrying part of the Egyptian delegation from moving.

"Shame on you Field Marshal, Muammar's people are in your hands!" the protesters shouted.

Abdul Rahim al-Keib, the Libyan interim prime minister, said he had raised the issue of pro-Qaddafi fugitives in his meeting with Tantawi.

"We told him that we want their support in Egypt against the figures of the former regime that have done wrong, oppressed, killed and abused the Libyan people in all possible ways," Keib told reporters.

Asked whether Cairo had promised to extradite the fugitives, he said: "This will take time, but we have raised the issue in a serious and clear way and without leaving any doubt that we are serious about this."

Relations between Egypt and Libya have become tense in the past few months. Some Libyans accuse Egypt's military council, in power since the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak, of failing to back the post-Qaddafi leadership in Tripoli.

The commander of a powerful Libyan militia warned Egypt last month he would use force to close its embassy and shut the border if Cairo failed to take off the air a Qaddafi-era television station that he said was broadcasting from Egypt.

Libya's interim government, the National Transitional Council (NTC), distanced itself from his threat.

Libyan activists say Egypt's military is harboring, among others, al-Tuhami Khaled, once the head of Gaddafi's internal security service who led a crackdown against Islamists in the mid 1980's.

The Libyan prime minister said after meeting Tantawi that Libya would not dispose of investments made by Gaddafi's administration in Egypt, provided they are financially sound.

“For investments (in Egypt), everything that is successful, or can be made successful, we will carry on with it,” he said.

“Any investment that was based on a meaningless political decision will be seriously reconsidered.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/17/188766.html?PHPSESSID=j50kdo1fm783ivm3igd4d59iq1>

6. SYRIA

• **Russia presents new Syria resolution at U.N. after weeks of criticism**

Russia on Monday distributed a new draft resolution on the Syria crisis at the U.N. Security Council after facing weeks of criticism over the slow pace of talks, diplomats said.



The draft “welcomed the Syrian government's acceptance of the Arab

League Action Plan, noting the deployment of the League of Arab States' observer mission, emphasizing commendable efforts by the observers contributing to stabilizing the situation and decreasing violence.”

It also expressed “profound regret at the death of thousands of people, calling for an immediate end to all violence and provocations, urging all sides to reject violence and act with utmost restraint.”

The new resolution was distributed as Germany again complained at the 15-member council over the lack of U.N. action on the worsening crisis, a spokesman for Germany's U.N. mission said.

Russia and China vetoed a European resolution on Syria in October calling a move by Western nations toward regime change in Syria.

Russia proposed its own resolution in December but Britain, France, Germany and the United States have said the text is not acceptable because it puts opposition violence on the same level as the

government's assault which the U.N. says has left more than 5,400 dead.

Diplomats said the latest text distributed by Russia will be discussed by experts on Tuesday. The new text, however, only takes the existing Russian resolution and adds a list of amendments proposed by the European nations and the United States.

“It is a maneuver playing for time,” one Western diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity of the new text.

Draft resolution on Syria

The following are further excerpts from the latest amended Russian draft resolution on Syria obtained by Al Arabiya. Most amendments in the draft were suggested by France, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Security Council,

Expressing grave concern at the deterioration of the situation in Syria,
Recalling its presidential statement of 3 August 2011,

Taking note of the submission, on 13 December 2011, by the UN Secretary

General to the President of the Security Council of the report of the international independent commission of inquiry mandated by the Human Rights Council (France),

Recalling General Assembly resolution A/Res/66/176 of 19 December, as well as Human Rights Council resolutions S/16-1, S/17-1, S/18-1,

Welcoming the plan of action developed by the League of Arab States, by which the Syrian Government agreed to cease all violence, release all those arrested due to the recent incidents, clearing cities and residential areas of all manifestations of militarization, and allow the relevant Arab League institutions as well as Arab and international media to move freely in all parts of Syria to determine the truth about the situation on the ground with the view to launching the process of LAS's consultations with the Government and different factions of Syrian opposition with regard to preparing the conference of national dialogue, (France),

Stressing that the only solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process

with the aim of effectively addressing the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the population which will allow the full exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction, including that of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and further stressing that such a political process can only be advanced through an environment free from violence, fear and intimidation,

Recalling the Syrian authorities' responsibility to fully respect human rights and to comply with their obligations under applicable international law,

Noting the announced plans made by the Syrian authorities towards reform and the steps taken in this direction, regretting insufficient progress in their implementation, calling upon the Syrian government to expedite progress in promoting political pluralism through adoption of new electoral law and constitutional reform, guaranteeing freedom of media, ensuring respect for human rights,

Expressing deep concern at the human rights situation and at the humanitarian

situation in crisis areas, and calling for expeditious access to international humanitarian assistance and to international media, and unhindered access to international media and independent observers, including international humanitarian actors, calling upon the Syrian authorities to cooperate fully with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the independent international commission of inquiry of the Human Rights Council (Portugal, France),

Underscoring the importance of ensuring the voluntary return to their homes in safety and security of those who have fled from violence, including Syrians who have fled to neighboring countries,

Calling upon the Syrian authorities to release all those detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Expressing grave concern at the illegal transfer of weapons into Syria and calling on Member States to take necessary steps to prevent such flow of arms,

Mindful that stability in Syria is key to peace and stability in the region,

Reaffirming its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria as well as to the basic principle of international law which provides that states shall not intervene in matters within the domestic jurisdiction of any state in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations,

Emphasizing the need to resolve the current crisis in Syria peacefully, ruling out any military intervention from outside, stressing that nothing in this resolution compels States to take measures or action exceeding the scope of this resolution, including the use of force or the threat of force (UNSCR 1929), (UK),

Welcoming the engagement of the Secretary-General and all diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing this situation,

Condemning in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks that occurred in Damascus on 23 December and 6 January, causing scores of deaths and injuries.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/17/188741.html?PHPSESSID=j50kdo1fm783ivm3igd4d59iq1>

- **West confused by new Russian Syria draft; U.N. to start training Arab observers**

Western diplomats said a new Russian draft resolution on the violence in Syria handed to the U.N. Security Council on Monday was confusing as the United Nations said that it would start training Arab League observers monitoring the deadly crackdown in Syria within days.

The diplomats said that the draft did not make clear if Moscow would accept tough language demanded by the West.

They said experts from the 15 council members would meet on Tuesday to discuss the Russian text, an amalgam of rival wording proposals. It is the third version that Moscow has presented in the past month, according to Reuters.

Council members have been divided for months over the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, with Western countries pushing for strong condemnation of the government's bloody crackdown but Russia seeking to shield its ally Damascus.

In October, Russia and China vetoed a European-drafted resolution that

threatened possible sanctions. Russia presented its own draft on Dec. 15 and Western countries agreed to discuss and negotiate it, but there has been little progress since then.

Western diplomats have said they cannot accept Russian wording that assigns equal blame to both government and opposition for the 10 months of violence in Syria the United Nations says has killed more than 5,000 people, mostly civilians.

They have accused Russia of failing to negotiate seriously, in a bid to buy time for Damascus. Russia, for its part, has said it wants to avoid any resolution that could pave the way for Western intervention in Syria, as happened in Libya.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the Security Council on Monday to handle Syria "in a coherent manner."

The text circulated on Monday ran to 10 pages, compared with two for Russia's last draft on Dec. 23. But that reflected the new version's page layout and the fact that it incorporated a string of alternative paragraphs proposed by European

countries, with no sign that Russia accepted them.

One paragraph, for instance, demands that the Syrian government “immediately put an end to attacks ... against those exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.” The draft ascribes the wording to France and Portugal without making clear if Moscow will agree.

Other paragraphs echo earlier Russian drafts in calling for an end to violence by all sides, backing a peace initiative by the Arab League, which has sent a monitoring mission to Syria, and urging Damascus to carry out promised reforms.

One Western diplomat said the latest text might only amount to a “slight tweak” to earlier Russia drafts. “I’m not sure any of the amendments are highly significant,” he said.

He and other Western diplomats said they hoped to know more after Tuesday's meeting of experts -- U.N. jargon for mid-ranking diplomats authorized to hammer out wording but not make policy decisions. “We’ll have to go through it and

work out where we go from here,” the diplomat said.

Training Arab observers

Meanwhile, the United Nations said Monday that it would start training Arab League observers monitoring the deadly crackdown in Syria within days.

A formal request for help has been made by the Arab League and the U.N. has agreed to start the training in Cairo after League foreign ministers meet this weekend, a U.N. spokeswoman, Vannina Mastracci, told AFP.

The training is to be carried out by staff of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mastracci said.

“At the request of the League of Arab States, the OHCHR has agreed to train observers and will deploy to Cairo to do this training,” she said.

A report by the observer mission is to be handed over to Arab League ministers on Thursday and the ministers will meet on Saturday in Cairo to decide the future of the mission.

Maestracci said the training had been scheduled to start earlier but was delayed at the request of the Arab League until after the ministerial meeting.

The U.N. said in early January that it was ready to help the observer mission, which has faced widespread criticism from the Syrian opposition, but that it was waiting for a request from the Arab League.

The spokeswoman was unable to say how many observers would be trained or how many U.N. experts would be involved.

The U.N. says that at least 5,400 people have been killed in Syria since President Bashar al-Assad's crackdown on opposition protests started in March last year.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/17/188745.html?PHPSESSID=j50kdo1fm783ivm3igd4d59iq1>

- **Syrian legislators join anti-Assad uprising**

Two members of Syria's parliament have left the country, saying they are joining the opposition movement against President Bashar al-Assad, as the

crackdown on anti-government protests continues.



Nawaf al-Bashir, a tribal leader and MP from Deir Ezzor, told Dubai-based Al-Arabiya TV on Monday that he had "come to Turkey to activate the opposition". He said he was a member of the Syrian National Council (SNC), the most prominent opposition bloc.

Bashir's announcement came a day after MP Imad Ghalioun, who represented the central city of Homs, also told Al-Arabiya that he had fled to Cairo.

He called Homs "disaster stricken" and said the city has been subjected to sweeping human-rights violations. Homs has been one of the most volatile regions in Syria since the uprising against Assad began in March.

Ghalioun said he was able to leave Syria before a travel ban was imposed on officials and that there are many

legislators who support the uprising but have not said so publicly.

Bashir, speaking on Monday, said he had previously been coerced into appearing on Syrian state television to praise Assad's reforms and that he had been interrogated by security forces 75 times. He said he would be based in Istanbul but would undertake a tour of the Middle East to discuss the Syrian revolution.

The UN has said that more than 5,000 people have been killed since March, not including an estimated 400 people the organisation thinks have been killed in the past three weeks, despite the presence of observers dispatched by the Arab League.

Mounting toll

Activists said Syrian security forces fired on a town that observers were visiting on Monday. The team was in Ariha, in Idlib province, as part of the Arab League mission to monitor an end to the violence, the activists said.

The mission is due to end on Thursday but the monitors may extend their stay to January 22.

The activists reported the deaths of at least 21 people across the country on Monday.

Random gunfire by armed men loyal to Assad killed five people, including a woman, and wounded nine in Homs, the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said.

A sniper later shot dead a 16-year-old girl in the city, the SOHR said.

It further said five soldiers were killed when they tried to change sides during a clash with opposition fighters in Idlib, and that 15 soldiers succeeded in defecting.

For its part, the state news agency SANA said an "armed terrorist group" killed Brigadier-General Mohammed Abdul-Hamid al-Awad and wounded his driver in the countryside near Damascus.

Liaison office formed

Reports of Monday's violence came as the political and military opposition to Assad announced that they had set up a liaison office to co-ordinate their action aimed at bringing down his government.

SNC said in a statement on Monday the decision to create the office was taken in talks on Saturday with the self-proclaimed Free Syrian Army (FSA), which is comprised of deserters from the military.

In addition to the office, a hotline "to follow internal political developments on the ground" was created, the SNC said. It did not say where the office would be located.

Syrian fighters have regrouped in Lebanon to plan raids on Syrian government checkpoints [Al Jazeera]

The SNC statement said further meetings would be held involving military experts "to strengthen the capacity of the FSA against regime forces and to protect civilian regions which the regime wants to raid or pillage".

The talks also focused on efforts to "restructure FSA units and create a modern and flexible structure ... to allow for rapid deployment" and cope with the daily inflow of deserting officers and soldiers.

The FSA claims to have gathered some 40,000 fighters under its command since March.

On the diplomatic front, Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, reiterated on Monday a call for Assad to "stop killing, and listen to his people".

During a visit to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, he said: "I hope the UN Security Council handles Syria in a coherent manner and with a sense of gravity", but did not recommend any specific action.

"The casualties have reached such an unacceptable stage, we cannot let the situation continue this way," Ban said.

Assad issued a decree granting amnesty to anyone who committed crimes "in the context of the events taking place since March 15, 2011, till the date of issuing the decree", SANA reported on Sunday.

Assad has freed 3,952 prisoners since the outbreak of the uprising, SANA said. The opposition, however, says there are thousands more held incommunicado in Syrian prisons.

Assad has made similar decrees on three previous occasions in May, June and November.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/2012116105334511489.html>

- **Ministry of Foreign and Expatriates Affairs: Syria Surprised by Qatari Officials' Statements Which Call for Sending Arab Forces to It**

DAMASCUS,(SANA)- An official source at the Ministry of Foreign and Expatriates Affairs on Tuesday stated that Syria is surprised by the statements of Qatari officials which call for sending Arab forces to it, and it categorically rejects such calls which would aggravate the situation, hinder the joint Arab work and open the door wide for the foreign interference in Syria's affairs.

The source affirmed that the Syrian people are proud of their dignity and sovereignty and they reject all forms of foreign interference in their affairs under any pretext, and they will confront any attempt to undermine Syria's sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

The source expressed regret that the Arab blood is being shed in Syria to serve well-known agendas, particularly after the conspiracy hatched against Syria has become very clear.

The source added that in a time when Syria implements its commitments agreed upon according to the Arab Work Plan, Syria reiterates the call upon the Arab countries and the Arab League to exert tangible efforts to stop the instigation campaigns and the media mobilization which aim at aggravating the situation in Syria and facilitating the infiltration of the gunmen and the smuggling of weapons to the Syrian territories to achieve security and stability in a way that would pave the way for constructive national dialogue aiming at finding political solution to crisis in Syria.

R. al-Jazaeri

<http://sana.sy/eng/21/2012/01/17/394828.htm>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Yemen's FM says he has doubts about holding presidential vote on time**

There are doubts over holding the presidential elections in its scheduled date, Yemen's foreign minister, Abu Bakr al-Qerabi, told Al Arabiya.



"In light of the security deterioration in the country, it would be difficult that the presidential elections could be held on its scheduled time on Feb. 21," he said in an interview with Al Arabiya from the capital of the United Arab Emirates.

Qerabi is a member of a Yemeni delegation, led by Prime Minister Mohammed Basindwa, in a multi-leg tour in the Gulf region, for the main aim of seeking political and economic support to the impoverished country.

"All the leaders we have met with in Saudi Arabia and the UAE have expressed their full support to Yemen. They all fully

understand that Yemen is in need of the Gulf economic support," Qerabi said.

Asked on the Yemeni law granting amnesty to President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Qerabi said that there are many parties that do not approve the law. "Anyways, the law that will be issued will not differ from what came in the Gulf Cooperation Council-brokered initiative in this regard," he said.

Basindwa's government signed off on the law granting Saleh and those who worked with him immunity from prosecution, a central element of the deal rejected by youth protesters, who denounce the interim government for agreeing to it.

Saleh has agreed to step down under the terms of a deal crafted by the six-member GCC -- and backed by a U.N. Security Council resolution -- aimed at ending nearly a year of protests demanding he steps down.

Earlier Monday, Prime Minister Basindwa said that Yemen needs billions of dollars in aid and has received assurances of financial help from oil-rich Gulf Arab

neighbors after a year of violent political turmoil over the fate of its president,

Basindwa, who leads a government tasked with preparing for a February election to pick a successor to Saleh, also said he wanted Saleh to leave Yemen before the vote.

“I’m hopeful he will leave (before Feb. 21),” he told Reuters in the interview, on the sidelines of a conference in the United Arab Emirates, one leg of a regional tour aimed at drumming up aid.

“But let us wait and see,” he added.

Forces loyal to Saleh are believed to have killed over 200 protesters during the uprising, in which a rebel army division and militias loyal to tribal chieftains have waged bouts of open war with his forces in the capital Sana’a and elsewhere.

Basindwa said aid from Yemen’s neighbors was crucial to rebuilding the country, one of the poorest in the Arab world, and which the United States and Saudi Arabia view as a potential foothold for al Qaeda.

“In late March or early April they will establish a fund for Yemen,” he said. “Yemen needs a lot of money to rebuild to achieve prosperity, to eliminate poverty, unemployment and thereby also terrorism. It needs billions of dollars, tens of billions of dollars.”

He said Yemen has received assurances of financial help from the GCC countries led by Saudi Arabia, but no set figures or a timeline for disbursing the funds.

Any aid would bypass his government and be spent directly on approved development projects, he said.

“Our role will be just to submit a list of projects Yemen needs in all its governorates,” Basindwa said.

“They’ll after (that) hold tenders and choose the right companies to implement. We will have nothing to do with choosing the consultants, companies that will carry out such projects... We don’t want cash money from that fund going to our Treasury.”

Any successor to Saleh will face multiple, overlapping regional conflicts including

resurgent separatist sentiment in the south, where Islamist fighters have also seized chunks of territory and control large parts of the province of Abyan.

Yemen's political chaos has deepened a pre-existing humanitarian crisis, with about half a million displaced and one-third of children suffering from moderate or acute malnutrition, according to a recent government and U.N. survey.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/17/188763.html?PHPSESSID=j50kdo1fm783ivm3igd4d59iq1>

- **Saudi Arabia and Iran spar over oil embargo**

Saudi Arabia will make up for any shortfall in world oil supply caused by sanctions against Iran, the country's oil minister has said, despite warnings from Iran that such a move would provoke unspecified "consequences".

The US has already approved a sanctions bill which penalises companies for dealing with Iran's central bank. The bank processes Iran's oil revenues, so the law would make it impossible for many countries to buy Iranian oil.

The European Union is now considering a similar set of measures, with a final decision expected within the next two weeks.

Concerns over the effects of sanctions, and a series of provocative statements from Riyadh and Tehran, have already helped to push crude oil prices above \$111.

Ali al-Naimi, the Saudi oil minister, told CNN on Monday that his country could increase production by two million barrels "almost immediately". Iran exports roughly 2.5 million barrels per day, so that increase would make up for most of the Iranian supply.

Iran, though, has threatened to retaliate: A senior military adviser said that Iran would "use any tools" to protect itself, and the country's OPEC envoy threatened that Saudi Arabia and other states would face consequences for boosting their oil output.

"We would not consider these actions to be friendly," Mohammad Ali Khatibi said on Saturday, according to Sharq newspaper. "They will be held responsible

for what happens ... one cannot predict the consequences.”

‘Replacing’ Iran

Amidst those tensions, Wen Jiabao, the Chinese premier, is partway through a six-day tour of the Arabian Peninsula. His country is one of the largest importers of Iranian oil, and analysts say his trip is at least partly an effort to line up alternate suppliers.



Wen’s stop in Abu Dhabi on Monday was his first-ever trip to the United Arab Emirates. It followed his first visit to Saudi Arabia in two decades.

The visit was not all focused on Iran: China signed a nuclear co-operation deal with Saudi Arabia, and its state-run oil company, Sinopec, sealed a deal with Saudi Aramco to build a 400,000-barrel refinery in the desert kingdom.

“It’s important to separate the short-term tactical issue, which is about Iran and

confirming alternate energy supplies are in place to replace Iran... and then long-term, China’s policy of deepening its ties with the Gulf,” Robin Mills, an analyst with Manaar Energy Consulting in Dubai, said.

Chinese officials have hinted that they will not abide by sanctions on Iran’s oil industry, partly because of their foreign policy, and partly because of simple math. China is the second-largest importer of Iranian oil: it purchases roughly 430,000 barrels per day, roughly one-sixth of Iran’s total output. Those supplies would be difficult to replace in a tight market.

A Chinese company, Zhuhai Zhenrong Co, was sanctioned by the US last week for doing business with Iran’s oil industry. The sanctions prompted a terse response from the Chinese foreign ministry, which expressed its “strong dissatisfaction”.

“Like many other countries, China maintains normal cooperation with Iran in energy, economic and trade fields,” Liu Weimin, a spokesman for the ministry, said in a statement.

But analysts say China is nonetheless trying to identify alternate suppliers, in

case international sanctions or war make Iranian oil unavailable.

“It's dangerous to read too much into state visits, but there is no doubt that when [Wen] was in Saudi Arabia he was discussing whether they would fill the gap should the need arise,” Paul Stevens, an energy analyst at Chatham House, said.

The Obama administration has also tried to persuade Iran's other major Asian customers, notably Japan and South Korea, to reduce their imports. Japan has reportedly started to look for alternate suppliers. South Korea, meanwhile, wants a waiver from the US sanctions to allow it to continue to purchase Iranian oil.

'No spare capacity'

Analysts are divided on whether Saudi Arabia will actually increase its exports. Practically speaking, it is feasible: Saudi Arabia currently pumps about 10 million barrels per day, and has about 2.5 million barrels in excess capacity. But the threat of retaliation from Iran could dissuade the Saudis from boosting production.

And if Saudi Arabia increased output - maxing out its production - oil prices would probably jump.

“The problem then is that you have no spare capacity left anywhere, except in Iran,” Mills of Manaar Energy Consulting said.

“Prices would inevitably price. Even if the amount of supply is the same, the markets would see the system is running at close to full capacity.”

Al-Naimi, the Saudi oil minister, also expressed his doubts that Iran could successfully blockade the Strait of Hormuz, the waterway through which one-fifth of the world's oil is shipped.

Iran has threatened a blockade in response to any oil embargo. “I personally do not believe that the strait, if it were shut, will be shut for any length of time,” al-Naimi said.

Few analysts think Iran will actually block the strait in response to an embargo. The blockade would inevitably be short-lived: The strait is fairly wide - 54km at its narrowest point - and a thinly spread

Iranian navy would quickly be overpowered by forces from the US and, perhaps, its regional allies.

Blocking the strait now would also deprive Iran of a key deterrent to dissuade Israel from attacking its nuclear sites.

“The credible threat to close Hormuz is the main deterrent against the US/Israeli threat to attack the Iranian nuclear facilities,” Stevens of Chatham House said. “So it’s unlikely that they will use their trump card in this situation.”

Instead, Stevens said, Iran could take other steps to retaliate, like threatening its Arab neighbours in the Gulf and targeting US or European interests in Afghanistan.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/2012116154947655566.html>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Pakistan PM to appear after court summons

The Pakistani prime minister has said he will comply with a supreme court order summoning him for a hearing related to

his government's failure in reopening corruption cases.

After the court issued a contempt of court notice against him on Monday, Yousuf Raza Gilani said he respected the decision and would appear for the hearing on January 19.

The setback delivered by the judiciary was offset somewhat by the boost Gilani received when he won a "show of confidence vote" in the national assembly, or parliament, which passed a "resolution in favour of democracy" later in the day.

Speaking during the vote, Gilani ruled out resigning, saying: "The court has summoned me, and in respect I will go on January 19."

Gilani held a meeting with members of his governing coalition shortly before the parliamentary session. Local media reports said coalition partners advised him to comply with the supreme court's order.

No direction

Monday marked the supreme court's deadline to Gilani's government for reopening the stalled corruption

investigation against Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari.

Maulvi Anwar-ul-Haq, the Pakistan attorney general, told a seven-member bench of the court that he had received no direction from the government in regard to a demand that information be provided on whether it was intending to act on pursuing a corruption case in Swiss courts.

The case, dating back to the 1990s, alleges that Zardari, among others, was involved in corruption. Both Zardari and Gilani belong to the ruling party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Gilani's government has contended that Zardari, as president, has immunity under the constitution.

Separately on Monday, a commission appointed by the supreme court resumed hearings into the so-called Memogate scandal, which has angered the powerful army and threatened the stability of Gilani's government.

A secret memorandum, allegedly written by Pakistan's former ambassador to

Washington, asked the US for help in thwarting a possible military coup in the aftermath of last year's US raid that killed Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda's leader, near Islamabad.

The counsel for Mansoor Ijaz, the Pakistani-American businessman who served as the intermediary for the memo, told the Memogate commission on Monday that his client had been receiving "death threats", and requested to be given until January 25 to appear before the body.

RIM, the maker of BlackBerry cellphones, meanwhile, has told the commission that it is unable to release data related to the case. The date of the next hearing in the case has been set for January 24.

Heightened tensions

Tensions heightened last week over the Memogate scandal when Gilani criticised the armed forces for co-operating with the supreme court's investigation into the affair without going through the proper channels in the civilian government.

Speaking in parliament after dismissing the defence secretary, Gilani said the

confrontation was nothing less than a choice between "democracy and dictatorship".

His comments followed a warning from the generals - who were infuriated by the memo - of possible "grievous consequences" ahead.

An army statement said Gilani's criticism of the army had been "divisive".

Last week, the supreme court threatened to dismiss Zardari and Gilani if they continued to ignore its demands to reopen the corruption investigation against the former.

In 2007, PPP leaders, including Zardari, were granted a controversial blanket amnesty over corruption charges under the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO).

The supreme court later struck down the NRO as being unconstitutional, but its rulings were never widely implemented, particularly when it came to pursuing legal cases against Zardari and other senior officials.

Gilani's government has argued that the constitution gives a sitting president amnesty from prosecution.

The ongoing confrontation between civilian leaders and the generals has prompted fears of another coup against an elected government.

Civil-military distrust has plagued Pakistan for almost its entire existence, with the military ruling for more than half of its 64-year history.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2012/01/2012116171148123533.html>

**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.*

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