



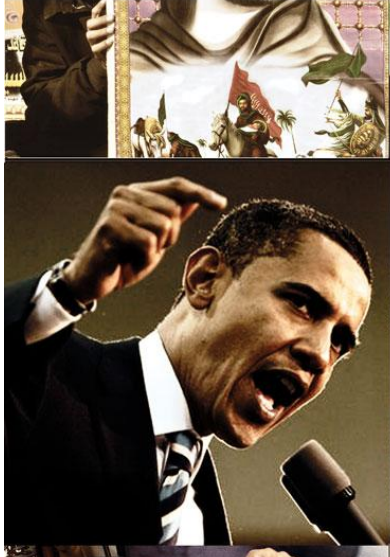
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ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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1. IRAQ

• **Rocket hits Turkish embassy in Iraq**

A rocket hit the Turkish embassy compound in Baghdad on Wednesday, striking its perimeter without causing any injuries, Iraqi security and Turkish officials said.



At least two rockets were fired from a vehicle at the embassy in northern Baghdad, outside the heavily fortified Green Zone complex, a senior Iraqi security official said.

Baghdad summoned Turkey's ambassador on Monday, complaining that comments made by Turkish officials amounted to meddling in its internal affairs.

"There were two Katyusha rockets. The first one hit the embassy blast wall, and the second one hit the second floor of an adjacent bank," the official said.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry said Ankara expected the Iraqi authorities to take steps to provide security for Turkey's diplomatic missions.

"We strongly condemn the atrocious attack on our embassy and we expect the Iraqi authorities to arrest the attackers and take them before the court, as well as to take every necessary measure to ensure such an attack does not take place again," its statement said.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/19/189145.html?PHPSESSID=uf81ia71rghk85g57hc0tsoqm4>

• **Iraq Vice-President of Baghdad Provincial Council arrested for terrorism charges**

Wednesday, January 18, 2012 17:17 GMT
An Iraqi police source reported, on Wednesday, that a special force arrested Vice-President of Baghdad Provincial Council Riyadh Al Adad for terrorism charges.

"A special force stopped, this morning, the convoy of Vice-President of Baghdad Provincial Council Riyadh Al Adad before it reached the council's headquarters in Al Salihya District, Central Baghdad," the

source told Alsumarianews noting that the force arrested Adad.

“The arrest was executed after Iraqi judiciary issued an arrest warrant for Adad by virtue of Anti-terrorism Law Article 4,” the source told Alsumaria on condition of anonymity.

Baghdad Provincial Council elected Riyad Al Adad of Iraqi Accord Front as Vice-President of the council, in 2009, following Iraqi provincial councils’ elections.

Article 4 of 2005’s Anti-terrorism Law stipulates that every act of violence, threat, instigation and financing that intend to create sectarian strife or civil war through citizens’ arming or inciting to arm each other is considered as terrorist act.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72895-Iraq-Vice-President-of-Baghdad-Provincial-Council-arrested-for-terrorism-charges.html>

- **Kurdistan opposition confers with Barzani in Baghdad**

ERBIL, Jan. 18 (AKnews) - The three opposition parties of Kurdistan Region will meet with Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani in Baghdad today.

Gorran [Change] Movement, Kurdistan Islamic Union and Kurdistan Islamic Party form the opposition to the coalition government of Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party of and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

Speaking to AKnews, Gorran deputy Mohammed Kiyani, KIU deputy Mohammed Faraj and KIG deputy Abdul-Sattar Majid, said their parties will attend the meeting with Barzani to discuss the current issues in Iraq and Kurdistan and the role of Kurds in resolving the difficulties.

The opposition in Kurdistan refuses to meet with the ruling parties, accusing them of promoting corruption. However, for issues relating to national security, they have repeatedly said they will be united with the rest.

The five parties united after the 2009 federal elections as the Kurdistan Blocs Coalition. Gorran has since split from this caucus.

By Rebin Hassan

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/4/285048>

- **Nechirvan Barzani officially agrees to head seventh cabinet**

ERBIL, Jan. 18 (AKnews) - Kurdistan Democratic Party Vice President Nechirvan Barzani has agreed to run the next regional government of Iraqi Kurdistan, a KDP spokesman said.

In a statement Jaafar Ibrahim said the fifth prime minister will return for a second go. Barzani officially voiced his readiness to assume the position from Prime Minister Barham Saleh of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

PUK, headed by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, and KDP, led by his Kurdish counterpart Massoud Barzani, form the coalition Kurdish government.

According to the deal the two parties enter elections together and share the government positions 50-50. Under what was called the Strategic Deal, each of the KDP and the PUK will head the government for two years during each term.

The KDP remained in office for entire four-year term when the two parties won the 2005 elections. PUK were hoping the KDP would allow them to stay in the position for a complete term as well when the two allies won the 2009 elections.

But PUK's star is waning. In the 2009 elections the PUK lost many of its seats to the splinter group Gorran [Change] Movement who hold 25 of the 111 seats in parliament. With this diminution of power KDP is claiming the Prime Minister's officer back after two years.

Ibrahim added the KDP leadership board will meet Jan.19 to discuss the mechanism of handover from PUK, led by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

PUK and KDP politburos will also meet to discuss the same topic, according to KDP spokesman.

By Wushyar Aswad

<http://aknews.com/en/aknews/4/285028>

2. IRAN

• Iran says nuclear talks to resume soon

Iran's foreign minister says his country is in negotiations to agree a venue and a date for new talks regarding its controversial nuclear programme, but the European Union denied that discussions had taken place.



Ali Akbar Salehi, speaking during a visit to Turkey on Wednesday, said the location for possible talks would probably be Istanbul.

"Negotiations are going on about venue and date. We would like to have these negotiations," said Salehi. "Most probably, I am not sure yet, the venue will be Istanbul. The day is not yet settled, but it will be soon."

Meanwhile, a member of the Iranian parliament told the semi-official Fars news agency that US President Barack Obama

had written directly to Iran's supreme leader to propose direct talks.

But Ali Motahari said the letter also warned Iran that closing the Strait of Hormuz, which Tehran has threatened to do in retaliation to tightening sanctions, was a "red line" for Washington.

"The first part of the letter contains threats and the second part contains an offer for dialogue," said Motahari.

But a spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, representing the six countries involved in talks with Iran, denied there were any fresh discussions with Tehran to organise a meeting.

"There are no negotiations under way on new talks," he said in Brussels. "We are still waiting for Iran to respond to the substantive proposals the High Representative (Ashton) made in her letter from October."

The UK was also dismissive. "There are no dates or concrete plans because Iran has yet to demonstrate clearly that it is willing to respond to Baroness Ashton's letter and negotiate without preconditions," a

spokesman for the British foreign office said.

"Until it does so, the international community will only increase pressure on it through further peaceful and legitimate sanctions," he said.

The last talks between Iran and the permanent members of the UN Security Council - the US, the UK, France, Russia and China - along with Germany stalled in Istanbul a year ago, with the parties unable to agree even on an agenda.

'Chasing headlines'

Tensions between Iran and the West are rising with the US and the EU preparing to embargo Iran's oil industry over its refusal to suspend a nuclear programme that the West suspects is intended to develop nuclear weapons.

EU foreign ministers are expected to approve an embargo on Iranian oil at a meeting on January 23, diplomats say.

"Ahead of (that meeting) Iran is chasing headlines and pretending that it is ready

to engage," a Western diplomat said in reference to Salehi's remarks.

"If it really is ready to sit down without preconditions the (six powers) would do so. Sadly, at the moment, it seems more interested in propaganda".

Tehran says other countries must respect its right to enrich uranium, the nuclear fuel which, if enriched to much higher levels than that suitable for power plants, can provide material for atomic bombs.

Iran denies it is seeking nuclear weapons and says its activities are for power generation and medical applications.

Russia, which has criticised the new EU and US sanctions, said on Wednesday that any military action by Israel or the US against Iran would ignite a disastrous, widespread Middle East war.

"On the chances of whether this catastrophe will happen or not you should ask those who repeatedly talk about this," Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, told a news conference in Moscow.

"I have no doubt that it would pour fuel on a fire which is already smouldering, the hidden smouldering fire of Sunni-Shia confrontation, and beyond that (it would cause) a chain reaction. I don't know where it would stop."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2012/01/2012118145640898340.html>

- **China's premier defends Iran oil trade, warns on nuclear weapons**

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao defended his country's extensive oil trade with Iran against Western sanctions pressure in comments published on Thursday, and yet also warned that Beijing firmly opposes any efforts by Tehran to acquire nuclear weapons.



Wen spoke on Wednesday at the end of a six-day visit to the Middle East against a backdrop of tensions over possible U.S. sanctions on nations that do energy trade with Iran, which Western powers say is focused on developing nuclear weapons.

Iran has insisted that its nuclear goals are peaceful, and in late December threatened to punish the latest Western sanctions by choking off oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital route for much of the Middle East's oil exports.

Wen said his government "adamantly opposes Iran developing and possessing nuclear weapons," and warned against potential confrontation in the Strait of Hormuz.

Beijing officials are usually much coy about even suggesting that Iran could be seeking nuclear arms.

Speaking at a news conference in Doha, Wen also took aim at both potential threats to China's oil imports: the U.S. sanctions pressure and the Hormuz tensions.

"I also want to clearly point out that China's oil trade with Iran is normal trade activity," he said in response to a question about U.S. and European efforts to curtail Iranian oil exports and revenues, according to a transcript on the Chinese

Foreign Ministry's website
(www.mfa.gov.cn).

“Legitimate trade should be protected, otherwise the world economic order would fall into turmoil,” he added.

But Wen shrugged off worry about China’s oil needs.

“I don’t have this or that worry about China’s oil supplies, and this time I didn’t discuss this issue with the leaders of each country,” he told the news conference, according to the official Chinese transcript.

Wen visited Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

Tricky path

His comments laid bare the tricky course Beijing is trying to steer between pressure from Washington and its allies and expectations from Iran, which looks to China as a sympathetic power and its chief oil customer.

The tensions are a particular worry for China, the biggest buyer of Iranian oil, followed by India and Japan. Only Saudi

Arabia and Angola sell more crude than Iran to China.

“We believe that, no matter what the circumstances, the security of the Gulf of Hormuz and normal shipping passage through it must be guaranteed, because this is in the interests of the whole world,” said Wen.

“Any extreme measures on this issue would violate the wishes of all countries in the world and their people.”

The Obama administration last week invoked U.S. law to sanction China’s state-run Zhuhai Zhenrong Corp, which it said was Iran’s largest supplier of refined petroleum products.

The United States is also working out how to enforce a law enacted on Dec. 31 that targets foreign financial institutions doing business with Iran's central bank, notably to buy crude.

China has backed U.N. Security Council resolutions calling on Iran to halt uranium enrichment activities, while working to ensure its energy ties are not threatened.

In the first 11 months of 2011, Chinese crude imports from Iran were at about 553,000 barrels per day, a gain of nearly 30 percent on the same period a year before, according to Chinese customs data.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/19/189172.html?PHPSESSID=uf81ia71rghk85g57hc0tsoqm4>

- **Iran, 5+1 likely to hold talks in Istanbul: Salehi**

TEHRAN, Jan. 18 (MNA) – The Iranian foreign minister has said that a new round of talks between Tehran and the 5+1 group (the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany) is likely to be held in Istanbul.

"I'm not sure, but the negotiations are likely to be held in Istanbul," Ali Akbar Salehi said in Ankara on Wednesday.

However, Salehi did not say when the negotiations are going to be held.

The Iranian foreign minister travelled to Ankara on Wednesday to attend the 23rd meeting of Iran-Turkey joint economic committee. He is scheduled to return home on Thursday, January 19.

Iran and the six major powers have recently signaled readiness to resume nuclear talks and Turkey has said that it is ready to host the negotiations.

Salehi also said that Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu will be in contact with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who represents the six major powers in nuclear negotiations with Iran, and Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili to decide when the talks should be held.

In late January 2011, a new round of talks between Iran and the major powers was held in Istanbul but no date was set for the next round of negotiations.

After the end of the Geneva talks in early December 2010, Jalili announced that Iran and the 5+1 group had agreed that the next rounds of talks should focus on common ground for cooperation.

However, the 5+1 group reneged on the agreement, and after the end of the Geneva talks, Ashton read out a statement saying the nuclear issue would be the focus of the next round of talks, a move

which drew strong criticism from Iranian officials.

The main bone of contention between Tehran and the West is Iran's uranium enrichment program.

Iran says all its nuclear activities are totally peaceful, and, as an International Atomic Energy Agency member and a nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty signatory, it has the legal right to produce nuclear fuel for its research reactors and nuclear power plants.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1513260>

- **Iran ready to start nuclear talks: Turkey's FM**

Ankara, Jan 19, IRNA - Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu Wednesday said both the European Union and Iran have expressed their readiness to resume talks on the nuclear issue.



Speaking at a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in Brussels this evening, the Turkish minister said he had contacts recently with Iranian officials and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and that 'both sides declared the intention to meet and restart the negotiations.'

'Of course, it is up to both sides to decide but as far as Turkey is concerned, we will be happy to host this new round of talks,' he said.

Tomorrow (on Thursday), Davutoglu said, 'I will be meeting with my Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi in Ankara to discuss this issue.'

'We hope these negotiations will create positive result and an important international concern will be thoroughly resolved,' he added.

The last nuclear talks between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the US, the UK, France, Russia and China, together with Germany was held in Istanbul about a year ago, but no progress was made.

According to Iranian sources, Iran's top negotiator Saeed Jalili has told EU in his response letter to EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton that Tehran is ready to hold fresh nuclear talks, but would not back down on its "rights" in the talks with the West. The letter, dated September 6 added: "The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that just negotiation and talk is the only way to remove existing misunderstandings in all areas."

Jalili spoke of the "necessity of achieving a comprehensive, long-term and negotiated solution for both sides." But he also said any "measures that would lead to deprivation" of the rights of states, "including the noble nation of Iran, is unacceptable." In a letter to Iran in July, Ashton announced the world powers' willingness to continue talks with Iran on its peaceful nuclear program.

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

Tehran has dismissed the West's demands as politically tainted and illogical, stressing those sanctions and pressures merely consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

http://www.irna.ir/News/Politic/Iran-ready-to-start-nuclear-talks-Turkey_s-FM/30772308

3. SYRIA

- **Ceasefire 'agreed' in Syrian mountain town**

The Syrian army has reportedly agreed to a ceasefire with opposition fighters in the town of Zabadani, near the capital, Damascus.

Opposition figure Kamal Labwani, who fled to Jordan two weeks ago, told Al Jazeera on Wednesday that an agreement had been made between town leaders and Asef Shawkat, the deputy minister of defence, who is also the brother-in-law of President Bashar al-Assad.

Labwani said town leaders had consulted the opposition Free Syrian Army and local activists, who in turn agreed to the ceasefire.

Under the deal, troops and tanks were to withdraw from Zabadani, a town of about 40,000 people on the border with Lebanon, and opposition fighters would withdraw from the streets, according to Labwani.

There was no comment from the Syrian authorities.

"As of now there is no shelling and no gunfire. It is quiet. But the army is still surrounding the area," a Zabadani resident who gave her name as Rita told the Reuters news agency. "The agreement last evening was that the army would withdraw and the armed rebels would leave the streets and clear roadblocks."

Zabadani, located about 30km northwest of Damascus, in the foothills of the mountains which separate Lebanon from Syria, has seen regular big demonstrations demanding the removal of Assad.

Troops backed by tanks reportedly attacked the town on Friday, in the biggest military offensive since Arab League monitors went into the country last month.

A statement by activists from Zabadani, published on Facebook, said the ceasefire was agreed after two days of negotiations.

Security Council split

International pressure is mounting on Syria to end its crackdown on dissidents, and parts of the opposition are calling for foreign intervention.

However, Russia's foreign minister said on Wednesday his country would block any attempt by Western nations to secure United Nations support for the use of force against Syria.

"If some intend to use force at all cost ... we can hardly prevent that from happening," Sergei Lavrov said. "But let them do it at their own initiative on their own conscience, they won't get any authorisation from the UN Security Council".

His comments came a day after Security Council diplomats held prolonged talks on a proposed Russian resolution on Syria. Lavrov said the draft was aimed at making it explicitly clear that nothing could justify a foreign military interference.

Western diplomats said the draft fell short of their demand for strong condemnation of violence against civilians, that the UN estimates has left more than 5,000 people dead.

The Security Council has been unable to agree on a resolution since the unrest began in March because of strong opposition from Russia and China.

Beijing on Wednesday defended the Arab League's widely criticised observer mission in Syria, which was deployed last month.

"Since the Arab League observer mission began, the violence in Syria has not completely ended, but the security situation of major areas has improved, which shows the mission is effective," foreign ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said.

'Wretched tyrant'

British Prime Minister David Cameron on Wednesday accused Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah movement of helping to prop up Assad, whom he described as "a wretched tyrant".

"Britain needs to lead the way in making sure we tighten the sanctions, the travel bans, the asset freezes, on Syria," Cameron told parliament in London.

European Union foreign ministers are expected to discuss extra EU sanctions at a meeting on Monday.

Hundreds of killings on both sides have been reported since the Arab League sent observers last month to see whether Damascus was respecting a peace plan it accepted on November 2.

An Arab League source said Damascus would accept a one-month extension of the monitoring mission, but no broadening of its mandate.

The Local Co-ordinating Committees, an opposition activist network, said 22 people were killed on Wednesday, eight of whom were said to be defectors from the army.

The activists said 13 of the deaths occurred in Homs province.

Syria's state news agency SANA said the strangled body of a veterinarian doctor was found in Homs bearing marks of torture four days after he was kidnapped by an "armed terrorist group".

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/201211884752784213.html>

- **EU readies new sanctions over Syria repression, adds names to blacklist**

European sanctions on Syria are set to be tightened after EU ministers added 22 individuals and eight companies to an existing blacklist on Monday in an effort to tackle the Syrian government's repression of anti-regime protests.

"As long as the repression continues we will step up our restrictive measures," one diplomat told AFP on the condition of anonymity.

No details were immediately available on the new targets of the sanctions, AFP news agency reported.



The EU has already agreed ten rounds of sanctions against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, with some 120 people and companies targeted so far by an EU assets freeze and travel ban, AFP news agency reports.

An arms embargo and a ban on imports of Syrian crude has also been enforced by the European Union.

The United Nations Security Council, meanwhile, is struggling struggles to agree on a resolution on Damascus's crackdown on dissent.

Russia, which insists the Syrian opposition is as much to blame for the violence as the regime, warned against Western calls for punitive measures.

"For us, the red line is fairly clearly drawn. We will not support any sanctions," said Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, whose country was a Cold War ally of Damascus and retains a naval base at Tartus on Syria's Mediterranean coast.

But China defended the Arab League's widely criticized observer mission to Syria which began last month

"Since the Arab League observer mission began, the violence in Syria has not completely ended, but the security situation of major areas has improved,"

said Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Liu Weimin.

"(This) shows the mission is effective," he added.

The U.N. says that of 5,400 killed since protest erupted in March, 400 have lost their lives since the observers arrived.

Moscow and Beijing used their vetoes at the U.N. Security Council last October to block a Western-drafted resolution that would have threatened Damascus with "targeted measures."

Meanwhile, a group of 140 Arab rights groups condemned on Wednesday the "flawed" Arab League observer mission from Syria and called for U.N. intervention to halt the violence.

The coalition sent a letter to the pan-Arab bloc urging it to withdraw the mission given the "flaws that have severely undermined" its efficiency and the Syrian government's failure to implement the Arab League peace plan.

The letter also urged the U.N. Security Council “to take action to address the violence.”

The heavily criticized monitoring team has been in Syria since December 26 to oversee an Arab road map under which Damascus agreed to end the violence, withdraw the army from the main cities, give journalists and observers access to all parts of the country and free political prisoners.

The Arab League is due to meet on Saturday and Sunday to discuss its mission’s future, as well as a proposal by Qatar to send Arab troops to Syria that Damascus has flatly rejected.

“The monitoring mission lacks basic transparency and credibility, the mission is under the authority of Sudan’s ex-military intelligence director who was president’s Darfur adviser during the genocide,” allegedly committed there, said Radwan Ziadeh, president of one coalition member, the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies.

“No observers have been able to do their job: instead, the mission legitimizes the

Syrian regime,” Ziadeh added, in a statement representing the rights groups working in 19 different countries.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/19/189142.html?PHPSESSID=uf81ia71rghk85g57hc0tsoqm4>

- **Lavrov: Russia Will Reject Deploying any Troops in Syria, Won't Pass any UNSC Resolution for Using Force against It**

MOSCOW, (SANA) - Russia stressed on Wednesday rejection of deploying any troops in Syria or imposing any sanctions on it, reiterating its insistence along with china on non-interference by the UN in the internal affairs of Syria and on not using force against it.



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in a press conference reviewing the outcomes of Russia's foreign policy in 2011 that his country will not pass any resolution at the UN Security Council that paves the way for interference in Syria,

affirming that any country seeking military intervention in Syria will not receive any authorization through the UNSC.

He reiterated his country's call for reaching a political solution through launching an internal national dialogue after violence, regardless of its source, is to be immediately halted.

He also stressed his country's support to the Arab League efforts, adding that Russia rejects any one-sided sanctions as they undermine the reputation and influence of the Security Council.

"For us the red line is clear. We won't back any sanctions or deployment of troops in Syria," Lavrov told the press conference, adding that his country will not allow the Security Council to take any illegal decisions that are in the interests of peoples.

He said that the Russian draft resolution currently proposed for discussion at the Security Council and has the support of China and the BRICS Group countries is aimed at reaching a political solution through internal national dialogue and

preventing the United Nations from interfering in the internal affairs of Syria.

He continued that Russia and China continue to insist that the draft resolution include terms on non-interference by the UN in the Syrian affairs as well as on not allowing this document to be interpreted as a pretext to use force against Syria.

The Russian Foreign Minister commented on the stances of some foreign countries towards the Russian draft resolution and their description of it as "not strict", saying not strict", saying their comments are an attempt to evade the main question related to the reasons behind silence on what the armed extremist opposition is perpetrating in Syria against the government headquarters, hospitals and schools and on the terrorist acts committed inside Syria. He added that the West has adopted a one-sided stance towards this issue.

Lavrov reiterated his country's criticism and rejection of the operations of arms smuggling into Syria to support the armed gangs and the attempts to create the impression of a humanitarian crisis in it,

describing these attempts as "rejected and unfruitful".

"There is an undeniable fact that arms are being smuggled to the gunmen and extremists in Syria who have been trying to exploit the protest movement in order to achieve their goals to usurp power," he said, lashing out at the so-called "aid convoys to Syria" with the aim of creating the impression of humanitarian catastrophe.

Lavrov considered the so-called aid convoys proposals to Syria which as completely rejected and fruitless because they lead but to intensifying the cycle of violence.

On the statements made by the officials of some foreign countries on denying desire for military intervention against Syria, Lavrov expressed hope that honest intentions were behind these statements and that they reflect the actual stance of these countries.

He noted that Russia has information indicating that there are countries in the West that do not consider seriously the issue of imposing a no-fly zone similar to

what happened Libya, stressing that the Libyan scenario cannot be applied in Syria.

"I heard calls for sending Arab troops to Syria. If some intend to use force at any price, they should do this on their own initiative...This will be in their conscience, but they will never get any authorization for this from the Security Council," said Lavrov.

He called upon the countries that have an influence on the opposition in Syria to use their effect to stop violence and work on warding off its use against civilians, adding at the same time that the countries that have dialogue with the Syrian government should insist on it not to use force.

The Russian Minister expressed his country's readiness to host representatives of all Syrian sides to hold a meeting as soon as possible to agree on launching national dialogue.

On the other hand, Lavrov said that Russia is exporting weapons to Syria in a legitimate way, adding that Russia does not need to justify this issue as it does not violate any international agreements or the UNSC resolutions, in response to what

the U.S. Representative at the Security Council Susan E. Rice stated on what she considered a concern about sending Russian arms to Syria.

<http://sana.sy/eng/22/2012/01/19/395106.htm>

- **Chinese Premier Calls for Political Solution in Syria**

DOHA, (SANA)_Premier Wen Jiabao of China called for a political solution to the crisis in Syria, indicating that China is constantly monitoring the Syrian crisis.

In a press conference in Doha on Wednesday, Jiabao underlined the necessity of respecting the demands of the Syrian people who aspire for reform and change, as well as activating the role of the Arab League as to reach a political solution through dialogue.

He added that China aims to see a solution to the crisis as soon as possible and seeks an improvement in the living conditions of the Syrians, meeting the people's needs and helping Syria realize stability and development.

China: Security Council Debates on Syria Should Help Ease Tension and Boost Dialogue

China on Wednesday underlined that the UN Security Council's discussions on the situation in Syria have to help ease tension and boost the political dialogue in order to solve differences and preserve pace and stability in the Middle East.

"China appreciates Russia's commitment and the efforts exerted to solve the crisis... we are ready to continue consultations regarding the Russian draft resolution," Liu Weimin, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson said at a press conference.

He added that China calls on all sides concerned in Syria to cooperate with the efforts exerted by the Arab League to apply an immediate halt to the violence, undertake a comprehensive political process as soon as possible and accelerate reforms in order to defuse the crisis' primer.

He indicated that China supports resolving the crisis in the framework of the Arab League and backs the constructive efforts exerted it exerted. Weimin hoped the

Arab monitors continue performing their duty in Syria and create the suitable conditions to reach a resolution to the crisis.

<http://sana.sy/eng/22/2012/01/19/395236.htm>

4. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Netanyahu headed to Cyprus to boost cooperation on security, offshore drilling**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will be going to Cyprus on February 16 in what a Foreign Ministry source says is the first-ever visit by an Israeli prime minister to the island country. Netanyahu hopes to increase cooperation with Cyprus in underwater drilling for natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as security cooperation in the wake of the crisis in Israel's relations with Turkey and the instability of Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime.

Over the past few days, Cypriot media outlets have reported that Israel and Cyprus has signed a cooperation agreement relating to the protection of natural gas drilling sites, and UPI reported that Israel has also asked Cyprus for permission to station aircraft in the island

country. The Cypriot government has not yet responded and it can be assumed that the subject will come up during Netanyahu's visit.



A rig at the Tamar field, during production tests.

The Prime Minister's Office confirmed that Netanyahu will be making the trip, and said it was an effort to create closer ties between the countries.

The issue of gas discoveries will be a major topic of discussion during the visit, a senior Israeli official said. Recent discoveries of underwater natural gas reserves in Israeli and Cypriot economic waters are of strategic importance to both countries and are expected to provide an injection of tens of billions of dollars into the countries' economies. Netanyahu is interested in striking an agreement with the Cypriots on cooperation in the delivery of the gas to markets in Europe and Asia. He would also like to resolve

several recent disputes over gas fields in adjacent areas, some of which are in waters in Israel's economic zone and others in Cypriot economic waters.

The Israeli premier's visit comes after dramatically closer relations between the two countries over the past two years against the backdrop of the severe crisis in relations between Israel and Turkey.

Before the May 2010 sailing of the Turkish flotilla that sought to break Israel's maritime blockade of the Gaza Strip, the Cypriot president issued a special order that is still in effect barring ships from sailing from Cyprus toward Gaza.

The Turks have directed strong threats at Cyprus in recent months over gas drilling activity and in connection with Cyprus' scheduled assumption of the rotating six-month presidency of the European Union in July.

Israel and Cyprus have also substantially boosted their security cooperation in recent months. Although both countries have stated that the move is not directed against any third country, Israeli Foreign Ministry sources acknowledge that the

crisis in relations that both Israel and Cyprus are experiencing with Turkey as well as threats by Hezbollah to attack Israel's gas installations in the Mediterranean has encouraged closer Israeli-Cypriot security coordination. Earlier this month, Cyprus' defense minister, Demetris Eliades, visited Jerusalem.

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/netanyahu-headed-to-cyprus-to-boost-cooperation-on-security-offshore-drilling-1.408054>

5. AFRICA and EGYPT

• Mubarak lawyers blame military for killings

Lawyers for Hosni Mubarak have said the military was responsible for the deaths of protesters during the revolt that toppled the former Egyptian president last year.



Defence lawyer Farid al-Deeb said on Wednesday that Mubarak had imposed a

curfew on January 28, handing responsibility for security to the army.

Mubarak, his two sons, his former interior minister and seven other officials are on trial on charges of corruption and over the unlawful killing of protesters.

But Deeb said army leaders were to blame for the hundreds of deaths during the curfew.

"Mubarak used his constitutional power and issued an order imposing a curfew across Egypt and put the army in charge of security from 4:00pm, January 28," Deeb told the court.

"Therefore, it does not make sense that police ordered the killing of protesters. The police did not have the jurisdiction or authority to issue any orders since the authority had been transferred to the head of the army."

Activists and families of the victims say that it was police and other elements of the interior ministry who caused the deaths.

But Deeb said that once the armed forces were placed in control of security, police would have been under the jurisdiction of the head of the army.

Deeb said Mubarak took the decision to hand over security to the army after he was informed by Habib al-Adly, his former interior minister also on trial, that police in Cairo's Tahrir Square - the cradle of the uprising - were being attacked by protesters.

Adly phoned Mubarak and told him "Help me, I can't see a solution", Deeb said.

"Thus, any killing or injury took place either on orders from the military commander ... or was the result of an individual decision taken by officers and soldiers," added Deeb.

'We are revolutionaries'

But the lawyer went on to argue that army and officers "have clearly said, and there is no question about it, that [the army] did not open fire and I believe the army because it doesn't lie.

"The army's duty is to protect people and property ... so the question is who killed

and caused the injuries ... This is the main point of the case."

Deeb also caused an uproar in court when he described the protesters who forced Mubarak to quit as "troublemakers", triggering the ire of a lawyer representing families of the victims.

"We are revolutionaries, not troublemakers," the lawyer shouted in an address to the president of the court who threatened to throw him out if he interrupted the defence again.

Mubarak is the first Arab head of state to stand trial in person amid a wave of popular uprisings across the Middle East. Prosecutors have called for him to face the death penalty if convicted. The case continues on Thursday.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/2012118161453587344.html>

- **Israeli hackers take down Gaza, UAE bank websites**

'IDF Team' hackers warn they will "disable stock market, gov't, economic, security sites" if attacks against Israelis continue; anti-Israel hackers say they published

details of additional 7,000 Israeli credit cards.



Israeli hackers operating under the name of 'IDF Team' brought down the website of the Arab Bank of Palestine on Thursday morning in retaliation for a web attack on Israel's Anti-Drug Authority website.

In a message sent to The Jerusalem Post early Thursday morning, members of the 'IDF Team' said that by 10:00 am Israel time, the Gaza-based Arab Bank of Palestine's website would be disabled, together with the website of the UAE's central bank.

A visit to the Arab Bank of Palestine's website confirmed that it was offline. The UAE's Central Bank website also appeared to not be functioning.

On Wednesday night, Arab hackers succeeded in breaking into the server of the Anti-Drug Authority, and redirecting visitors to a website which features

images of Palestinian gunmen crouching near a depiction of the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

The words "death to Israel" were written in Hebrew alongside extensive Arabic messages. "Gaza hackers were here" was also written on the web page.

The attack represented an escalation from the distributed denial of service attack earlier this week against the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange and El Al, which took the sites offline but did not compromise their servers.

'IDF Team' described the latest hacks as "terrorist acts against Israel" and condemned "attempts to disrupt the normal course of life in Israel."

The Israeli hackers warned that "if there no change in the near future... [we] will disable stock market sites, government sites, and sites related to... economy and even security."

Also on Thursday, anti-Israel hackers said they published details on an additional 7,000 Israeli credit cards. The publication included the full credit card numbers,

security codes that appear on the backs of the cards, and expiry dates.

<http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=254265>

6. JORDAN and LEBANON

• U.S. lawmaker urges Jordan king to name Israel envoy after more than a year hiatus

A key U.S. lawmaker Wednesday urged Jordan's King Abdullah II to name an ambassador to Israel after a hiatus of more than a year and a half to help improve regional ties.



"Jordan has not yet appointed an ambassador to Israel in the year and a half since the previous ambassador moved on, and I would strongly encourage you to do so," said Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, head of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, at a meeting with the monarch at the U.S. Capitol.

Ros-Lehtinen, who recently completed a tour that included Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, discussed the impasse over Israeli-Palestinian peace talks with the visiting Jordanian leader.

The U.S. lawmaker also discussed the unrest in Syria and welcomed Abdullah's view that President Bashar al-Assad should leave office.

"I share that view because Iran is certainly doing all it can to keep Syria afloat but the people are rising up," she said.

Ros-Lehtinen said the kind "was encouraged with what United States is doing with all of the partners in the region" on the Syrian unrest.

Abdullah, who helped convene informal talks between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Jordan this month, met with President Barack Obama at the White House Tuesday. He addresses the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on Thursday.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/19/189169.html?PHPSESSID=uf81ia71rghk85g57hc0tsoqm4>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA

• Yemen fighters 'to withdraw' if inmates freed

Yemeni fighters who seized a small town southeast of the capital Sanaa this week have said they will withdraw if several of their colleagues are released from jail.



Tribesmen negotiating with the group on behalf of the government said the fighters, who took over Radda, about 170km southeast of Sanaa, agreed to leave if their leader's brother and several others were freed.

Tareq al-Dahab, the fighters' chief, is related to Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen whom Washington accused of a leadership role in the Yemeni branch of al-Qaeda, and who was assassinated in a drone strike last year.

Radda's capture underscored US fears that political upheaval in Yemen over the fate of President Ali Abdullah Saleh will give al-

Qaeda a foothold near shipping routes through the Red Sea and may spread to the world's leading oil exporter Saudi Arabia.

Saleh formally handed over power to his deputy late last year, in line with a Gulf-brokered plan to end months of mass protests and bursts of open combat between his forces and those of a rebel general and tribal armed groups.

Under the deal, Saleh's General People's Congress and opposition parties divided up cabinet posts between them, forming a unity government to steer the country towards presidential elections in February.

Threats to handover

Saleh's opponents accuse him of ceding territory to al-Qaeda related groups to bolster his assertion that his rule alone keeps al-Qaeda from growing stronger in Yemen, and ultimately aiming to retain power by sabotaging the transition deal.

Yehia al-Arasi, a spokesman for Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, Yemen's acting leader and vice president, dismissed comments by Abu Bakr al-Qirbi, the foreign minister, who suggested a day

earlier that elections may be delayed due to deteriorating security.

"There is no scope for delaying the ... election because it will be conducted under the supervision of the international community," Arasi said.

Qirbi later backtracked on his statement. Washington, which long backed Saleh as key to its "counterterrorism" policy, endorses the transition plan.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Tuesday that Saleh was failing to meet his pledges under the deal and that Washington was "focused on the threat posed by al Qaeda in Yemen".

Yemen's parliament has yet to vote on a law - denounced by protesters demanding Saleh's ousting - that would give him and his associates immunity from prosecution over the killing of protesters. The measure has the cabinet's backing.

"The legitimacy of the parliament depends on the Gulf initiative and its operational mechanism. It must pass the law because it is written into the Gulf initiative," Arasi said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/201211951038171631.html>

- **Qatar promises labour reform before 2022**

Qatar 2022 World Cup organisers will ensure contractors adhere to international labour laws at construction projects before the tournament, the head of the event's organising committee has said.

Hassan al-Thawadi, the Qatar 2022 general secretary, said on Tuesday that progress was being made on the labour front.

"Major sporting events shed a spotlight on conditions in countries," al-Thawadi said, adding: "There are labour issues here in the country, but Qatar is committed to reform."

"We will require that contractors impose a clause to ensure that international labour standards are met ... Sport, and football in particular, is a very powerful force. Certainly we can use it for the benefit of the region."

Poor working conditions are common across the oil-rich Gulf region, where

impoverished men and women from South Asia have come for decades to toil on construction sites or to work as domestic help.

'Inhuman' conditions

Conditions on building sites in Qatar had been described as "inhuman" last year by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which wants world football's governing body, FIFA, to ensure that standards are met for migrant workers.

In November, the ITUC and other groups met with FIFA's general secretary to inform him that they would hold a campaign in opposition to the 2022 World Cup being held in Qatar unless the country improved working conditions.

At the time, ITUC chair Sharan Burrow said the organisation would "not accept people working to build stadiums without respect for workers' rights".

Labour advocates also say the sponsorship system, in place across much of the Gulf - and the lack of a minimum wage - allow migrant workers to be exploited.

All foreign workers in the region must work for a local sponsor, and it is legally difficult to leave the sponsor before an employment contract ends without the sponsor's consent. Many sponsors keep their workers' passports.

Massive building effort

Qatar has embarked on a massive domestic building programme in the run-up to the tournament. It is spending \$11bn on a new international airport, \$5.5bn on a deep-water seaport and \$1bn for a transport corridor in the capital, Doha. It will also spend \$20 billion on roads.

A management contract to oversee construction projects for the 2022 tournament would be awarded in the first quarter of this year, Thawadi said.

"It will be in the first quarter, definitely. [The programme manager] will ensure the infrastructure projects are delivered on time, and that there is a contingency plan in place in case of a delay," Thawadi said.

The contract, originally expected to be awarded late last year, will oversee co-ordination with government agencies on

large infrastructure projects, including the construction of stadiums, on which the country plans to spend \$4bn.

Qatar has said it will build nine new stadiums and renovate three existing facilities.

A construction industry source told the Reuters news agency in October that more than six companies were vying for the contract, including British construction consultants Arup, Mace and Turner International.

Samir Aita, editor of Le Monde Diplomatique's Arabic edition, told Al Jazeera that the World Cup would "shed light on Qatar and all Gulf countries, since all reports say they are not respecting basic human, social and economic rights".

"When the same person is a minister and the president of a company, can a worker go to the minister and ask him to sue the company?" he asked. "This doesn't work."

"This occasion of the games could be a good step [if] Qatari people and Qatari authorities respond point-by-point to

[International Labour Organisation] demands," Aita said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/2012118182959566572.html>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Pakistan court to examine Zardari's immunity

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari risks losing his immunity from prosecution, the Supreme Court has said in a contempt hearing against Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani.



Gilani appeared in court on Thursday, facing contempt of court proceedings for failing to pursue corruption cases against the president.

Gilani had been summoned to explain his refusal to ask Switzerland to re-open fraud cases against Zardari dating back from 2003.

The prime minister told the court that Zardari could not be prosecuted as he enjoyed immunity.

"It is my conviction that he has complete immunity inside and outside the country," Gilani told judges. "In the constitution, there is complete immunity for the president. There is no doubt about that."

However, Al Jazeera's Imtiaz Tyab, reporting from the hearing, said the court then challenged the president's alleged immunity.

"The court dropped a bit of a bombshell, that what if they don't recognise the immunity that is purportedly under the constitution?," he said.

"The prime minister's lawyer then suddenly started with a different defence, saying it's not the president's immunity that is questioned or that he'll fight about, but that he'll fight about whether the issue is whether the prime minister believed the president had immunity."

Hundreds of policemen were stationed outside the court in the heavily protected constitutional sector of Islamabad.

Several senior cabinet ministers and leaders of allied political parties attended the proceedings.

The next court hearing was set to February 1, and the court said the prime minister's legal representation could attend the session on his behalf.

Political crisis

In 2008, Swiss authorities shelved an investigation into alleged money laundering by Zardari and his late wife, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated in 2007.

The couple were suspected of using Swiss bank accounts to launder about \$12m in alleged bribes paid by companies seeking customs inspection contracts in Pakistan in the 1990s.

The statute of limitations of the case expires in April.

The case was dropped by Swiss authorities at the request of the Pakistani government as part of an amnesty deal to heal the country's political problems.

But in 2009, the Supreme Court declared the amnesty unconstitutional, and ordered the government to re-open the case against Zardari. The government did not - and that is why Gilani has been accused of contempt.

The summoning of Gilani has plunged his government deeper into a crisis that could force early elections within months.

The government is also under immense pressure from the army and judiciary over an unsigned memo asking the US to prevent a feared coup last May.

Supreme Court judges have six options on how to proceed which include finding Gilani in contempt, disqualifying the prime minister and president, and holding early elections.

Analysts say Gilani has to either resign or find a way of satisfying the court order if he wants to keep his job.

Some have suggested that the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) could sacrifice Gilani to protect the president, who has been accused over the

controversial memo that sought US assistance to curb the powerful military.

However, other observers have suggested that the court's real target is Zardari.

During the 1990s, Zardari had multiple cases of corruption, and even murder, lodged against him, all of which he says are false and politically motivated.

An amnesty deal that protected him from prosecution was nullified in 2009 and the court has been pushing for the government to re-open and investigate the corruption cases against Zardari.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2012/01/20121191845232600.html>

- **Many killed in Afghan suicide attack**

More than a dozen people have been killed and many more wounded when a man on a motorcycle blew himself up in a market in Helmand province, Afghan and international officials said.



Thirteen Afghans, including three police officers, were killed and at least 23 others wounded, Daud Ahmadi, a spokesperson for the province, said on Wednesday.

US General John Allen condemned the attack in Kajaki district and said it was evidence that the fighters had "declared outright war" on the Afghan people, and that it signalled the Taliban's leader had "lost all control" of his footsoldiers.

"With today's horrendous attack at the Kajaki Sofla Bazaar, insurgents have once again destroyed the lives of dozens of innocent Afghan civilians," he said in a statement.

"[Taliban leader Mohammad] Mullah Omar has lost all control over Taliban insurgents, otherwise he would immediately denounce these attacks and order his forces to stop attacking innocent Afghan civilians," Allen said.

Seperate attacks

Farther south in Helmand province, an Afghan intelligence official in Nad Ali district and two of this bodyguards were killed in an explosion, Ahmadi said.

A remote-controlled bomb was detonated as the intelligence official, Wali Mohammad Khan, walked out of his house.

He was the third local government official to be assassinated this week in southern Afghanistan, the birthplace of the Taliban insurgency.

On Tuesday in neighboring Kandahar province, a member of the Dand district council was assassinated while praying in a mosque in Kandahar city, and a member of the district council in Panjwayi was killed by gunmen on a motorbike.

Separately, NATO is investigating reports that five civilians, including one woman and two children, were accidentally killed during a night raid earlier this week in northeastern Afghanistan.

Sayed Fazelullah Wahidi, governor of Kunar province, said coalition helicopters fired into a compound on Monday night in Chawkay district, killing two fighters and the five civilians.

Karzai has repeatedly demanded an end to night raids, saying that Afghan citizens cannot feel secure if they think armed soldiers might burst into their houses in the middle of the night.

Meanwhile, Afghan security forces said they had killed nine fighters and captured 23 suspects in a series of raids in the past 24 hours.

An interior ministry statement said the operations in eight different provinces also uncovered caches of weapons, ammunition and explosives.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/2012118205631369990.html>

**This media summary is prepared by ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Nebahat Tanriverdi 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*

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