



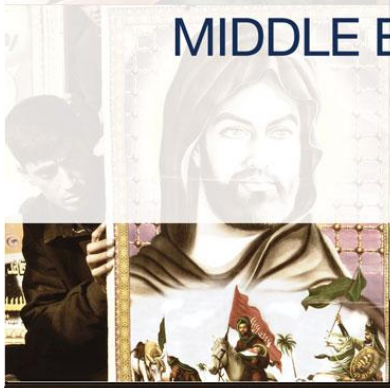
**ORSAM**  
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

# GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

## MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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## 1. IRAQ

- **Higher Judicial Council of Iraq denies transferring Hashemi case to Kirkuk**

Higher Judicial Council of Iraq denied, on Tuesday, having approved to transfer Iraqi Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi's case to Kirkuk. Hashemi's case will remain in Baghdad, Higher Judicial Council announced noting that it will be examined by a judicial body of nine judges.

"Higher Judicial Council decided to retain Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi's case in Baghdad," spokesman of the council Abdul Sattar Birkdar told Alsumarianews.

"Reports about a possible transfer of Hashemi's case to Kirkuk are totally unfounded," Birkdar added indicating that a judicial body of nine judges will be examining the case.

Interior Ministry displayed, on December 19, confessions of Hashemi's bodyguards assuring that he personally charged them to execute assassinations and bombings in Baghdad in return of money. Based on these confessions, Higher Judicial Council issued an arrest warrant for Iraqi Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi by virtue of article 4 of Anti-Terrorism Law.

Vice-President Hashemi didn't leave Iraq following these confessions but assured, in a press conference he held in Erbil on December 20, that he is staying in Iraq and will reassume his post as soon as things get back to normal. Confessions displayed by Al Iraqiya Channel are faked, Hashemi uttered. I am ready to appear before court if my case was transferred to Kurdistan Region, Hashemi called swearing that he never had or will harm or kill anybody.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki warned Kurdistan Regional Government, on Wednesday, of allowing Vice-President Tarek Al Hashemi to escape calling the government to hand him over. All evidence against Hashemi are in the hands of Iraqi judiciary, Maliki indicated.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72360-Higher-Judicial-Council-of-Iraq-denies-transferring-Hashemi-case-to-Kirkuk.html>

- **Roadside bomb explosion eastern Baghdad injures 2 civilians**

Two Iraqi civilians were injured in an explosive device blast eastern Baghdad, an Iraqi police source reported on Tuesday.

"This morning, a roadside bomb exploded eastern Baghdad injuring two civilians who

were traversing the area in the moment of the explosion,” the source told Alsumarianews.

“A security force imposed a security cordon over the incident area and transported the wounded into a nearby hospital for treatment,” the source indicated on condition of anonymity. “The security force executed raids in search for bombers,” the source added.

Today in Baghdad two cleaning workers were injured in an explosive device blast in Al Saydiyah area southern Baghdad.

In 2011, violence increased in Baghdad and lately led to the death of 63 persons and the injury of 197 in a series of explosions that occurred on December 22. The country is going thru a major political crisis caused by the issuance of an arrest warrant against Iraqi Vice-President, Leader in Iraqiya List Tarek Al Hashe. To that, Iraqiya List headed by Iyad Allawi’s suspended its membership in both parliament and cabinet following Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki’s demand to discharge his deputy leader in Iraqiya List Saleh Al Mutlaq.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72362-Roadside-bomb-explosion-eastern-Baghdad-injures-2-civilians.html>

- **Iraqi boy addicted to gas, weirdest phenomenon in Wasit Province in 2011**

Citizens of Wasit Province considered that the case of ten year old Hussein Alwan, whose favorite drink is gas, is the weirdest phenomenon the province ever witnessed in 2011. We ask researchers and experts to study this phenomenon and investigate about its reasons and consequences, citizens said.

“If we move away from evaluating the most important security, political, economic, sports and cultural events that Wasit Province witnessed in 2011, we would reach a weird phenomenon which is the addiction of 10 year old Hussein Alwan on gas,” reporter Jalal Al Shati told Alsumarianews.

“In the beginning, I couldn’t believe what I heard from people and colleagues about that boy,” he added noting that he believed it after he saw the boy drinking gas. “This is why we consider this as the

weirdest phenomenon in 2011,” he advanced.

“This boy is different from children his age because he is calm and sometimes lazy,” a citizen in Al Naft Street southeastern Al Kut reported. “He doesn’t eat candy and drink soft drinks but prefers instead to drink gas which became his favorite beverage,” he stated.

“Since four years, my son disappears sometimes until we caught him once stealing gas and drinking it from parked vehicles,” the father revealed.

“In the beginning we couldn’t believe this even though he used to continuously faint,” the father explained. “Regardless of all our efforts to make him stop he would always come back to drinking gas,” he added, a source told Alsumaria.

Hassan, for his part, admits that he used to face dangerous setbacks since he used to faint every time he drinks gas. “Now, not a single day passes without having my favorite drink,” Hassan revealed.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72281-Iraqi-boy-addicted-to-gas%2C->

[weirdest-phenomenon-in-Wasit-Province-in-2011.html](http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-72281-Iraqi-boy-addicted-to-gas%2C-in-2011.html)

- **Military parade on the Army’s 91st Anniversary**

Baghdad (NINA) – Baghdad will witness a large military parade, in which various military ranks on the 91st Anniversary of the Army’s founding.

Official spokesman for the Ministry of Defence, Gen. Mohammed al-Askari, told NINA on Tuesday, Jan. 3, that the parade that will be held for the first time since American forces’ withdrawal will have a special flavor for the Iraqis.

He added that the upcoming parade will differ from previous ones because new weaponry will be shown in it, where various types of modern equipment and helicopter and transport airplanes, in addition to tanks and armored personnel carriers will take part.

Iraq has concluded a number of contracts to modernize the Iraqi Army, including the supply of 140 Abrams tanks, Antonov-32 transport planes from Ukraine, ME-17 Russian helicopters and American made

field artillery, in addition to various other types of weaponry.

[http://www.ninanews.com/english/News\\_Details.asp?ar95\\_VQ=FJIMGD](http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=FJIMGD)

- **POLITICS: Iraqi Kurds have land problem with Sunnis, Oil Fortune with Shiites, Opposition Leader says**

ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq: The Leader of north Iraq's Kurdistan's Goran (Change) Movement, Nowshirwan Mustapha, has said on Thursday that Iraqi Kurds have a problem of land with Arab Sunnis in Iraq, whilst they have another problem with the Central Baghdad Government, led by the Shiite Coalition, which is the problem of the oil fortune and power.

"Arabs in Iraq are split between Sunnis and Shiites, whilst the Kurds are not counted on both sects, because their identity is a nationalist identity, and their problems are considered to be nationalist and not sectarian problems," Mustapha told the Kurdish KNN TV Satellite Channel on Thursday. Mustapha said that "the Kurds have their problems with both sides, as there are the problems of the lands with the Sunnis in the areas-in-conflict, majority of which were not

restored for Kurdistan Region, and they are based in the provinces, inhabited by the Sunni Sect, such as Ninewa, Salahal-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk."

The Leader of the Change Movement said "the Kurds are part of the solution, though they are part of the problem as well," pointing out that "the Kurds can play the role of mediation among the conflicting parties, though they are part of the problem as well, and it is supposed that the problems of the Kurds be treated as being part of the Public Interest, we want to achieve in Iraq."

"The Kurds have not achieved any benefit from their role as a mediator between others; but on the contrary, some Arab parties in the political process have said that they Kurds have exploited the current differences between the Sunnis and the Shiites, to serve their own interests," he said adding that "the mediation have had a passive impact on the Kurds, by some Arab circles in Iraq, instead of having a good impact on the Kurds," he said.

The Kurdish opposition has scored 25 seats in the 11-Member Kurdistan

Parliament, with the Change Movement leading the opposition, together with the Islamic Union and the Islamic Group in that Parliament, whilst the 2 leading parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) possess 59 seats in the Parliament, along with other seats, distributed among the small parties, the Christians, the Turkomen and the Armenians.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%2801oqvw555lc0yr552xkexsuh%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=146353&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%2801oqvw555lc0yr552xkexsuh%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=146353&l=1)

- **Talabani confirms to Kobler the supremacy of law**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: President Jalal Talabani stressed the supremacy of law during his meeting with UN secretary general representative in Iraq Martin Kobler.

In a statement, issued today, President Talabani received in Sulaimaniya Mr. Kobler, during which both sides discussed the latest events in the Iraqi political scene and their effects on the future of the country.

Talabani confirmed that "all problems should be solved through dialogue and trust among political blocs in order the conference to be a success".

On the role of the United Nations, Talabani pointed out that "it could help Iraqis through extending support and advice to Iraqi constitutional and democratic organs".

Mr. Kobler pointed out the role played by the UN to help Iraqis to surpass this historical stage and solve pending questions.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%2801oqvw555lc0yr552xkexsuh%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=146349&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%2801oqvw555lc0yr552xkexsuh%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=146349&l=1)

- **Call to support Egypt in their democratic process**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: An al-Iraqiya Bloc MP said today that "Iraq is obliged to be open to Arab milieu, particularly Arab Spring countries that led to toppling a number of heads of states, mostly Egypt".

MP Khalid Al-Alwani, said in a statement, as received by Aswat al-Iraq, called to "support Arab Egyptian brothers to move

towards democracy, stability and flourishment".

He, as a member of Parliamentary Integrity Commission member, added that "such move will help Iraq to return to its Arab role".

Egyptian Premier Kamal Ganzouri entrusted seven specialized ministers to visit Iraq next week to contribute in the reconstruction of Iraq and to increase trade relations to two billion dollars.

[http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%2801oqvv555lc0yr552xkexsuh%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=146348&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%2801oqvv555lc0yr552xkexsuh%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=146348&l=1)

- **NC-Iraqiya tensions render meeting unlikely**

ERBIL, Jan. 4 (AKnews) - As the tension between two major parties persists there is no chance of a national extraordinary meeting called for by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to be held, two Kurdish deputies said.

Farhad Atrushi, spokesperson for Kurdistan Blocs Coalition, told AKnews currently it is "impossible" for such a meeting to be held "because the tensions

between Iraqiya and the National Coalition are so complicated that they hardly can work out an agreement."

Deputies and ministers of Iraqiya List, led by Ayad Allawi, have boycotted Councils of Ministers and Representatives sessions for two weeks.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki who leads the State of Law Coalition recently sacked his deputy Saleh Mutlaq, a senior Iraqiya member, after the Deputy Prime Minister described Maliki as "like a terrorist".

Another senior Iraqiya member, Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, has been indicted on terrorism charges. Hashemi has accused Maliki of politicizing the case and said the evidence against him is fabricated.

To ease tensions, Talabani called for an inclusive meeting of the political bloc leaders to.

Iraqiya has made it a condition that the issues of Hashemi and Mutlaq should be resolved in the meeting. The largest Shiite alliance, N.C. (which includes S.L.C.), has rejected to attend the meeting to address

such issues because they regard this "interference in judiciary authority."

Atrushi said both the N.C. and Iraqiya have clear conditions for the meeting but neither is ready to reconcile with the other and this will hinder any agreement.

"It is impossible for the national meeting to be held at the moment," Fatih Daraghayi another K.B.C. member told AKnews "because the gaps between Iraqiya and N.C. have widened so much."

Iraqiya has demanded the meeting be held outside Baghdad while N.C. insists it should be in the Iraqi capital, Daraghayi added.

<http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/4/282269/>

## 2. IRAN

- **Judaization of al-Quds will lead to Israel's destruction: Ahmadinejad**



President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said that the Knesset's decision to declare al-Quds the capital of Israel not only will not save the Zionist regime but also will speed up the regime's annihilation.

Ahmadinejad made the remarks during a meeting with the head of Turkey-Palestine parliamentary friendship group, Murat Yildirim, in Tehran late on Tuesday.

He said that the Judaization of al-Quds is in line with the domineering powers' colonialist policies to save the Zionist regime and dominate the region.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ahmadinejad said that the Islamic Republic and Turkey have shared interests and common enemies.

He added the Palestine issue is one of the main concerns of the region and the world, and nobody can be indifferent to it.

He also said Iran and Turkey should prevent the hegemonistic powers from dominating the region, he stated.

He went on to say that the colonialists have always cast a greedy eye and thieving hand over the Middle East region and do not want any nation in the region to be powerful and advanced.

Commenting on the latest developments in the region, Ahmadinejad said that Iran and Turkey can play a significant role in the developments and help raise the hopes of the people in the region through cooperating with each other.

The two countries have great potential and can take major steps on their path to prosperity and at the same time meet the needs of regional nations through utilizing their capacities.

In the meeting, Murat Yildirim said that the Islamic Republic and Turkey have many affinities which would help strengthen their ties, adding that Ankara attaches high significance to the expansion of relations with Tehran in all spheres.

He also expressed hope that the relations between the two countries would be promoted in all areas particularly in the economic area.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/942-42-judaization-of-al-quds-will-lead-to-israels-destruction-ahmadinejad->

- **Judiciary Chief: Threatening Iran Endangers Entire Region**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani lauded Iran's recent naval drills as a show of might and power, and warned the enemies that threatening Iran's security means endangering security of the entire region.



"The Iranian Armed Forces are making their best efforts in defending the Islamic Republic of Iran's territory, and the power and self-confidence of the Islamic Republic

Armed Forces were clearly visible in the wargames," Ayatollah Larijani stated.

He said that the wargames conveyed a strong message to the western countries, and added, "Countries that have greedy eyes on Iran's resources should know that their economic pathway in the region will come under threat if they want to disturb our country's security."

"The security of Iran and the security of the region are inseparable," Larijani stated.

The remarks by Ayatollah Larijani came after the Iranian Navy completed 10 days of naval wargames in the country's Southern waters.

On Tuesday, an Iranian parliamentarian said that all foreign warships will soon be unable to pass through the Strait of Hormoz unless they first receive permission from the Iranian Navy ships deployed in the region.

He added that the country's lawmakers are now working on a relevant plan as the strategic waterway is part of the Iranian territories.

"If the military vessels and warships of any country want to pass via the Strait of Hormoz without coordination and permission of Iran's Navy forces, they should be stopped by the Iranian Armed Forces," Nader Qazipour told FNA, explaining about the contents of the plan.

He underlined that the plan will be presented to the parliament's presiding board next week.

In relevant remarks on Monday, another Iranian legislator stressed that Iran will use all its capabilities and possibilities to defend the country against foreign threats and the country will use the Strait of Hormoz as a defensive tool and will close the waterway if it comes under threat.

"Iran will definitely use the defensive potential of the Strait of Hormoz if it is faced with threats," Rapporteur of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Kazzem Jalali told FNA.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007270366>

- **Senior Afghan Lawmaker Slams US Secret Meetings with Taliban**



TEHRAN (FNA)- First Vice-Speaker of the Afghan Senate Mohammad Alam Izadyar criticized the secret talks between the US and the Taliban, and stated that the so-called Afghan Peace Talks lack "transparency".

"Details of the Afghan peace talks should not be hidden from the people of the country," Izadyar told Afghanistan TV on Wednesday.

He underlined the significant role of Pakistan in the establishment of peace in Afghanistan, and asked for Islamabad's honest cooperation in the peace talks.

Izadyar, however, welcomed the efforts being made for the establishment of peace in his war-torn country.

Taliban announced on Tuesday that they had struck a deal to open a political office in Qatar that could allow for direct negotiations.

In a statement, Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, said that along with a preliminary deal to set up the office in Qatar, the group was asking that Taliban detainees held at the American prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, be released.

Mujahid did not say when the Qatar office would be opened, or give specifics about the prisoners the Taliban wanted freed.

Meantime, Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan under the leadership of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, sent a delegation to Kabul in a move to hold peace talks.

Afghan High Peace Council welcomed the move by Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan for sending the delegation to take part in peace talks with the Afghanistan government.

Some analysts are skeptical of the prospects for meaningful peace negotiations with the Taliban.

The developments came as Pakistani media revealed last week that the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has removed the name of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar from the list of "most wanted terrorists."

The report came following Washington's secret meetings with the Taliban after one decade of war. US officials have held several meetings with representatives of the Afghan Taliban leader, headed by Tayyib Agha, in Germany and Qatar over the past months.

During the meetings, the US and Taliban negotiators reached a deal to transfer five Taliban militants, who are under custody in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, to Qatar. The removal of Mullah Omar's name from the terror list comes after the prisoner deal.

The founder of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, has been in hiding since the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

Washington removed Mullah Omar's name despite its continued allegations that the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden were behind the September, 11 attacks in

the US. Mullah Omar was Bin Laden's staunchest ally and most intimate friend.

The United States invaded Afghanistan 10 years ago under the pretext of eradicating the Taliban, but its failure has forced Washington to turn to negotiation with militants.

The US government has planned new round of talks with the Taliban in early 2012.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007270362>

- **Ahmadinejad: Enemies Unable to Impede Iran's Progress**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad downplayed enemies' attempts to block the country's progress in different scientific and technological fields, and stressed that the Iranian nation will not give up even an iota of its inalienable rights.



"As long as we are alive, we will not allow even the smallest part of the enemies' extreme desire for Iran's withdrawal and compromise with the world arrogance come into reality," Ahmadinejad said, addressing directors and officials of the Iranian intelligence ministry here in Tehran on Wednesday.

He also underlined ineffectiveness of the enemies' threats and sanctions against the Islamic Republic and the Iranian nation, stressing that Iran will keep moving ahead on the path of progress and prosperity.

Iran is under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment, saying the demand is politically tainted and illogical.

Tehran has dismissed West's demands as politically tainted and illogical, stressing that sanctions and pressures merely

consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

The US-led West accuses 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.

Political observers believe that the United States has remained at loggerheads with Iran mainly over the independent and home-grown nature of Tehran's nuclear technology, which gives the Islamic Republic the potential to turn into a world power and a role model for other third-world countries.

Despite such pressures and sanctions, Iran has recently made huge achievements in various fields of science and technology,

from nuclear knowledge to stem cell and Nano technology.

Iranian Health Minister Marziyeh Vahid Dastjerdi announced in August that the country would soon start production of 15 types of anti-cancer drugs.

"15 types of monoclonal anti-body drugs are being synthesized with the help of the Scientific Department of the Presidential Office, using hi-tech technology," Vahid Dastjerdi said.

Noting that these anti-cancer drugs are now produced by only two to three western companies, she raised the possibility that the Iran-made monoclonal antibodies would be introduced to the Iranian market within the next two months.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007270360>

- **US carrier may face problems if returns to Persian Gulf: IRGC general**

TEHRAN, Jan. 4 (MNA) – IRGC Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri warned on Wednesday that if the U.S. aircraft carrier, which had left the Persian Gulf because of

Iran's naval war games, returns to the sea, it may face problems.

"We tell the Americans that now that you have left (the Persian Gulf), you had better not return. In case of your return, you will be responsible for possible problems in the future," Jazayeri told the Press TV.

He added that U.S. forces should leave the region to prevent undesirable consequences.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1501603>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Olmert charged with accepting bribes in Holyland affair**



Former prime minister charged with taking bribes from real estate developers in exchange for supporting the Holyland

construction project in southern Jerusalem; Zaken and Lupolianski also charged.

Tel Aviv District Prosecutors charged former prime minister Ehud Olmert with receiving bribes in the Holyland affair on Thursday, the Justice Ministry announced.

Olmert was charged with accepting bribes in order to advance certain construction projects while he served as mayor of Jerusalem.

Charges were also filed against Olmert's bureau chief Shula Zaken and former Jerusalem mayor Uri Lupolianski in the affair.

The Justice Ministry said that following an opinion from the state prosecutor and state legal advisor on criminal matters, it decided to file bribery charges against Olmert, Zaken and Lupolianski.

In August 2010, Police recommended that state prosecutors indict Olmert and several additional suspects in the affair.

The former prime minister was questioned under caution three times in

June and July of 2010 over suspicions that he accepted around a million shekels in bribes from real estate developers in exchange for supporting the Holyland construction project in southern Jerusalem.

During questioning, Olmert was shown a series of documents allegedly linking him to bribery, fraud and abusing public office during his tenures as Jerusalem mayor and minister of trade, industry and labor. He has denied all of the suspicions against him.

<http://www.ipost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=252292>

- **IDF expels 12 activists from West Bank**



Group are believed to be radical right-wing activists operating violently against West Bank Palestinians, security forces.

The IDF, accompanied by police, handed out 12 temporary administrative expulsion orders overnight Wednesday to right-wing activists in the West Bank. The orders, signed by OC Central Command Maj.-Gen. Avi Mizrahi are for a time period of between three to nine months.

The orders were handed out to activists from Havat Gilad, Alon More, Ramat Migron and Maoz Esther, based on information that the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) had gathered against them. According to the information, the group are radical activists, operating violently against West Bank Palestinians and security forces, threatening lives and public order and security in the region.

The IDF stated that the orders were issued solely based on security reasons, after all other alternatives were weighed.

Right-wing activists were angered by the move. NGO Honenu reacted saying: "We have reached a new record low of human rights in the West Bank. If there is information against the youths, charges should be filed, but measures should not be taken without a trial, without evidence and proof. The issuance of the orders is a

step fit for a totalitarian state in which a military regime rules."

Wednesday brought the most recent price tag incident, after more than a week of quiet from right-wing attacks. Jerusalem experienced an attack against Arab property and an attempted attack against the Knesset. Two cars were burned in the Arab neighborhood of Sharafat, a small neighborhood located north of Gilo near Beit Safafa. Next to the burned vehicles, police found graffiti with the words "price tag" and "revenge." Police opened an investigation into the incident.

On Wednesday afternoon, Knesset Guards thwarted an attempted "price tag" attack on the Knesset. Police had briefed the Knesset Guards about the suspect, who had a warrant out for his arrest for his involvement in previous "price tag" attacks. The suspect requested to enter the Knesset, but security forces detained the man and he was transferred to police custody.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=252290>

- **LI chief tells PM to build ties with Syrian rebels**



"Europe should back Israel," Liberal International president says after meeting Netanyahu at Knesset.

Israel should start building ties behind the scenes with Syrian opposition factions, Liberal International president Hans van Baalen told Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu this week.

Van Baalen, a Dutch member of the European Parliament in Brussels, heads the London-based Liberal International (LI), a federation of dozens of liberal political parties and organizations around the world. He came to Israel to deliver an address in Tel Aviv this Thursday, sponsored by the Israeli Liberal Group – a remnant of the old Liberal Party that merged with the Likud in 1973.

In a meeting with Netanyahu at the Knesset on Monday that lasted an hour and a half, van Baalen discussed what the West could do to better support Israel, including intensifying military, intelligence, economic and technological cooperation.

He told Netanyahu that he supported granting Israel observer status in NATO and an upgrade in relations with the EU.

In an interview with The Jerusalem Post on Tuesday, van Baalen said that while Netanyahu was very critical of many of the changes taking place in the region, he was open to increasing contacts with members of parliament in the Arab world. Van Baalen said the EU, The Netherlands and LI, which has member parties in Egypt, could assist with this.

"I told the prime minister to develop relations with the opposition in the resistance council in Syria," he said. "There has to be some linkage. If you don't have any contacts, it will be difficult to come to an understanding."

He expressed optimism that whoever takes power after Bashar Assad in Syria will realize that it is in his country's

interests to have diplomatic relations with Israel, or at least not to be in a state of war.

“If there’s a new regime in Syria, they will have to have economic development, and if they are at war with Israel, they won’t have this,” he said.

The LI president describes himself as an admirer of Israel who has been to the country five times in the past 12 years. His bond with Israel was strengthened by relatives who made aliya after their Jewish father was murdered in the Holocaust.

“Like the Dutch built a country out of water, it always appealed to me that you [Israelis] built a country out of the desert after the Holocaust,” he said. “It’s not just a country. It’s a Jewish state, and that’s an ideal.”

He described the EU parliament as one-third pro-Israel, one-third anti-Israel, and one-third undecided and uninformed. He said more needed to be done to reach out to the undecided third.

“The EU parliament has a majority against upgrading cooperation with Israel, and I’m

fighting against it,” he said. “Whatever your reason, from an economic point of view, there is not a reason not to upgrade the relationship. Preventing importing Israeli medicine to the EU is crazy, and it won’t help a single Palestinian. Only a strong and vibrant Israel will be able to make peace.”

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=252264>

- **Fatah official slams Amman negotiations**

Israeli sources urge sides to give new diplomatic channel a chance; Erekat denies report 2 sides agreed to hold another meeting.

A day after the first meeting between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in some 16 months, a senior Palestinian official on Wednesday expressed dissatisfaction with the talks, while Israeli sources urged everyone to give the new diplomatic channel a chance.

Mahmoud al-Aloul, a senior Fatah official in the West Bank, said Wednesday that the meeting in Amman between chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat and

Israeli envoy Yitzhak Molcho was very disappointing for “us and the Jordanians.”



“The Palestinian leadership has spared no effort to seek peace and has complied with all [peace] initiatives,” al-Aloul, a member of the Fatah Central Committee, said in a speech on behalf of PA President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. “But all our efforts have been in vain.”

Al-Aloul claimed that Molcho came to the meeting, which was held under the auspices of the Quartet, empty-handed and without new ideas.

“The Israelis are not prepared for any solutions,” he charged.

Israeli officials, on the other hand, were reticent to speak about the talks, with one government official saying Jerusalem would honor an agreement reached during the meeting – that neither side

would discuss the negotiations – and that the Jordanians would act as spokesmen.

Presented with al-Aloul’s comments, however, the official said it was incumbent upon all parties to take the “right steps” in the beginning of the process.

“The process is new, it is fragile, and it is easy to throw a spanner in the works,” he said. “We hope that no one will do that, that people will act responsibly and give it a chance.”

Erekat, meanwhile, denied an Israel Radio report that the two sides had agreed to hold another meeting in Amman on Friday.

However, Nabil Abu Rudaineh, a spokesman for the PA, said that the two parties would continue to hold “exploratory” meetings until the end of January to discuss ways of resuming the diplomatic process. Further talks are expected in Jordan next week.

Al-Aloul expressed hope that the year 2012 would see the eruption of a “popular resistance” against Israel.

“We can’t restrain ourselves any longer in the face of settlement construction,” al-Aloul said. “The popular resistance will erupt in the next phase.”

He added that Fatah “was born to stay and triumph” and that Abbas had made it clear that the Palestinians wouldn’t accept the continuation of the status quo.

Fatah believes that the Palestinians have a legitimate right to resort to “all forms of resistance against the occupiers.”

PA negotiator Nabil Sha’ath said that Abbas was facing immense pressure from the Americans and other international parties to return to the direct talks with Israel.

Sha’ath said that Abbas has resisted the pressure and continues to insist that peace negotiations may only resume if Israel meets the conditions of a settlement construction freeze and recognition of the pre-1967 lines as the basis for a future Palestinian state.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=252270>

## 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Prosecutors say Mubarak approved live fire**



The prosecution in the Hosni Mubarak trial has said that Egypt's ousted president, his security chief and six top police officers were the "actual instigators" of the killing of more than 800 protesters during last year's popular uprising.

Mubarak and his seven co-defendants were in court Wednesday to face charges of complicity in the killings and could face the death penalty if convicted.

Chief prosecutor Mustafa Suleiman said the defendants clearly authorised the use of live ammunition and a shoot-to-kill policy against peaceful protesters.

He also complained that the prosecution had to launch its own probe after security authorities ignored the prosecution's requests for help in the inquiry.

Prosecutors interviewed hundreds of witnesses, physicians and police officers to build its case.

Troops deployed

The Mubarak trial brings out conflicting visions. Reformers and the victims' families clamor for a full measure of justice, while many others want the turbulence to end so that Egypt's battered economy can move toward stability.

Suleiman said the decision to use live ammunition was taken on January 27 last year, just before the most violent day of the 18-day uprising that forced Mubarak to step down on February 11.

Dubbed the "Friday of Rage," January 28 also saw the deployment of army troops in Cairo and across much of the nation, as well as the yet to be explained disappearance of security forces.

The objective, he said, was to kill enough protesters to force the rest to disperse.

Another prosecutor, Mustafa Khater, told the court that special police forces armed with automatic rifles targeted the heads, chests and eyes of protesters. The prosecution also showed video of the violence taken by TV stations.

They showed police officers loading up their weapons with live ammunition and police and fire engine trucks chasing protesters and running them over.

One video showed a police officer perched on top of a police car and killing a protester with a gunshot to the head.

"The defendants before you in the cage are the actual instigators and are the ones who gave police officers the order to shoot," Suleiman said.

He also said that the prosecution has evidence that the regime used "thugs" against the protesters.

"The protesters were peaceful, and it was the police that started firing on them," he said.

## Provoked attacks

Suleiman said the interior minister and the country's intelligence agency ignored or provided little data in response to the prosecution's requests for information on the circumstances surrounding the killings.

He said widespread disarray in the state at the time of the probe, around mid-February, or the wish to protect their own may have been behind the lack of co-operation.

Khater told the court that Interior Ministry officials used thugs and hardened criminals to provoke the protesters into violence. The thugs, he said, pelted protesters with rocks, prompting them to act in self defense and appear not to be peaceful.

The hearings will resume on Thursday for the third and final day of the prosecution's opening statement.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/201214174936485167.html>

## • Egypt's Islamists eye lower-house majority

The Muslim Brotherhood looks set for a dominant role in Egypt's first free parliament in decades and is promising rivals a role in writing a new constitution as military generals face growing pressure to hand power to civilians.

Egyptians voted for a second day on Wednesday in the final stage of the lower-house election, the first free legislative vote since army officers overthrew the monarchy in 1952.

The staggered election is part of the military's plan to hand power to civilians before July, ending its turbulent interregnum that began with the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in February last year in a popular uprising.

Welcomed then as heroes who helped nudge the autocratic leader from office, the generals now face anger over their handling of protests that have left 59 dead since mid-November and an economic crisis that is worsening the plight of the poor.

Meanwhile, the Brotherhood has surfed a wave of hostility to long-time foe Mubarak. For millions of poor Egyptians, its record of charitable work in areas ignored by his government suggests it would care for their needs if it won power.

In the working class suburb of Shubra al-Khaima on the northern limits of Cairo, citizens queued to vote in pot-holed streets littered with rubbish.

"I've voted for the Muslim Brotherhood. They have experience in running politics and I am convinced they will start implementing serious reforms," said pensioner Fawzi Mohamed.

Its Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) leads after two of the three rounds of voting and the rise of Islamist parties in the poll has prompted Western concern for the future of Egypt's close ties to Washington and peace with Israel.

Raids last week on non-governmental organisations by police in a judicial probe into foreign funding for political parties have incensed rights activists and drawn a rebuke from Egypt's long-time ally the United States.

Secular ties

The more hard-line Islamist al-Nour Party has come second in the voting so far but some analysts believe the Brotherhood may seek to build a coalition with liberal groups.

That could ease concerns at home and in the West about the rise of the Islamists in a country whose economy is propped up by tourism.

"The party's winning of the majority in the new parliament does not mean going it alone in writing the constitution without consideration for the rights of other Egyptians, or ignoring the political forces which did not get a majority or failed in the parliamentary elections," FJP head Mohamed Mursi said.

Founded in 1928, the Brotherhood is Egypt's best organised political force, emerging stronger than others from three decades of Mubarak rule.

With so much to gain from its return to mainstream politics, the Brotherhood has insisted that the elections proceed as

planned and has shunned recent street protests against the army.

Jobs and homes

In Shubra al-Khaima, where many voters are illiterate labourers and factory workers, poll officials said many citizens had turned up just to avoid paying a fine for not voting.

However, turnout on Tuesday and Wednesday seemed lower than in the first rounds, some poll organisers said, with many voters apparently feeling the result was already decided.

Rania, a 37-year-old housewife, said she had voted for the FJP because they will create more jobs for the young and provide apartments.

"Don't get confused and mark down the wrong candidate," she told her elderly mother as they stood in the queue.

Throughout the staggered election, agents for several parties have hustled for votes outside polling stations, flouting a ban on election-day campaigning.

"In many districts our members saw people affiliated to al-Nour and FJP telling voters to vote for them, which the election law totally prohibits," said Ahmed Said of the liberal Free Egyptians party.

An official from the liberal Egyptian Bloc, which includes the Free Egyptians, said the electoral alliance should get 15 per cent of votes in the third stage, slightly above earlier rounds. Another source in the alliance said it would be lower.

Preliminary third-round results are due to be given on Saturday, the High Elections Committee said.

The lower house election concludes with a run-off vote on January 10 and 11, with final results expected on Jan. 13. The new parliament will then pick a 100-member assembly to write a new constitution.

Voting for the upper house will be held in January and February.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/201214154145596419.html>

- **Egyptian Nasserist presidential hopeful comments on new**

## parliament, discusses his presidential platform



Being a prominent political activist and one of the staunchest opponents of the Mubarak regime before the January 25 Revolution – as well as a former MP who fell victim to vote-rigging rigging in the 2010 elections and a potential presidential candidate – makes Hamdeen Sabahi’s take on the Egyptian parliamentary elections an insider’s reflections on the political scene in the country.

The sweeping victory of Islamist parties in the first two rounds of the parliamentary elections should not be a cause for apprehension on the part of Egyptians, said Sabahi.

“Egypt is a country distinguished by diversity and unity at the same time. This is part of its culture and no one can

change that,” he told Al Arabiya’s Parliament Race.

Political Islam, Sabahi explained, cannot shape the Egyptian character to suit its ideological or partisan agenda, whether through a parliamentary majority or a president who adheres to the same line of thought.

Sabahi found it unlikely that the Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, intends to effect such a drastic change, especially as far as the civil character of the state is concerned.

“As for the Salafi parties, they are new to the political scene and it remains to be seen what they will do.”

Sabahi pointed out that Salafis, like other extremist groups, are unnecessarily rigid and compared them to any solid object that either breaks or becomes more malleable.

“This means that they will either fade away or will start respecting the diversity of the Egyptian culture and will realize that they have become part of a

democratic process in which they have no right to intimidate or discriminate like the statements of some of their leaders demonstrated that they plan to do.”

Regarding the application of sharia (Islamic law), Sabahi said that all Egyptians support the “principles” of Islam, which basically revolve around equality, justice, and human rights.

“As for the penalties dictated by Islamic law, these vary according to time, place, and circumstances. They can also be modified through the interpretation of scholars or through national consensus. Islam promotes flexibility in a way that serves humanity, and this is the main criterion.”

When asked if the upcoming parliament will be representative of the Egyptian revolution, Sabahi replied that those who were in Tahrir Square are not exactly the same people who won seats.

“However, the new MPs will have to be in touch with the people and aware of their problems and their demands to be able to serve them. Otherwise, they will lose touch with the people.”

Sabahi then talked about the role of the new parliament in drafting the post-revolution constitution and stressed that, contrary to what many think, the parliament will not write the constitution, but will instead choose members of the committee that will do so.

“This does not mean that this committee will be chosen to serve what a certain group wants, but rather according to what all Egyptians want. The constitution belongs to all the people – Muslims and Christians, rich and poor, from major cities and from Nubia and Sinai.”

Sabahi stressed that it is impossible to write a constitution that does not promote equality between all citizens and does not criminalize discrimination.

“The real mission of the parliament is to draft legislations that would achieve real progress in Egypt. This is the challenge.”

Sabahi argued that the victory of Islamist parties in parliamentary elections does not necessarily mean that an Islamist will get a majority in presidential elections.

“Islamists’ victory was the result of years of social work on the ground, but in the presidency it will be different. People will choose the candidate they believe is not involved in bargains and is not after political gains.”

Sabahi added that Egyptians would also support a candidate who has been around for a while, and not one who would make a sudden appearance right before the elections.

“Whoever will appear suddenly will be suspected of being pushed to the scene by a specific power whose interests are served by the presence of this person. People are smart enough to distinguish between who is sincere and who is not.”

Sabahi said that in the upcoming government he prefers a combination between the parliamentary and the presidential systems.

“This system would give the president executive powers, but would also make him accountable before the parliament, public opinion, and the judiciary if necessary

Being a Nasserist, Sabahi was asked whether at a time when Egypt is suffering from an economic crisis and when foreign investment and the private sector are badly needed, it would be a good idea to adopt a socialist ideology.

“I will offer a formula that I see as the best for all Egyptians. It is one that sides with the poor. No progress is possible without making the poor a priority.”

Sabahi added that he will promote national capitalism but will fight all sorts of corruption in which people use capital to abuse power and plunder national resources.

“It is not possible now to adopt the system applied during Gamal Abdel Nasser’s time, but some things can be adapted to our time, like launching a large development project in which both public and private sectors take part.”

Concerning his stance against Israel, his strong opposition to the Camp David treaty, and his statement about stopping the export of natural gas to the Jewish state, Sabahi said that Israel’s war crimes and discriminatory practices against

Palestinians, as well as the racist ideology on which it was created, make it unlikely for the country to engage in real peace.

“Of course I will never give gas to Israel while the poor can’t find gas in their homes and I will support the Palestinian resistance.”

Sabahi made it clear that his war is not with Israel, but with poverty inside Egypt.

“When I solve this problem and restore to Egypt the place it deserves, we will be on equal footing with Israel and only then can we start reconsidering everything else.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/05/186455.html?PHPSESSID=2g2qudir90ishmme9t48fqve55>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Beirut to host U.N. conference on democracy in the Arab world**

Lebanon will host this month a U.N. conference on democracy in the Arab world, with a slew of high-level dignitaries, including U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon, due to attend, organizers and Lebanese officials said Tuesday.

The two-day conference entitled “Reform and Transitions to Democracy” will be held January 15 and 16. It is organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

Some 50 high-level Arab and international policymakers, academics and development experts have been invited to the meet but the list of those attending has not been finalized, organizers said.

“The aim of this meeting is to provide decisions-makers in emerging democracies in Arab countries with an opportunity to interact with leaders who encountered similar challenges during their countries’ transitions to democracy,” according to an outline of the conference obtained by AFP.

Officials from Poland, Argentina, Sierra Leone, Uruguay and other countries have been invited to speak.

Some of the themes that will be addressed will be how countries that have been part of the so-called Arab Spring can transition from autocracy to democracy, how to strengthen democratic institutions and

how to reintegrate former combatants into society.

The U.N. chief, who will be visiting Lebanon next week to meet with officials and members of the U.N. peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon (UNIFIL), will be among the keynote speakers at the conference.

Al Arabiya

Photo: U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon. According to An Nahar newspaper he will raise the issue of the demarcation of the Lebanese borders with Syria during his visit as outlined in UN resolution 1680. The UN is reportedly planning on issuing a resolution on Syria and the UN chief may be interested in finding out during his visit whether Lebanon will participate in a UN sponsored monitoring team that will be sent to the embattled country following the approval of the resolution.

<http://www.yalibnan.com/2012/01/05/beirut-to-host-u-n-conference-on-democracy-in-the-arab-world/>

- **Lebanon Cabinet OKs offshore oil exploration projects**

The cabinet met on Wednesday and approved a decree that enacts offshore oil exploration projects, including the formation of a committee to oversee the issue, Social Affairs Minister Wael Abu Faour told reporters press following the cabinet meeting at the Grand Serail.

The parliament endorsed the bill in August 2011.

“Among the most prominent items approved by the government was the adoption of a draft decree on the oil sector commission, which includes the financial and administrative regulations and organizes employment in the sector, as recommended by the relevant panel.” Abu Faour said and added that the cabinet agreed to amend certain laws, including ones related to the management of civil aviation.

Abu Faour also quoted Prime Minister Najib Mikati as telling the ministers that there needs to be “solidarity in the government in order to face challenges and called on the ministers to be united and harmonious and cooperative with the other constitutional authorities.”

Last December 28 the ministerial committee charged with following up the issue of oil and gas excavation referred the executive decrees prepared by the energy and water ministry to the government.

Briefing reporters after the committee's meeting, Energy and Water Minister Gebran Bassil told reporters :

"The oil wealth is located in the south, center, north, near the coast, away from the coast and in all areas. " The minister added "therefore we have several opportunities and capabilities that would allow us to easily utilize this oil wealth."

Lebanon and Israel, which remain technically at war, have disputes over the maritime border after the discovery of potential offshore energy reserves. Each country prepared its own maritime border map

Lebanon argues its map is in line with an armistice accord drawn up in 1949, an agreement which is not contested by Israel.

<http://www.yalibnan.com/2012/01/04/lebanon-cabinet-oks-offshore-oil-exploration-projects/>

## 6. SYRIA

- **Doubts over Syria rebel army after escalation threat**



Threats by Syrian armed insurgents to step up attacks on security forces, just days after their leader announced a truce that was largely ignored, have reinforced doubts over the control top officers exert over rebel fighters on the ground.

Colonel Riad al-Asaad, head of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), pledged this week to escalate operations in response to what he said was the unsatisfactory performance of Arab League monitors in halting President Bashar al-Assad's crackdown on protests.

The warning came just days after he said he had ordered a halt to operations against security forces while the monitors carry out their work - an order apparently disregarded by rebels who killed at least nine soldiers in three attacks.

Based across Syria's northern border in Turkey, Asaad has been described by some observers as more of a figurehead than leader of the Free Syrian Army, which says it has over 15,000 military defectors in its ranks but whose true size, membership and capabilities remain cloaked in mystery.

"I'm not sure how much control the FSA has over militants in Syria," said London-based analyst Julien Barnes-Dacey. "Most of these groups are operating on localized autonomous basis."

Attacks by the rebel army have already begun to overshadow 10 months of largely peaceful protests. Authorities have seized on them as proof that Syria faces armed Islamist fighters backed by foreign powers.

Since November rebel fighters have ambushed military convoys, attacked an

airbase, seized army checkpoints and launched symbolic attacks on an intelligence centre and an office of the ruling Baath Party in the heart of Damascus.

On Tuesday Asaad said the rebel army would "take a decision which will surprise the regime and the whole world" within days. "What is most likely now is we will start a huge escalation of our operations," he said.

Fears of civil war

The scale of the FSA attacks has already raised fears that the country could be slipping towards civil war.

Burhan Ghalioun, head of the main opposition Syrian National Council has urged army defectors and insurgents to limit their operations to defending peaceful protests, saying it was "fundamental for the success of our revolution to preserve its peaceful character."

That tension between the armed and political wings of the uprising is matched by the gulf between an opposition in exile rallying international support and the

protesters and rebels inside Syria who act largely independently, analysts say.

“I don’t think the Syrian National Council has much leverage over the Free Syrian Army, and I don’t think the Free Syrian Army has much leverage itself over what is happening on the ground,” said Peter Harling, an analyst with the International Crisis Group who has spent several years in Damascus.

He said the FSA was more of an umbrella for disparate fighters than a real centre of command.

“People see a source of legitimacy in this (FSA) label, but what you have is groups emerging on a very local level, mostly composed of civilians, joined by defectors. But it’s local dynamics rather than national.”

The divisions are one reason why Western powers who rushed to support Libyan rebels seeking to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi have been more cautious with the opposition and the FSA.

Ghalioun said unless the rebels reined in their operations Syria could slip deeper

into conflict “which pits a free army and an official army against each other”. But in recent weeks he has faced growing criticism, even from within the SNC, for not endorsing a more forceful policy against Assad.

A spokesman for the Free Syrian Army, Major Maher al-Naimi, said Ghalioun’s comments reflected his ignorance of “military basis of the (Syrian) regime”, and insisted the rebels would target anyone bearing arms against civilians.

FSA statements about the size of its forces are impossible to verify, but Naimi said it had 22 brigades across the country, each led by a local leader in charge of up to six companies.

Another FSA officer called Mazen told Reuters the FSA forces were scattered around the provinces, armed with rifles and rocket propelled grenades. He said they did not have any fixed bases in the country.

FSA fighters say they are armed only with weapons they took with them when they defected, but authorities say they have

seized shipments of weapons crossing into Syria from neighboring states.

The increasing violence has encouraged those protesters - a minority in the early months for the uprising - calling for foreign intervention against Assad.

“There’s only a handful left in the SNC that don’t want to move toward armed intervention,” said one council member, who asked not to be named.

“...I’m against arming the Free Syrian Army. I see them as more harm than good, but that’s it - it has become an armed revolution now.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/05/186464.html?PHPSESSID=2g2qudir90ishmme9t48fqve55>

- **Qatari premier admits Arab League ‘mistakes’ in Syria amid rising criticism**

Qatar’s prime minister on Wednesday admitted that the Arab League had made ‘mistakes’ during its monitor mission in Syria as the taskforce faced criticism from the Syrian opposition.

“This is the first experience for us. I said we have to evaluate what sorts of mistakes” have been made, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem al-Thani, who heads the bloc’s task force on Syria, was quoted as saying by the Kuwaiti news agency KUNA.



“There is no doubt for me. I can see there are mistakes, but we went there not to stop the killing but to monitor,” the Qatari prime minister added.

Sheikh Hamad did not clarify what mistakes had been made.

He also said it was Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s job to stop the killings, which the United Nations now puts at more than 5,000 since anti-government protests first erupted in the country in mid-March.

The Syrian Revolution General Commission said that seven people have

been killed by security force gunfire across Syria on Thursday morning.

Earlier, opposition activists had criticized the latest effort from Syrian authorities to withdraw troops from the streets of strife-torn towns, adding that the reality of the situation contradicts statements by Arab League peace monitors.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that the authorities are breaking their promises to withdraw troops, whereas League Secretary General Nabil al-Arabi said in Cairo on Monday the monitors had reported back that state forces had withdrawn from residential areas.

“We are not seeing the release of detainees or the true removal of a military presence from the streets,” said Rami Abdelrahman, head of the Syrian Observatory.

“Army tanks have been replaced with police armored personnel carriers that still have the capability to shoot heavy weaponry,” he added.

One Syrian activist sent out a message to the Arab League Secretary General, according to Reuters news agency.

“Nabil al-Arabi, you are in Cairo and we’re in Baba Amr. Here are the tanks and there are your monitors,” the activist said in a video uploaded on the internet which showed a team of orange-vested men who appeared to be League monitors standing near an armored vehicle behind a barrier.

Syrian opposition groups have been deeply critical of the mission, saying it is giving Assad cover for his crackdown. The Local Coordination Committees, an umbrella group of activists, says the observer mission is witnessing mainly regime-staged events, and they move about the country only with the full knowledge of the government.

Syrian dissident Omar Idilbi told The Associated Press that statements by Arab League officials “were surprising and we were shocked by what they said.” Idilbi was referring to al-Arabi comments on Monday in which he also said that Syria’s government has freed some 3,500 prisoners.

“Many videos posted by activists show that tanks are still in the streets, and since the mission arrived in Syria, the regime is staging wild campaigns of arrests,” Idilbi said. Still, he said, the mission’s presence had advantages such as ending the regime blackout on what is going on in Syria and releasing some activists.

After admitting mistakes with the Arab League monitor mission, Sheikh Hamad is now seeking the help of U.N. leader Ban Ki-moon.

A U.N. spokesman said that Ban and the sheikh “discussed practical measures by which the United Nations could support the observer mission of the Arab League in Syria,” AFP reported.

“We are coming here for technical help and to see the experience the U.N. has, because this is the first time the Arab League is involved in sending monitors, and there are some mistakes,” Sheikh Hamad was quoted as saying by KUNA.

The monitors had done their best, the prime minister said, but they do not have enough experience.

That is why “we need the experience from the U.N. and we need to see how we can evaluate if they go back, how they will work.” Sheikh Hamad said that if the observer mission goes back, the Syrian government must keep its “commitments” under the accord made with the 22-nation Arab League.

Arab League ministers are to discuss the mission at a meeting on Saturday. He said ministers would evaluate the crisis and “we will see whether we can continue the mission or not and how we can continue the mission. But we need to hear the reports of the people who have been on the ground first.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/05/186451.html?PHPSESSID=2g2qudir90ishmme9t48fgve55>

- **Syria claims US aims to 'rekindle violence'**

Damascus has accused Washington of interfering in the work of the Arab League after a US official travelled to Cairo for talks with the bloc about the protest crackdown in Syria.

"The United States is one of the parties which is seeking to rekindle violence by its mobilisation and incitement [to violence]," Jihad Makdisi, foreign ministry spokesman, said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The US... statements are a gross interference in the work of the Arab League, and an unjustified attempt to internationalise" the issue of Syria, he said.

The US State Department said on Tuesday that Jeffrey Feltman, the assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs, was to travel to Cairo for consultations with the Arab League about Syria.

"We have made clear that if the Arab League initiative is not implemented, the international community will have to consider new measures to compel a halt to the regime's violence against its own citizens," spokesman Jay Carney said on Tuesday.

There are about 100 Arab League monitors in Syria, dispatched to verify the government's compliance with a plan to

stop its crackdown on dissent. However, activists and the regional body itself has said security forces are still killing anti-government protesters despite the observers' presence.

The UN said in December that more than 5,000 people have been killed in the continuing crackdown. Since that report, opposition activists say hundreds more have been killed. Syrian authorities say armed groups have killed about 2,000 security forces personnel.

#### Opposition forces

Colonel Riad al-Asaad, the head of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), has threatened to step up attacks on government forces, saying he was frustrated with Arab League monitors' lack of progress in ending a government crackdown on protests.

Al-Asaad said he is waiting for the regional bloc's report on its first week before deciding whether to make a "transformative shift" that he said would mark a major escalation against the security forces.

"If we feel they are still not serious in a few days, or at most within a week, we will take a decision which will surprise the regime and the whole world," he told the Reuters news agency on Tuesday by telephone from his safe haven in southern Turkey.

"Since they [the monitors] entered, we had many more martyrs."

Activists put the death toll at more than 400 people since Dec. 21, with reports from Local Coordination Committees that 21 people were killed in clashes across the country on Wednesday.

Al-Asaad defected from the Syrian air force in July. The strength of his forces is unknown, but according to media estimates, the umbrella organisation has more than 10,000 men in its ranks.

League claims 'noticeable progress'

The Arab League said it would hold a meeting to look into the first report by the head of the monitoring mission. Originally scheduled for Saturday, the meeting has been postponed to Sunday due to the Orthodox Christmas.

Adnan al-Khudeir, the Arab League official who heads the operations room that the monitors report to, said the meeting would be chaired by Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, the Qatari prime minister.

"There is noticeable progress," al-Khudeir said, referring to the reports he received so far. "It is hard to make a judgement on the mission of the monitors because they are still in the beginning ... We can't tell if they failed or succeeded right now."

Nabil Elaraby, the Arab League secretary-general, said on Monday that killings were continuing in Syria, but that the military had withdrawn tanks and artillery from residential areas and was on the outskirts of the cities.

"Yes, killings continue," he said. "The objective is for us to wake up in the morning and hear that no one is killed. The mission's philosophy is to protect civilians, so if one is killed, then our mission is incomplete."

Activists have rejected claims that the military has withdrawn from the cities, posting videos online of soldiers close to a

group of Arab League observers on Tuesday in the flashpoint city of Homs.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/20121453922557362.html>

Mission criticised

- **FSA gives Syrian security forces 4-day ultimatum**

The Arab League mission has come under harsh criticism by opponents of President Bashar al-Assad's government who say some observers lack experience.

Asharq Al-Awsat

Beirut, Asharq Al-Awsat -- The unilaterally declared truce between the Free Syrian Army [FSA] and the Syrian regular army collapsed after the defectors attacked the regular army's units in various parts of Syria the day before yesterday after accusing the regime "of not stopping the killings" which forced them to back down on "their conditional promise" to stop the attacks during the presence of the Arab observers.

Its chief, Lieutenant-General Mohamed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi, raised opposition concerns because he served in critical security positions under Omar al-Bashir, the Sudanese president who is wanted on an international arrest warrant for crimes against humanity in Darfur.

The Local Co-ordination Committees, an umbrella group of activists, says the observer mission is witnessing mainly government-staged events, and they move about the country only with the full knowledge of the government.

Paratrooper Captain Ammar al-Wawi, secretary of the FSA's Military Council, asserted that the FSA "released 30 soldiers and four officers from the regular army who had surrendered to its elements in Jabal al-Zawiyah area the day before yesterday." He told Asharq Al-Awsat that "Al-Zawiyah martyrs' regiment" carried out an operation at 0500 hours the day before yesterday against a regular army unit which resulted in the surrender of 30 soldiers and four officers. He pointed out that they surrendered without any fight

However, video clips posted by activists appear to show observers moving around in protesting crowds, on some occasions within hearing distance of gunfire.

and handed over their weapons and that the investigations with them indicated there were instructions to kill the demonstrators and oppositionists in addition to targeting the Arab observers on their arrival in the area and to accuse "terrorist elements." He pointed out that simultaneous attacks were carried out in the areas of Daraa, Damascus countryside, Jabal al-Zawiyah, and Dayr al-Zur which resulted in targeting and killing more than 40 soldiers and officers.

Al-Wawi announced that the "FSA" has addressed an ultimatum to all the army officers and soldiers, the security forces, and the shabbihah to stop targeting the civilians within four days or else they would be targeted. He said: "We have information about all the officers ordering the shooting of demonstrators. We warn all the killers that we will deal with anyone who hands over his weapon and surrenders on the basis of let bygones be bygones but they would be targeted one by one if they continued with what they are doing." [Passage omitted on FSA commander Al-As'ad's statements to Reuters]

On his part, Al-Wawi strongly criticized Arab League [AL] Secretary General Nabil El-Araby and expressed surprised at his description of the Arab observers as the "UNIFIL" forces deployed on the borders between Lebanon and Israel. He said: "If El-Araby believes that the observers are UNIFIL, then let him refer the issue to the Security Council to be the arbiter between the people and government." After praising Ali al-Diqbasi, the Arab parliament speaker, who demanded the immediate withdrawal of the observers from Syria, he called on El-Araby "to resign immediately because he has harmed the Syrian revolution, the AL, and the Arab peoples demanding freedom, justice, and democracy."

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27970>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahraini forces kill woman protester**

Riot police chase Bahraini anti-government protesters on Sunday in the village of Sitra, Bahrain. (AP photo)

Riot police chase Bahraini anti-government protesters on Sunday in the village of Sitra, Bahrain. (AP photo)

A Bahraini woman has been killed in a tear gas attack by the Saudi-backed regime forces on an anti-government demonstration in an area near the capital, Manama.



On Tuesday, 55-year-old Fakhria Jassim died after inhaling poisonous tear gas fired by regime forces to disperse the protesters in the area.

Bahrainis have held a funeral ceremony for Jassim who came from Isa Town in the north of the country.

Jassim was the third victim of the regime's violent crackdown on demonstrations since late November 2011.

According to the main Bahraini opposition group al-Wefaq, 15-year-old Sayyed Hashem Saeed was “hit in the head” and killed by regime forces in the northeastern town of Sitra in late December 2011.

On November 19, Ali al-Badah, 16, also died after being run over by a police vehicle during an anti-regime protest in Juffair village, near Manama.

Dozens of people have been killed and thousands more have been arrested and put in jail or fired from their jobs in Bahrain since the beginning of the popular uprising in February 2011.

In addition, many health workers, teachers, opposition figures and human rights activists in Bahrain are still facing trial or serving prison terms over participation in anti-government demonstrations.

On Monday, the deputy head of the supreme judicial council of Bahrain, Sheikh Khalifa bin Rashid Al Khalifa, said a judicial panel established in accordance with the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry would review verdicts that were initially not

subject to appeal after being issued by a semi-military court over involvement in anti-government protests in mid-March 2011.

Rashid said the panel would review the verdicts “in terms of applying international principles of fair trials, including the right to have a lawyer and proof verification.”

The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry issued a report on November 23, 2011, saying that the Manama regime had used “excessive force, including the extraction of forced confessions against detainees” in their attempts to choke the demonstrations in the country.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/middle-east/94246-bahraini-forces-kill-woman-protester->

- **Yemeni official, citing upcoming elections, says Saleh won't go to U.S.**

President Ali Abdullah Saleh has cancelled a trip to the United States, a senior official said on Wednesday, after requests from his ruling party that he remain in Yemen until after presidential elections.

Saleh announced he would visit the United States last month, hours after forces loyal to him killed protesters demanding he face trial for killings during an uprising aimed at ending his 33-year rule.



He would enjoy immunity from prosecution under a deal crafted by his wealthier neighbors and backed by Washington - which long backed Saleh as a pillar of its “counter-terrorism” strategy - aimed at averting civil war by easing him from power.

“The idea of President Saleh’s visit to America is now unlikely,” Abdu al-Janadi, who is a senior figure in Saleh’s political party and Yemen’s deputy information minister, told reporters on Wednesday.

Saleh is set to resign formally after the February polls in accordance with a Gulf-sponsored power transition plan.

Al-Janadi told reporters on Wednesday that Saleh decided to cancel his trip after leading members of his General People's Congress party "pressured him not to travel... because the elections could not take place without him."

"This is what made the president decide not to leave," said Janadi, adding that there was "no truth to the news that there is a dispute between Washington and Sana'a over the president's trip."

A senior U.S. official said last week that Saleh's office had informed the U.S. embassy in Sana'a that the president wanted to go to the United States to seek "specialized medical treatment."

At the time, White House deputy spokesman Josh Earnest said that U.S. officials were still considering Saleh's request and no decision had been made, despite news reports to the contrary.

The veteran Yemeni leader suffered severe burns in a June 4 bomb attack as he prayed at a mosque in his palace compound in Sana'a, and was admitted to a Saudi hospital for treatment.

Janadi said on Wednesday that Saleh "was in good health."

The Gulf Cooperation Council initiative, signed by Saleh in November after more than 10 months of mass anti-government protests, forced Saleh to hand power to his deputy, Vice President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi.

The United States has said it is considering giving Saleh a visa for medical treatment, a decision critics of the U.S. administration's Yemen policy have said lends the impression that Washington is sheltering Saleh.

Washington and oil giant Saudi Arabia fear uncertainty over Saleh's fate could push the country into chaos and embolden Yemen's al-Qaeda wing, which has plotted attacks abroad.

Meanwhile, Armed Islamists on Wednesday attacked a hotel in Aden that they suspected of hosting prostitutes and set it on fire, causing the death of two who tried to escape from windows, Yemeni police said.

The gunmen opened fire on workers at the Layali Dubai (Dubai Nights) hotel, in the Sanafir neighborhood in the southern city, "before they set the hotel on fire, causing the death of two and injuring 15 guests," a police official told AFP.

Witnesses said many guests fell as they used ropes to escape from upper floors of the five-storey hotel, which more than 10 gunmen had set on fire.

A medic at Jomhuriya hospital said 13 people suffering broken bones were admitted.

Qaeda linked militants are active in southern Yemen, where lawless regions have become safe havens for the the local branch of the jihadist network.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/04/186393.html?PHPSESSID=2g2qudir90ishmme9t48fqve55>

- **Bahrain to review military court verdicts**

Bahrain says it will set up a judicial panel to review some verdicts a military court issued over anti-government

demonstrations led last year by members of the country's Shia majority.

A statement on the official BNA news agency said on Monday that the move came in response to the recommendations of an inquiry Bahrain commissioned into the turmoil.

Military courts issued at least five death sentences and sentenced some opposition leaders to life terms for organising protests after last year's unrest, which came as protest movements swept across the Arab world. The Shia-led protests in Bahrain were crushed by the country's Sunni government.

The United States, which harbours its Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, has said a \$53m arms sale to the island kingdom depends on its response to the recommendations of the inquiry, which found detainees had been systematically abused and in some cases tortured to death.

Monday's statement said judges from civilian courts would be part of a body reviewing verdicts issued by the military tribunal that were not subject to appeal.

Rulings subject to review would include convictions for statements that did not amount to incitement to violence, it said.

The inquiry had criticised such convictions as punishing free speech.

'National Safety'

The National Safety tribunals, in which Bahrain prosecuted some of the more than 1,000 people detained in the aftermath of protests that rocked the kingdom in February, did not initially allow appeals.

Bahrain subsequently transferred some of the cases to civilian courts and allowed them to hear appeals of verdicts handed down by the military tribunals.

Separately, BNA said the head of the body charged with implementing the recommendations of the inquiry was continuing to work, apparently responding to a report in the opposition Al Wasat daily that he had resigned.

The inquiry dismissed Bahrain's claim that Shia Iran had stoked unrest through its co-religionists, who complain of

discrimination in access to land and state employment.

Continued clashes

Riot police in Bahrain fired tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades as they clashed on Sunday with hundreds of opposition supporters following the politically charged funeral of a 15-year-old boy.

Thousands of opposition supporters carrying Bahraini flags and chanting anti-government slogans converged on Sunday on the island of Sitra, south of the capital Manama, to mourn the death of Sayed Hashim Saeed.

Police earlier tried to seal off the site of the funeral to prevent crowds from gathering. The opposition says the teenager died on Saturday after a tear gas canister fired at close range hit him in the chest.

Also on Sunday, Bahrain's new police chief announced that the kingdom would hire an additional 500 police officers "from all sections of Bahrain society", according to

a statement from the country's Information Affairs Authority.

The government has pledged to undertake reforms following the release of a report in November that outlined human rights abuses carried out by the government during this year's unrest.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/201212173316143805.html>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Mass Grave Found In Afghan Army Compound**

January 4, 2012  
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Afghan officials say they have found a mass grave containing at least 10 human skulls in northern Afghanistan.

The human remains were found on January 4 by construction workers digging to build a car park in an army compound in the Deh Dadi district of Balkh province.

Mohammad Nahim, a spokesman for the Afghan army in the north, said that "10 to

15 skeletons" were unearthed, after which construction work at the site was halted.

Nahim added that the army was allowing forensic and human rights groups to investigate the grave, which was once the site of a major battle during the country's civil war in the 1990s.

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

- **Senior Afghan Lawmaker Slams US Secret Meetings with Taliban**

January 4, 2012  
Fars News Agency

TEHRAN (FNA)- First Vice-Speaker of the Afghan Senate Mohammad Alam Izadyar criticized the secret talks between the US and the Taliban, and stated that the so-called Afghan Peace Talks lack "transparency".

"Details of the Afghan peace talks should not be hidden from the people of the country," Izadyar told Afghanistan TV on Wednesday.

He underlined the significant role of Pakistan in the establishment of peace in

Afghanistan, and asked for Islamabad's honest cooperation in the peace talks.

Izadyar, however, welcomed the efforts being made for the establishment of peace in his war-torn country.

Taliban announced on Tuesday that they had struck a deal to open a political office in Qatar that could allow for direct negotiations.

In a statement, Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, said that along with a preliminary deal to set up the office in Qatar, the group was asking that Taliban detainees held at the American prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, be released.

Mujahid did not say when the Qatar office would be opened, or give specifics about the prisoners the Taliban wanted freed.

Meantime, Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan under the leadership of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, sent a delegation to Kabul in a move to hold peace talks.

Afghan High Peace Council welcomed the move by Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan for

sending the delegation to take part in peace talks with the Afghanistan government.

Some analysts are skeptical of the prospects for meaningful peace negotiations with the Taliban.

The developments came as Pakistani media revealed last week that the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has removed the name of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar from the list of "most wanted terrorists."

The report came following Washington's secret meetings with the Taliban after one decade of war. US officials have held several meetings with representatives of the Afghan Taliban leader, headed by Tayyib Agha, in Germany and Qatar over the past months.

During the meetings, the US and Taliban negotiators reached a deal to transfer five Taliban militants, who are under custody in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, to Qatar. The removal of Mullah Omar's name from the terror list comes after the prisoner deal.

The founder of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, has been in hiding since the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

Washington removed Mullah Omar's name despite its continued allegations that the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden were behind the September, 11 attacks in the US. Mullah Omar was Bin Laden's staunchest ally and most intimate friend.

The United States invaded Afghanistan 10 years ago under the pretext of eradicating the Taliban, but its failure has forced Washington to turn to negotiation with militants.

The US government has planned new round of talks with the Taliban in early 2012.

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

- **Deal: US to release Taliban leaders**

Press TV

January 4, 2012

The United States is set to release several Taliban leaders from the Guantanamo Bay prison after Washington struck a deal with

the militant group agreeing to their opening of an office in Qatar.

Former Taliban Interior Minister Mullah Khair Khowa and senior Taliban military commander Noorullah Noori are among the Taliban officials, The Guardian reported on Tuesday.

The US may release "high-risk detainee" and former Taliban Deputy Defense Minister Mohammed Fazl, held at Guantanamo since 2002, but hand him over to Qatar, the newspaper said.

Fazl was allegedly involved in the massacre of thousands of Afghan Shia Muslims between 1998 and 2001.

The report comes after the Taliban announced earlier on Tuesday that it would open a liaison office in Qatar to conduct negotiations with the "international community."

"We have reached a preliminary understanding with relevant sides, including the government of Qatar, to have a political office for negotiations with the international community," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said.

According to the report, secret talks between American and Taliban officials over the opening of a Taliban office and the release of prisoners have been underway for more than a year in Germany and Qatar.

It is not clear when the office will open, and there is also likely to be disagreement about the role of the Kabul government.

Last week, Afghan President Hamid Karzai agreed under pressure to a US proposal to let the militants establish an office outside Afghanistan.

The Afghan president strongly rejected the idea previously, saying that he was not consulted with over the potential venue of a Taliban office.

The US-led war on Afghanistan was initially said to be aimed at toppling the Taliban regime. The White House has turned to negotiating with the Taliban after one decade.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 has claimed numerous civilian lives and destroyed the country's infrastructure.

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

- **US asked to explain Mullah Omar move**

Press TV

January 4, 2012

Afghanistan has asked the US to explain why it has removed the name of the Afghan Taliban's founder and leader Mullah Mohammad Omar from the list of 'most wanted terrorists.'

"The Afghan government has called on the US embassy in Kabul to explain about the reports on removing Mullah Mohammad Omar's name from the black list," said Afghan presidential spokesman Aimal Faizi.

"In case the reports on the removal of Mullah Omar's name from the US blacklist prove to be true, the US should then explain why and on what basis it has embarked on taking such a measure," the official went on to say.

Mullah Omar has been in hiding since the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

Pakistani media reported last week that the name of the Afghan Taliban leader has been taken off the list by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The report came following Washington's secret meetings with the Taliban after around a decade of US-led war failed to eliminate the militancy waged by the group.

There have been several such meetings between US officials and Mullah Omar's representatives, who are headed by Tayyib Agha, an aide to the Afghan Taliban leader, in Germany and Qatar over the past months.

The US also reportedly plans to release Mullah Mohammed Fazl, a top Taliban commander and high-risk detainee, who has been held at the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba since early 2002. The potential release, which is described as an alleged attempt to facilitate peace talks between the militants and Kabul, comes despite Fazl being accused of human rights abuses.

The US government has also planned new round of talks with the Taliban in early 2012.

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