



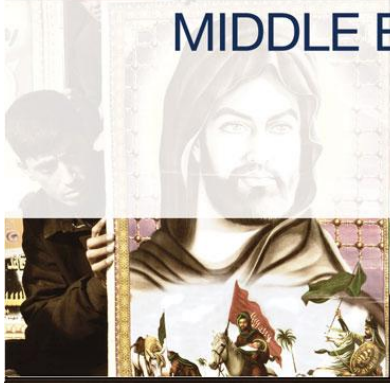
ORSAM
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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1. IRAQ

- **Bahrain condemns 'irresponsible' Iraqi statements**

Dubai, (AFP) - Bahrain's foreign ministry summoned Iraq's envoy to the Gulf kingdom on Monday over what it charged were provocative comments made by Iraqi leaders, state media said.

The ministry complained to Iraqi envoy Najla Thamer Mahmud about the "unconstructive positions expressed in statements made by officials and political and religious leaders," the official Bahrain News Agency reported.

The ministry singled out Shiite radical leader Moqtada al-Sadr "who has repeatedly made irresponsible statements on Bahrain and its people, including calls for sedition in a way that represents a flagrant interference in Bahrain's internal affairs."

Sadr's movement holds several cabinet posts in Iraq's national unity government.

Bahrain called on the Iraqi government to "assume its full responsibilities regarding such statements, which violate the sovereignty and stability of Bahrain."

It also warned that those statements "do not help improve relations between the two brotherly countries as they stoke tension and destabilise regional security".

The complaint comes four days after Sadr reportedly egged on Bahraini protesters, telling them "to continue to demonstrate" as the first anniversary of Shiite-led pro-democracy protests in the Sunni-ruled archipelago approaches.

"You will prevail, and we are behind you, supporting you," Sadr reportedly said, addressing protesters in Bahrain, where security forces crushed a month-long protest movement last March.

Last year's crackdown left 35 people dead, including five security personnel and five detainees who were tortured to death, a commission appointed by King Hamad found.

The commission accused police of using torture and excessive force.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28304>

- **Iraq Sunni-backed bloc returns to parliament, easing crisis**

BAGHDAD, (Reuters) - Iraq's Sunni-backed Iraqiya bloc returned to parliament on Tuesday, ending their boycott over a political crisis within Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government, but several of its ministers held out by snubbing his cabinet.

Iraqiya's return to parliament came as Iraq's blocs wrangle to end the turmoil that stoked fears over revival of broad sectarian violence days after the last American troops left the OPEC-member country in mid-December.

The crisis began after Maliki's government sought the arrest of Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi and the removal of his Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq, prompting Iraqiya to boycott parliament and cabinet meetings.

Iraqiya on Sunday agreed to end its parliament protest and most of its lawmakers returned to the legislature on Tuesday where they were scheduled to take part in discussions of the delayed 2012 budget bill.

But Iraqiya's ministers of finance, education, and science, would not return to cabinet, two Iraqiya members said, demanding the return of Mutlaq to government. At least three of its ministers planned to attend the cabinet meeting.

"They decided to go back to parliament because of the budget," said Jaber al-Jaberi, lawmaker and member of parliament's finance committee.

Ahmed al-Alwani, a senior Iraqiya lawmaker, said the bloc would continue talks over the next few days over its cabinet boycott. But talks between Maliki's Shi'ite alliance and Iraqiya had so far not touched on Mutlaq's return, another senior Iraqiya source said.

Maliki appears to have shored up his own position during the crisis with Iraqiya deeply splintered. Some of its ministers kept working and a group of its lawmakers threatened to break away over boycott they saw as political damaging.

FRACTURES

Hashemi, who denies government charges his office ran a death squad, has fled to

Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region where his immediate arrest is unlikely. Mutlaq upset Maliki after calling him a dictator in a media interview.

The crisis has underscored the deep fractures in Iraq's government that divides ministries up among Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs in a unwieldy power-sharing arrangement that has stalled key legislation, including a vital oil and gas law, since its formation a year ago.

Iraq's Shi'ite majority has ascended since the 2003 invasion that ousted Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein, and Maliki has since edged the country close to Shi'ite power Iran, worrying Baghdad's Sunni Arab Gulf neighbours.

A former Arabic teacher who emerged as a shrewd political player, Maliki says his moves against Sunni leaders are legal. But the measures are compounding fears among Iraqi Sunnis that he is seeking to consolidate his power at their expense.

Since the crisis erupted in mid-December, violence has spiked with more than 450 people killed in attacks. The number of victims in January alone was more than

double a year ago, according to government figures and a Reuters tally.

Security officials blame Sunni Islamist insurgents trying to incite sectarian tensions for recent attacks on Shi'ite targets, including a suicide bomb attack on a Shi'ite funeral in a Baghdad neighbourhood on Friday that killed 32 people.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28303>

- **Iraq to host Arab summit on March 29**

The Iraqi capital is to host the next regular Arab summit on March 29, the Arab League assistant secretary general, Ahmed ben Hilli, announced on Wednesday in Baghdad.



“We’ve agreed on all the logistical and security arrangements. Arab economy ministers will meet on March 27, foreign ministers on the 28th and heads of state on March 29,” he said at a press

conference with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari.

The summit was originally due to be held last March 29 in the Iraqi capital but was delayed due to the turbulence of the Arab Spring that last year swept away long-term rulers of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

It was rescheduled until May 11 before being postponed for a second time.

The Cairo-based bloc, which in November suspended Syria because of its deadly crackdown on dissent, is this week seeking U.N. backing for its plan for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down and hand over to his deputy.

The Arab states of the Gulf, which have been among the fiercest critics of the Assad regime, last November also blocked a Syrian request for an emergency Arab summit on the crisis in the country.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/01/191929.html?PHPSESSID=brn38q28gigm8m573405774qr1>

- **Corruption as dangerous to Iraq as terrorism: Maliki**

Corruption poses a major threat to Iraq, so much so that Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has said it is “as dangerous” to the country’s stability as terrorism, according to a U.S. watchdog.



Iraq is one of the countries least able to control corruption, according to World Bank information cited in a report to the U.S. Congress by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR).

Iraq ranked 175th out of 182 countries in anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index in 2011.

And according to SIGIR, Maliki has said that corruption within the Iraqi government is “as dangerous a threat to national stability as terrorism,” in a country that sees near-daily bomb and gun attacks.

At issue are the inadequacies of the legal framework set up after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003, and pressure and threats against officials charged with fighting corruption, especially from the highest level, SIGIR said.

The report details the case of former defense minister Hazem al-Shaalan, who was convicted of spiriting more than \$1 billion out of Iraq during his tenure.

But it notes that though Shaalan was convicted in absentia, as of mid-January he was “living comfortably abroad.”

Radhi Hamza al-Radhi, the man who prosecuted the case against Shaalan and his associates and who from 2004 to 2007 headed the Commission of Integrity, Iraq’s anti-corruption body, now lives in the United States due to assassination fears.

“One of my reliable sources within the ministry of defense informed me that I was on a list for ‘elimination’,” he told SIGIR.

Radhi discussed difficulties he faced as head of the commission.

“Leaders did not take our new anti-corruption agency seriously. The whole idea of an independent agency authorized to fight corruption was new to Iraq and, thus, not well understood or accepted,” Radhi said.

“The (then) prime minister (Iyad Allawi) could not understand why he could not order us around like the rest of the government,” he said.

“This became a problem because the prime minister is a politician subject to the political pressures of the moment -- and those political pressures began to interfere with our work.”

A major obstacle was a legal loophole, article 136B of the Iraqi Criminal Procedure Code, that “allowed ministers to block investigations of ministry employees.”

Radhi added that “the law did not allow the prime minister to grant similar immunity to ministers but (Allawi) claimed it did and no one challenged him.”

SIGIR notes that the article has been repealed but that a pending appeal before Iraq's highest court could see it reinstated.

Another head of the Commission of Integrity, Rahim Hassan al-Uqailee, resigned in September 2011 citing political interference in his duties, after holding the post since January 2008.

“The fight over stealing the money of the state and its property is the unspoken part of the struggle for power in Iraq today,” Uqailee said in an open letter to the Iraqi parliament's anti-graft committee released soon after his resignation.

Uqailee said that while Iraq's leaders claimed to be aware of the size of the corruption problem, they had instead complained over monitoring and legal restrictions.

He said they were “trying hard to resist the tools and mechanisms of accountability and transparency,” and added: “I strongly rejected being a partner in this.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/01/191870.html?PHPSESSID=brn38q28gigm8m573405774qr1>

2. IRAN

• Turkey continues purchase of oil from Iran, Turkish minister

Ankara, Feb 1, IRNA – Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Taner Yildiz said his country will continue importing oil from the Islamic Republic of Iran.



Speaking to reporters, the Turkish minister said his country is only committed to the decisions made by the United Nations in this regard.

Turkey does not give heed to the recent sanctions on Iran's oil exports imposed by the US and the European Union (EU), said Yildiz.

Elaborating on the issue, the Turkish minister said the private company of Toprash and the public company of Botash will not stop buying oil and gas from Iran.

Referring to the last year's oil and gas agreements reached between Iran and

Turkey, the minister said Turkey will fulfill all its commitments regarding the Iranian side.

The Turkish energy minister also said the sanctions against Iran will lead to sharp increase in oil and gas prices at international markets.

<http://www.irna.ir/News/Economic/Turkey-continues-purchase-of-oil-from-Iran,-Turkish-minister/30792364>

- **Ahmadinejad puts next year total budget at rls 5,100,000 billions**

Tehran, Feb 1, IRNA – President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad put the state’s total budget for the next Iranian year (to start March 20, 2012) at about rls. 5,100,000 billions.



The President went to the parliament Wednesday morning to submit his proposed budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year to Majlis deputies.

Outlining the features of the proposed budget bill, he said it consisted of two parts which cover the budget for state-owned companies many of which act independently and also the state’s public budget which is planned by the government.

He said rls 4,000,000 billions of the proposed budget would go to public companies.

According to the President, the state’s public budget shows a decrease of 5.6 percent compared to the budget for the previous Iranian year.

President Ahmadinejad stressed that he is firmly willing to move speedily towards achieving the goals of the 20-Year Vision Plan to remove discrimination and injustice by restructuring most sectors by relying on people's power and enhancing coordination among the three branches of power in the country.

<http://www.irna.ir/News/Politic/Ahmadinejad-puts-next-year-total-budget-at-rls-5,100,000-billions/30792493>

- **FM: Iran to Send Letter to G5+1 to Announce Readiness for Talks**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi renewed the country's preparedness to resume negotiations with the Group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany), and announced that Tehran will soon send a letter to the six world powers to reiterate its readiness for talks.



"Mr. (Saeed) Jalili as Iran's top nuclear negotiator had earlier announced his readiness to hold talks with the G5+1 and he will announce this once again in black and white," Salehi told FNA in Tehran on Wednesday.

"We hope that the meeting will be held in a not far future," he added.

Salehi had also earlier this week expressed the hope that the upcoming negotiations with the G5+1 would yield good results.

"I think upcoming talks with the G 5+1 will be a successful meeting, because I feel the

other side is now interested to find a way to settle Iran's nuclear issue," Salehi said upon his arrival at Addis Ababa airport on Saturday evening.

The foreign minister also said that Iran is always ready to settle its nuclear issue in an appropriate way.

Concerning talks with the Group 5+1, Salehi said that Iran has already declared its readiness for talks and date and venue of the negotiation will be declared in Mr. Jalili's letter to Ms. Ashton.

Iran and G5+1 attended three rounds of talks in Istanbul, Turkey, in January 2011.

The Iranian side was presided by Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili, while Catherine Ashton, the EU foreign policy chief, headed delegations from the six world powers.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9010173269>

- **IAEA, Iran see more talks ahead on nuclear issue**

VIENNA, (Reuters) - United Nations nuclear inspectors and Iranian officials

held what both sides described as "good" talks in Iran about suspicions that the Islamic Republic was seeking to develop atomic weapons, but said more discussions would be needed.

The U.N. inspectors went to Tehran on Saturday to confer with Iranian officials on Iran's suspected atomic weapons programme, and to try to advance efforts to resolve the nuclear row. Tehran says its nuclear activities are for peaceful electricity generation.

"We are committed to resolve all the outstanding issues and the Iranians said they are committed too. But of course there is still a lot of work to be done and so we have planned another trip in the very near future," Herman Nackaerts, deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, told reporters after returning from Tehran on Wednesday.

Asked if he was satisfied with the talks, Nackaerts, who headed the six-member IAEA mission, said: "Yeah, we had a good trip."

He described the three days of talks as "intensive discussions" but declined to comment on whether his Iranian counterparts had engaged in substantial dialogue or to give any more details, saying he first needed to brief his superiors.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi also said more talks would be needed but did not say when.

"We had very good meetings and we planned to continue these negotiations ... the team had some questions about the claimed studies ... one step has been taken forward," he told the semi-official Fars news agency in Tehran on Wednesday.

"We were ready to show them our nuclear facilities, but they didn't ask for it."

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, had already announced Iran's readiness to hold talks with major world powers and would issue a written invitation, Salehi added.

"I hope this meeting takes place in the not too distant future," he said.

Western diplomats have often accused Iran of using offers of dialogue as a stalling tactic while it presses ahead with its nuclear programme, and say they doubt whether Tehran will show the kind of concrete cooperation the IAEA wants.

Tension between Iran and the West has increased sharply this year after Washington and the European Union imposed the toughest sanctions yet in a drive to force Tehran to provide more information on its nuclear programme.

The measures take direct aim at the ability of OPEC's second-biggest oil exporter to sell its crude.

Iran rejected the EU sanctions as "psychological warfare" and threatened to cut off oil exports to European countries before July 1 when the sanctions would be fully enforced.

Iranian officials have shrugged off the impact of sanctions, saying their country has become more self-reliant.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28316>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **UN chief calls on Israel to make 'goodwill' gestures toward Palestinians**

Ban Ki-moon's visits region in an attempt to persuade sides to continue direct exploratory talks, which began in Jordan last month.

By Barak Ravid and DPA

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon kicked off a series of meetings Wednesday with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, beginning in Jerusalem with President Shimon Peres. Ban told Peres that Israel must make some confidence-building gestures toward the Palestinians, in order to carry on with the direct talks between the sides in Jordan.

According to senior Israeli officials, Ban told Peres that Israel should take steps to assist the Palestinians and illustrate that the Palestinian state is already being built on the ground. Later on Wednesday, Ban is scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and is expected to make the same calls for Israeli gestures.



President Peres with UN chief Ban Ki-moon in Jerusalem, February 1, 2012

Photo by: Mark Neiman / GPO

Ban is one of several foreign leaders who have recently called on Netanyahu to make gestures toward the Palestinians in order to avoid a breakdown in the Amman talks. Netanyahu has said is willing to make such gestures, but only if he is given guarantees that the Palestinians will not walk away from the negotiating table a few weeks later.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman also met with Ban on Wednesday, and told him that "the impression is that the Palestinians are only interested in declaring the failure of the talks in Amman so they can continue with unilateral steps."

In recent weeks, the Palestinians have repeatedly asked that Israel release

approximately 130 prisoners it Israel has been holding since the years before the Oslo Accords. Other possible gestures may include increased Palestinian security control over areas B and C.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is scheduled to consult with the Arab League on Saturday, before making a final decision.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/un-chief-calls-on-israel-to-make-goodwill-gestures-toward-palestinians-1.410382>

- **Netanyahu wins Likud primary following tense day of voting**

Prime Minister wins primaries by a landslide, with 85 percent of the votes accounted for; Netanyahu beat his far-right rival 75 to 24, about the same as their last contest in 2007.

By Haaretz

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu won the Likud party's primary. With 85 percent of the votes tallied early Wednesday the PM beat his rival Moshe Feiglin 75 percent to 24 percent.

The results followed a tense day of voting on Tuesday, characterized by a much lower voter turnout than Netanyahu had hoped or expected, prompting the premier to organize an impromptu press conference to urge voters to arrive at the nationwide polling stations.

“When I ask [Likud] activists why the percentage is so low, they respond by telling me that there is no need to vote because I will win,” Netanyahu said, emphasizing that he wants “as many Likudniks as possible to vote.”

Netanyahu warned his party that when people do not vote, they allow others who do not vote Likud in the general elections to “distort the picture.” Upon finishing his speech, Netanyahu headed to Be’er Sheva and the Negev town of Omer with his entourage in order to motivate voters.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after his Likud primaries win.



Photo by: Tomer Appelbaum

In the previous Likud leadership primary in August 2007, Netanyahu beat Feiglin by 73.2 per cent to 23.4 per cent.

After casting his own vote early Tuesday, Netanyahu issued a call out Likud members to "come and vote for me, I know most of you support me."

"If people stay home, there will be no way to express this great support, and the way that I lead the Likud, which has garnered such support among the members of Knesset and the ministers. The more voters that turn out, the clearer it will be how great the support is for me," he said.

Some 125.000 Likud members are eligible to vote, in more than 150 countrywide polling stations. While polls were supposed to close at 10 P.M., Likud's elections committee allowed some stations to stay upon until as late as midnight.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/netanyahu-wins-likud-primary-following-tense-day-of-voting-1.410327>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

• Egypt Islamists stop protest against military

Hundreds of Egyptian protesters, demanding the end of military rule, have been prevented from reaching parliament by backers of the Muslim Brotherhood, which holds the majority in the assembly.



There were 71 people wounded in the clashes on Tuesday between the protesters and Muslim Brotherhood supporters, according to the deputy health ministry.

"We are standing here as a human shield, because if the protesters go any further, they will clash with the police. They want to enter parliament, what do you expect me to do?" Muslim Brotherhood member Hamdy Abdelsamad told the AFP news agency.

Behind him, anti-military protesters chanted against the Supreme Council of

the Armed Forces (SCAF) that took power when Hosni Mubarak was toppled by a popular uprising last year.

Activists had called for a march from Cairo's Tahrir Square, the symbolic heart of the Egyptian uprising, to parliament to press the newly-elected MPs to implement the goals of the revolution.

They want the ouster of the military government, an end to the military trials of civilians, the restructuring of the interior ministry and a guarantee of freedoms and social justice.

They say that as the country's only elected authority after the uprising, that parliament could either select a temporary president until a constitution is written or press for earlier elections which lawmakers could oversee.

"That's enough for the Field Marshal [Hussein Tantawi]," one protester said. "He should hand over power so we can have a civil state."

Accusations of 'collusion'

Islamist and secular protesters stood side by side in Tahrir Square during the 18 days

of protests that toppled Mubarak in early 2011.

But tensions have risen between them since parliamentary elections propelled the Muslim Brotherhood to the centre stage of politics, with its Freedom and Justice Party now controlling 47 per cent of the assembly.

Secular protesters accuse the Islamists of colluding with the ruling military to maintain their new-found power.

"Badie, you are selling the revolution!" the anti-military protesters chanted, in reference to Mohammed Badie, the Islamist movement's supreme guide.

"The Muslim Brotherhood youth are blocking all roads to the parliament, preventing the anti-military protesters... There are huge numbers of them standing in rows like militias," one anti-military protester said.

Riot police was also deployed near the parliament building where MPs were holding a session.

After several hours, protesters decided to abandon their plans to reach parliament and headed to the state television building in the Maspero district, another focal point of the protests.

Since January 25, pro-democracy groups have organised a series of rallies and protests to mark one year since the uprising that toppled Mubarak and left the military in power.

The military council, led by Mubarak's ex-defence minister Hussein Tantawi, has pledged to hand power to civilian rule by June when a new president is to be elected.

The military enjoyed hero status at the start of the uprising last year for refusing to shoot on demonstrators, but became the target of protester wrath over human rights abuses and the stifling of dissent.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/01/2012131204333901759.html>

- **Libyan militia leader sues former UK spy chief**

LONDON, (Reuters) - A Libyan militia leader has begun legal action against a former senior British intelligence chief

whom he accuses of playing a key role in illegally returning him to Libya to be jailed and tortured under Muammar Gaddafi, his London-based lawyers said.

Abdel Hakim Belhadj, who commands one of Libya's most powerful militias, is seeking damages from Mark Allen, who was director of counter-terrorism at MI6, Britain's foreign intelligence agency.

Belhadj and a second Libyan dissident, Sami al-Saadi, accuse Allen of complicity in torture, negligence and misfeasance in public office -- the wrongful exercise of his authority.

"We are taking this unusual step of preparing legal action against an individual as the documents we have in our possession suggest Sir Mark was directly involved in the unlawful rendition of our clients," said lawyer Sapna Malik, from the London law firm Leigh & Day, which represents Belhadj and Saadi.

An Oxford-educated Middle East specialist, Allen retired from MI6 in 2004 and went on to work for oil major BP and The Monitor Group, a global investment and consultancy firm.

He is an honorary fellow of St Antony's College at Oxford University and sits on the advisory board for the London School of Economics' centre for diplomacy and international affairs.

Belhadj accuses Allen of helping to organise the operation to fly him from Bangkok to a prison in Libya in 2004.

During six years in jail, Belhadj says, he was tortured and beaten. He also accuses Thai and U.S. agents of abusing him when he was first held in Bangkok.

Born in Libya in 1966, Belhadj is a former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which waged an insurgency against Gaddafi in the 1990s.

His emergence as an important figure in Libya after Gaddafi's downfall is potentially embarrassing for London, which led international moves to improve relations with Libya after Gaddafi renounced weapons of mass destruction in 2003.

Belhadj's lawyers say Allen's name was found in intelligence documents

recovered in Tripoli around the time of the collapse of Gaddafi's administration last August.

The pair are also suing the British government and its legal advisers, the MI5 domestic intelligence agency, the Home Office (interior ministry) and the Foreign Office, which oversees MI6.

A Foreign Office spokesman said: "We take all allegations of mistreatment seriously, but these matters are also the subject of legal correspondence between Mr Belhadj's lawyers and our own so we can offer no further comment at this stage."

Allen could not immediately be reached for comment.

Earlier this month, Britain postponed a judge-led inquiry into whether its security services knew about the torture of suspects overseas. Ministers said the inquiry would be delayed because police have begun a separate investigation into whether London illegally sent detainees to Libya.

Britain has long faced accusations that its spies were complicit in the abuse of overseas detainees in the years after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

Prime Minister David Cameron has cited those suspicions as one of the reasons why he set up the now-delayed inquiry. Britain's security services have always denied using or condoning torture.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28310>

- **Libya rejects MSF torture allegations-minister**

ADDIS ABABA, (Reuters) - The Libyan government rejected on Monday allegations it had tortured detainees who had fought for Muammar Gaddafi's forces, saying that if there had been cases of torture it had not known about them.

The aid agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said last Thursday it had stopped its work in detention centres in the city of Misrata because its medical staff were being asked to patch up detainees midway through torture sessions so they could go back for more abuse.

Libyan Foreign Minister Ashour bin Khayyal said it was not the policy of the ruling National Transitional Council, which has promised to make a break with Gaddafi-era practices and respect human rights, to use torture.

"Gaddafi's remnants committed actions that were an aggression to the revolution and to Libya and they will now receive the treatment they deserve," Khayyal told Reuters on the sidelines of an African Union summit in Addis Ababa.

"As a government, it is not our policy at all to commit torture because we, the Libyan people, suffered under these policies and we strongly reject it," Khayyal said.

"If there was torture, then it was not with the knowledge of the government or by the agreement of the government either. It may be actions by individuals, but we have not heard about the report you mention."

Khayyal said his government had no problem dealing with forces loyal to Gaddafi who were not carrying weapons.

The MSF allegations are awkward for Western powers which backed the rebellion against Gaddafi and helped to overthrow him and install Libya's new leaders.

PROTECTING LIBYAN MONEY

The civil war which ended with Gaddafi's death last year may have helped spread small arms around the region, according to a U.N. report which said some countries believed former fighters in Libya may have smuggled weapons into the Sahel region on the southern edge of the Sahara desert.

Khayyal stopped short of blaming certain countries for providing shelter to these groups, among them Libyan army regulars and mercenaries.

"We cannot say they are giving shelter to them, but they are there in their territories, especially in Niger and Mali," he said, adding that a recent visit to both countries had been positive.

Khayyal said his government was trying to resolve the standoff in the tribal stronghold of Bani Walid by peaceful

means. A militia commander whose troops were driven out of the town last week said his forces were massing to recapture it but were holding back at the government's request.

"We are trying to resolve the situation there by peaceful means and we avoid confrontation, but if we have to then we will confront them," said Khayyal.

He also said he would send delegations soon to review Libya's investments in several African countries.

Under Gaddafi's rule, Libya made major investments in Africa, some of which are managed by the \$65 billion Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) through a \$5 billion fund known as the Libyan African Investment Portfolio.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28305>

5. SYRIA

- **Al-Jafari: Syria's Sovereignty, Independence and Territorial Integrity Are Red Line**

NEWYORK, (SANA) - Syria's Permanent Representative to the UN Bashar al-Jafari

on Tuesday stressed that Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity are red line.



Speaking during a Security Council session on the situation in Syria, al-Jafari said the Syrian patriotism rejects foreign interference and stresses on standing united in the face of sedition and division, renouncing violence and not resorting to arms while demanding reform.

"Homelands are built by their people, and we as Syrians have ahead of us the opportunity to have true national dialogue and speed up reforms with the aim of establishing a real national partnership that preserves the security of the homeland and citizens as the only way to come out of this crisis and fulfill the legitimate demands of the Syrian people without compromising our homeland," said al-Jafari, adding that the coming generations will hold accountable all those who missed this opportunity.

Al-Jafari went on saying "Today Syria is facing decisive challenges in its history and we want this particular stage to be under the will of our people not anyone else and to be a point of determination to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people."

"The homeland is for all of its people, but in Syria there is no majority or minority. There are only Syrians and the homeland is entrusted to them, even if some of them were misled while others went off the right path," al-Jafari continued.

He added the events taking place in Syria demand that all its sons, whatever their trends or affiliations are, to opt for the path of wisdom and use their national sense to guide them so that to achieve victory for the whole homeland and not just a part of it.

Al-Jafari said the Syrian people, who offered the world the first alphabet, have all over the years been able to solve their internal problems and crises by themselves and will never accept any form of foreign interference in their homeland Syria.

He stressed that the Syrian people will do it again through the participation of all the Syrians in overcoming the crisis and contributing together to the national construction process bearing in mind only the higher interest of the homeland and not anyone else's interest in an atmosphere of reconciliation among all.

Al-Jafari recalled how in the late 50s and the beginning of the 60s "when we were at the preliminary school we used to recite the Algerian anthem instead of the Syrian national anthem...We were happy to donate our pocket money to help the Arab liberation movements in the Gulf against the British colonialism."

"That was before the oil boom, when Arabism was different in its concept from the way some look at it today," he noted.

He said that the Arab people would have wished that the presence of the Arab League (AL) Secretary General and the Chairman of the current session of the AL Council to the Security Council would have been to demand the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities to end the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories

and to halt the Israeli escalated acts of killing and settlement activities.

"It is so strange to see some of the AL members restoring to the Security Council against Syria that has always been ready to sacrifice the dearest for the sake of defending the Arab issues," al-Jafari added.

"They are very mistaken those who think that the countries I am talking about, which have always stood against the just Arab issues inside and outside the Security Council, show this enthusiasm for the Arab League out of their respect for it and its decisions or out of their keenness on the interest of Syria and the Syrian people," said the Syrian Representative. "The clear truth is that this enthusiasm came in the same antagonistic context towards all the legitimate Arab issues," he continued.

He considered that the Arab League's recent decision to head to the Security Council is a kind of circumventing the success of the Arab monitoring mission and an attempt to pass over its report because it came contrary to the plot of some Arab and non-Arab parties who

falsely claim keenness on the Arab role in resolving the crisis in Syria.

"This hall today re-echoes almost more than 60 vetoes to prevent draft resolutions on settling the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with the resolutions of this highly-regarded Council...What is new today about the AL referring of its unjust decisions against Syria to the Security Council in Syria's absence and without consultation with its leadership, in a violation of the AL charter and in preparation for direct aggressive interference in Syria's internal affairs, is that the AL decision meets the plans and interests of the non-Arab countries that are aimed at destroying Syria and disrupting its security and stability because Syria rejects to be a subordinate country or a country of incomplete sovereignty and insists on the independence of its decision and on preserving its people's interests and security.

"Syria considers the decision made at the AL Council's recent meeting a violation of Syria's national sovereignty, a flagrant interference in its internal affairs and a gross transgression of the goals for which

the AL was founded and of the eighth provision of its charter," said al-Jafari.

He stressed that Syria rejects any decision outside the framework of the Arab Work Plan it agreed upon and the protocol signed with the Arab League.

He found it strangely paradoxical how the AL had first requested the Syrian government to extend the Arab monitoring mission for another month, a request that Damascus immediately agreed, only for the AL to later contradict itself by ignoring the mission's report, working on taking the crisis in an Arab country to the Security Council and suspending its mission.

The representative of Syria blasted the strange contradiction when some Oligarchy States present draft resolutions for democracy, human rights, power rotation while they themselves don't have even a constitution, or electoral system and never practice democracy.

"The wild tendency of some Western countries to interfere in our internal and external affairs by all means is not new or accidental, but it is a systematic and

continued approach since Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 and Balfour Declaration in 1917, and through the unlimited support to Israel in its aggressive policies and its occupation of the Arab territories," said al-Jafari.

Ambassador al-Jafari voiced astonishment over the Arab League deliberate disregard of the Arab Monitors' report about the ongoing in Syria, especially the points which highlight the destructive role of armed groups in attacking the Syrian citizens and security forces.

Ambassador al-Jafari wondered about the French Policy cool response to what the Arab Monitors report said that the French Journalist, Gilles Jacquier , was killed by mortars shells from the opposition in Syria.

The Syrian representative cited some examples of the already taken Syrian reform measures and time-framed near to take place measures including new constitution, political plurality and parliamentary elections, welcoming the Russian initiative for sponsoring Syrian dialogue in Moscow.

He called upon the Arab and non-Arab parties that are contributing to inflaming the Syrian crisis to reconsider their policies, stop the shedding of the Syrian blood and support the national dialogue and the political reform program.

Ambassador al-Jafari, in a potent silencing response to the Qatari representative accusations, cited some news reports by western media that Qatar and Saudi Arabia finance the smuggling of arms to Syria, calling on Qatar to stop its al-Jazeera's distortions and lies, and calling on other neighboring countries to stop hosting the armed opposition, which bomb oil refineries and gas pipelines and explode railways, on its territories.

" Bin Jessem, the Qatari Premier, talks to you to inform you of what the League of Arab States, decided; such a League, however, does not exist without Syria; and we would never allow any body to take a decision about our future in our absence or on out behalf." underscored al-Jafari.

"In Damascus still we have a quarter called 'al-Hariqia' , -the destroyed by fire- because French forces in the late 40s of the last century bombed the quarter with

artillery and warplanes killing thousands of civilians," al-Jafari added reminding the French of their colonial past not to mention the thousands of the Algerians massacred.

Al-Jafari expressed Syria's appreciation of South Africa over its wise leadership of the Security Council during this month, reiterating Syria's pride in the victory of the people of South Africa and the peoples of the African continent over the policies of discrimination and apartheid, wondering about the stance of some countries that are now speaking of democracy and human rights and about which side they took during the struggle of South Africa.

Churkin: International Community's Role Is Not to Stoke Conflict or Interfere but to Enhance Dialogue to Reach Solution

On his part, Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, said the Arab monitoring mission provided more objective information on what is taking place in Syria and confirmed the presence of armed people who have been committing acts of killing and looting.

Ambassador Churkin said the Arab League's decision on suspending Syria's membership has had negative results, asserting that the role of the international community should not be to stoke conflict or interfere by means of economic sanctions or military force, but to enhance dialogue to reach a solution.

Churkin said that Russia is continuing work to reach a national agenda for dialogue among all sides without conditions.

Ambassador Churkin underscored that Russia would never support any resolution imposing sanctions on Syria, any resolution transferring the UN Security Council into a tool for aggravating conflicts and for justifying any future foreign intervention.

"The UN Security Council can never impose a frame for a political settlement and is NOT authorized as the UN Charter enshrines to do so," declared Ambassador Churkin citing the 'presence of armed persons fighting innocent civilians and security forces in Syria, which means that all sides have to shoulder their responsibility to cease violence and not only the Syrian Government'.

Baodong: Syria and Syrian People Able to Settle Crisis

On his part, The Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Li Baodong, said Syria is an important country in the Middle East and its stability is important to the whole region.

Ambassador Baodong stressed the need to respect the Syrian people's efforts for reform, to cease violence by all sides in Syria and put an end to the killing of innocent civilians, in addition to launching a comprehensive political process with the participation of all sides at the same time.

He called for speeding up reform process and settling all conflicts peacefully through negotiations to restore stability in Syria and enable it to move forward with the development process "I believe that Syria and the Syrian people have all that needed to settle the crisis, reach a political solution and start to go ahead in line with the what suits the Syrian people." said Baodong, adding that the international community can have a constructive role in this regard and provide help to reach a peaceful solution for the crisis through dialogue.

Ambassador Baodong underlined the AL monitoring mission's role in monitoring the situation in Syria, adding that "We give all attention to it and we hope that the mission will continue its work to achieve its goals and conduct neutral investigations. We call upon the Syrian government and all sides to cooperate with the mission in this regard."

"China stressed in many occasion that the Council's work on Syria should commit to the AL Charter and should contribute to ending tension, launching political dialogue, settling conflict and preserving stability, security and peace in the Middle East," he added.

He said "China has adopted a more cautious stance towards sanctions as they complicate conflicts more rather than solving them," stressing that his country rejects the use of force to solve the situation in Syria and opposes all efforts to change the regime in Syria in a way that violates the UN charter and the basic principles in the international relations.

Ambassador Baodong said "China supports Russia's proposal on the

situation in Syria and considers the new text distributed by Morocco," expressing China readiness to build on its preliminary stances and effectively engage with all sides to reach a settlement to the situation in Syria through peaceful dialogue.

The Representatives of India, Pakistan, Azerbaijan and South Africa underlined that discussions in the United Nations should continue with full respect to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, asserting that the international community should also call on the opposition to take specific and parallel steps as to end the crisis peacefully by the Syrians themselves with no foreign intervention whatsoever.

<http://sana.sy/eng/22/2012/02/01/397794.htm>

- **Arab League calls for UN action on Syria**

The Arab League has urged the UN Security Council to adopt a clear resolution to support the league's efforts in ending the 11-month-old conflict in Syria, but said it opposed foreign military intervention to achieve the objective.

Nabil Elaraby, the regional bloc's secretary-general, and Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, the prime minister of Qatar, appeared on Tuesday before the 15-nation council in New York to present a plan of action, and challenge Russian and Chinese opposition to the measure.

Al Thani, speaking on behalf of the Arab League, said the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had "failed to make any sincere effort" to end the crisis and believed the only solution was "to kill its own people".

"Bloodshed continued and the killing machine is still at work," he said, following months of efforts to bring the Syrian conflict before the council.

"Realising the hopes of the Syrian people is in your hands," Al Thani added, asking the council to adopt the resolution, based on the Arab League's peace plan for the country. "It is part of your responsibility under the (UN) charter."

'No mandate'

However, Russia signalled on Wednesday it would veto a draft UN resolution calling on the Syrian president to step down

unless it explicitly ruled out military intervention.

Vitaly Churkin, Moscow's ambassador to the UN, said Syria should "be able to decide for itself" and said the council "cannot impose the parameters for an internal settlement".

"It simply does not have the mandate to do so," he said. "We hope that the council will come to consensus on the Syrian issue, as is not only possible but also necessary."

Fred Weir, a Moscow-based correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor, said when Russia says it is prepared for compromise it means it wants a resolution that rules out any outside interference in Syria.

"The furthest [the Russians] are prepared to go is to distance themselves rhetorically from Assad, and call for that dialogue," Weir told Al Jazeera.

The United States strongly backed the call by the Arab League and Qatar for "rapid and decisive action", despite Russia's opposition.

"It is time for the international community to put aside our own differences and send a clear message of support to the people of Syria," US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, backed by her French and British counterparts, said.

"We all have a choice: Stand with the people of Syria and the region or become complicit in the continuing violence there.

"The alternative - spurning the Arab League, abandoning the Syrian people, emboldening the dictator - would compound this tragedy and would mark a failure of our shared responsibility and shake the credibility of the United Nations Security Council," she said.

Syria criticises 'double standards'

In its current form, the resolution calls on Assad to halt the government crackdown on protests and implement an Arab League peace plan calling for him to hand over power to his deputy. If Assad fails to comply within 15 days, the council would consider "further measures", a reference to a possible move to impose economic or other sanctions.

In his response, Syria's UN ambassador hit back at the league.

"How strange it is for us to see some members of the League of Arab States seeking the support of the Security Council against Syria," Bashar Jaafari said.

"[Syria] will stand firm in confronting its enemies," he said, accusing the alliance of Western powers and Arab League states of "double standards" and of "fomenting the crisis".

"One can't be an arsonist and a firefighter at the same time."

An actual vote on the resolution is considered unlikely until later this week.

Veto power

A French official said the draft resolution had a "comfortable majority" of support from 10 of the Security Council's 15 members, meaning Russia or China would have to use their veto power to stop it.

Li Baodong, China's ambassador to the UN, said Beijing was opposed to punitive measures such as military action or sanctions against Damascus and instead called for dialogue between Damascus and the opposition.

Li urged Syria to carry out "reforms and safeguard the interests of its people, stop the killing of innocent people and hold dialogue without delay", warning that any conflict in Syria could have an effect on the wider Middle East.

The draft resolution insists it does not compel states "to resort to the use of force, or the threat of force", which a diplomat said was a statement aimed at answering the concerns of Russia and China.

Speaking to Al Jazeera, Robert Fisk, Middle East correspondent for the UK's Independent newspaper, said the reason why the Russians were not going along with the resolution was because "they feel conned by the no-fly zone [in Libya]".

"They did not vote against the no-fly-zone over Libya at the Security Council. They

didn't think it meant the overthrow of Gaddafi," he said.

"Since they have their 24-hour port in Tartus - the only 24-hour port they have left in the area - they do not want to lose Syria," Fisk added, referring to Russia's naval base in Syria's second largest port city where Russian warships docked last month.

The diplomatic wrangling came as fighting escalated between Assad's security forces and protesters, with activists reporting the deaths of at least 37 people across Syria on Tuesday.

"The government is pushing ahead, trying to firm-up its control all over the country, especially in the rebellious areas, like Homs, Deraa and the suburbs of Damascus," Al Jazeera's Rula Amin, reporting from neighbouring Lebanon, said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/2012131212539291323.html>

- **Free Syrian Army Ready for the battle for Damascus**

Antakya, Asharq Al-Awsat – The Free Syrian Army [FSA] morale has never been

higher, for despite the difficult circumstances that its members are facing at home and abroad, the group's military achievements over the last week have lifted its spirits to the point that many are predicting that victory is just around the corner.

The FSA camp is located on the Turkish side of the border, and is currently in a state of high alert as everybody monitors the reports of the battle staking place in Syria between the regime's forces and the FSA. The FSA officers are unconcerned with the harsh winter conditions that surround them, where the temperate falls below zero at night, as all their focus is on overthrowing the al-Assad regime.

"We do not care about the lack of resources and food, or the bad weather...the only thing we want is arms" adding "arms it the only way out of this crisis and the only means of victory against this criminal regime that is killing its own people every day." An FSA soldier stressed to Asharq Al-Awsat.

"There is no solution [to the Syrian crisis] other than combat...we have seen the Arab and western initiatives collapse one

by one; the solution is in our own hands, and we will achieve this soon." The FSA soldier added.

FSA Commander Riad al-Asaad is cautious by nature, and he is devoted to the daily meetings and operations of the FSA. He revealed to Asharq Al-Awsat that, "the divisions [within the Syrian military apparatus] are great and growing every day...if we only had air support we would be in a very different position."

The FSA camp in Turkey currently houses around approximately 300 Syrian army defectors, the majority being officers, as there has been a widespread exodus of FSA soldiers returning to Syria to continue the fight against the al-Assad regime. The majority of FSA soldiers and officers in Turkey have already returned to the Syrian interior, whilst others are preparing to join them.

FSA spokesman, Colonel Ammar al-Wawi, told Asharq Al-Awsat that "divisions are rife within the regime, and the FSA reached the outskirts of the presidential palace [in Damascus], but we refrained from attacking it for fear of risking civilian lives."

He added “we will intensify our operations over the forthcoming days; with the Damascus campaign ending with the seizure of the [presidential] palace...we will overthrow the regime without foreign intervention.”

As for the FSA’s overall operations within Syria, Colonel al-Wawi said “we are in control of areas in every Syrian region, and at the end we will ultimately impose a buffer zone ourselves” adding “as the [al-Assad] regime becomes weaker we become stronger.”

The FSA spokesman also asserted that the forthcoming days will see Syrian rebel activity focusing on Damascus. Colonel al-Wawi stressed that the FSA is “prepared for the final battle”, adding that the majority of FSA officers and soldiers are already in the field.

Colonel al-Wawi also told Asharq Al-Awsat that “we will soon see Bashar al-Assad fleeing the country for Qom or Moscow, for there is no place for him now in Syria.”

Asked whether he wanted to send a message to Hezbollah chief Hassan

Nasrallah, one of the al-Assad regime’s staunchest supporters, the FSA spokesman called on Nasrallah to “stop the killing of the Syrian people who previously embraced the Lebanese people during the 2006 war...opening their homes to them.” He also said that Nasrallah would be held accountable for his actions “in the revolutionary courts following the victory of the [Syrian] revolution”.

However it appears that there are also divisions amongst the Syrian opposition, as FSA spokesman Colonel Ammar al-Wawi expressed his “disappointment” in the Syrian National Council [SNC], adding that the SNC includes “capitalists and landlords” who want to ride the wave of the revolution at the expense of the Syrian people. He said “whenever the SNC feels its popularity waning it comes to the FSA to take souvenir photographs to show the public that it is support the FSA” adding “the SNC claims to have set-up a liaison office to support the FSA...but this is not true, and we have not received any financial aid from the SNC until now.”

Colonel al-Wawi called on the SNC to “reconsider its policy on membership”, accusing members of the SNC Executive

committee of “being unable to keep a secret, revealing all their information to global intelligence agencies, including the Syrian intelligence services.”

Colonel a-Wawi also stressed that the FSA had not received any financial or military support from Turkey, although he went on to thank Ankara for receiving the Syrian refugees, FSA, and opposition. He expressed his regret that Ankara had failed to expel the Syrian ambassador to Turkey, and formally recognized the SNC as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people. He also called on Turkey to provide military support and assistance to the FSA, confirming that Turkey “has not aided us by firing a single bullet.”

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28311>

6. ARABIAN PENINSULA

• Clashes in Kuwait before parliamentary vote

More than 20 people were wounded when Kuwaiti riot police clashed with tribesmen who stormed a local television station in a second day of violence before parliamentary elections, witnesses said.



The incident took place late on Tuesday at the offices of the privately-owned Al-Watan satellite channel which was hosting Nabeel al-Fadl, a pro-government candidate in Thursday's vote to determine Kuwait's 50-seat parliament.

Police used tear gas to disperse the crowd that started throwing stones, wounding around 20 security men and four reporters, a witness told AFP.

Some of the angry crowd managed to enter the offices and damaged some furniture and equipment, but all staff members escaped unhurt. They later attacked a nearby fire station, the witness added.

Around 15 tribesmen were arrested during the clashes.

The incident came a day after angry tribesmen burned down the election tent of Mohammed al-Juwaihel, a controversial

pro-government candidate and ally of Fadl, over remarks deemed offensive to the Mutairi tribe, the second largest Bedouin clan in Kuwait.

Al-Juwaihel has alleged that many tribes are not "true Kuwaitis" because of ancestral roots in Saudi Arabia that allow them to obtain dual citizenship and gain access to generous welfare systems in both countries.

Opposition tribal candidates held a massive rally to condemn Juwaihel's remarks and to ask the government to take legal action against him.

"We tell the (ruling) family that we are partners in governance and public funds and we are free people," Mussallam al-Barrak, a leading opposition candidate, told a crowd of over 20,000 who listened to him under heavy rain.

Kuwait's royal court, many election candidates and a large number of political groups on Tuesday strongly criticised the Juwaihel incident as well as the tribesmen's response.

The royal court warned in a statement that the incident risked "fuelling divisions in society," and called on Kuwaitis to steer clear of anything that could negatively affect the elections.

Veteran opposition figure Ahmad al-Saadun charged that anti-democracy elements were trying to discredit elections in which the opposition is tipped to win.

"This time we are before an abnormal struggle ... Parties that will not come back (to parliament) will not remain silent ... They want to sabotage the election," Saadun told an election rally on Tuesday night.

The liberal National Democratic Alliance described Juwaihel and his associates as "puppets and destructive tools being moved by certain quarters in the regime."

Oil-rich Kuwait has been hit by a series of political crises over the past six years leading to the resignation of seven governments and the dissolving of parliament on four occasions.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/02/2012219228336696.html>

- **Yemen official survives assassination attempt**

Yemen's newly appointed information minister has escaped an assassination attempt as he was leaving government headquarters in the capital Sanaa.

Ali Ahmed al-Amrani was unhurt in Tuesday's attack, that left his vehicle riddled with bullets fired as the minister was leaving a weekly cabinet meeting.



"I don't know the reasons behind assassination attempt," Amrani told Al Jazeera.

"I don't have personal problems with anyone and I don't think my position to lead to such an act, the tension and mobilisation in Yemen are increasing and having time to time having some illegal consequences."

The minister, a member of the opposition, was named to the post in December as part of a deal that saw President Ali

Abdullah Saleh hand over power to his deputy.

Drone attacks

Meanwhile, air raids in the south killed up to 15 fighters alleged to have links with al-Qaeda, including a regional leader, Yemeni officials said on Tuesday.

Local residents told the Reuters news agency that an unidentified drone carried out the attack on two vehicles travelling east of the city of Loder in Abyan province.

"We think they were carried out by American planes," a tribal official told the AFP news agency.

Al Qaeda-linked groups have reportedly used Yemen's political turmoil to gain a foothold in the south.

Kidnapping

Yemeni tribesmen kidnapped six aid workers from a tourist area west of Sanaa on Tuesday, tribal sources and police said.

State news agency Saba said the abductees were a German, a Colombian, an Iraqi, a Palestinian and two Yemenis.

Tribal sources earlier said three foreigners and three Yemenis working for an international aid group were seized.

Their abductors are demanding the release of people held by Yemeni authorities.

Kidnappings of foreigners and Yemenis are common in the impoverished Arabian Peninsula state, where hostages are often used by disgruntled tribesmen to press demands on authorities. Hostages are often freed unharmed.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/2012131154046370290.html>

7. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Analyst urges Pakistan to proceed with IP project**

Islamabad, Feb 1, IRNA – A senior defense analyst and former ambassador has advised the Pakistani government to proceed with the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project and fulfill all its obligations under the contract.



“It is clear we cannot participate in any American-led international boycott or a sanctions against Iran,” Zafar Hilaly said in an article published in daily ‘The News’ on Wednesday.

He added 'We should drag our feet in implementing any resolution which harms Iran.'

The analyst said 'It is prudent, therefore, not only to disassociate ourselves from the American policy towards Iran but also to take measures to assure Iran of our friendship and support in the event of a conflict imposed on Iran.'

He said the dispatch of a high level special envoy to Iran conveying this message seems an appropriate gesture in these testing times.

The analyst was of the view the Americans know very well the problems Pakistan has been facing due to its energy deficiency.

“The current American negotiating stance concerning Iran is absurd. What it basically says is that there will be no negotiations with Iran unless its nuclear programme is shut down. But, if Iran were to agree to shut it down, what would be there to negotiate about?” said the analyst.

He said China, Russia and India are not willing to get roped into observing the US economic sanctions imposed on Iran and they intend to continue buying oil from Iran.

“Given the importance of Iran and the ‘fellow’ feeling we have for Iran, we need to go further and chart a policy that is entirely supportive of Iran in the international fora and especially the UN Security Council of which we are a member,” he said

Zafar Hilaly said Pakistan also need to declare that it will not permit its airspace, territorial waters or soil being used in any manner that is inimical to Iran, including US drones overflying Pakistan to spy on Iran.

“We should also consider joining with Russia and China to guarantee the supply of fuel for Iran’s civilian nuclear reactors,” added the analyst.

He said Pakistan could go further and engage with other regional states which possess nuclear weapons, including India, to provide Iran with a nuclear umbrella.

“Such a measure would not, of course, persuade Israel to forego nuclear weapons but it could inhibit Tel Aviv using, or threatening the use of tactical nuclear weapons against Iran,” he said.

<http://www.irna.ir/News/Politic/Analyst-urges-Pakistan-to-proceed-with-IP-project/30792520>

- **Insurgents kill 14 Pakistani soldiers in Balochistan**

Islamabad, Feb 1, IRNA – Insurgents have killed 14 paramilitary soldiers in Pakistani’s southwestern Balochistan province in an attack on their check post, official sources said Wednesday.



The Frontier Corps (FC) sources told correspondents in Quetta, the provincial capital, that 15 other soldiers were injured in the Tuesday night attack in Sibi district.

No group claimed responsibility. The government blames suspected Baloch insurgents for attacks on security forces and government's installations. Baloch insurgents, fighting for more rights, are active in the area.

Sources said that a helicopter was sent to the area after the information was passed on to the authorities in Quetta last night. Bodies and injured were airlifted to Quetta.

Forces were sent to the area for a search operation in the region but no one has been arrested so far. Sources said that the attackers burnt the "Khushdil Post".

Insurgents have stepped up attacks on security forces in Balochistan in recent weeks.

At least 14 FC men, including two junior commissioned officers, were killed and nine others received bullet injuries in an armed attack by Baloch militants close to

the Iranian border in Turbat district last month.

<http://www.irna.ir/News/Politic/Insurgents-kill-14-Pakistani-soldiers-in-Balochistan/30792134>

- **Pakistan denies 'intimate' Taliban links**

Pakistan has rejected as "frivolous" a leaked NATO report which claims that the country's security services are helping the Taliban, and suggesting that the group believes it is poised to regain power.



The leaking of the report came as Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar visited Kabul on Wednesday for talks aimed at improving strained relations between the antagonistic neighbours.

Speaking after talks with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Khar told journalists the report should be disregarded.

"We can disregard this as a potentially strategic leak... This is old wine in an even older bottle," she said.

Khar's one-day diplomatic visit, scheduled before the report was leaked, was dubbed a "new co-operation phase" by Afghan officials.

But while allegations that Pakistan's security services are helping the Taliban have been repeatedly made, the timing of the report's leak, initially reported by the BBC and the UK's Times newspaper, appeared to place fresh strain on already fractured diplomatic ties.

The report, titled "State of the Taliban: Detainee Perspectives", is derived from thousands of interrogations and alleges that Pakistan knows the locations of senior Taliban leaders.

It claims that Pakistan's ISI intelligence agency is "intimately involved" in the Taliban's campaign against Afghan forces and its international allies, and that the Taliban assumed their victory would be inevitable once US and coalition forces left the country in 2014.

'Frivolous' report

But a Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman denied the allegations and played down the report's significance.

"This is frivolous, to put it mildly. We are committed to non-interference in Afghanistan and expect all other states to strictly adhere to this principle," said Abdul Basit, the spokesman.

Al Jazeera's Jennifer Glasse, reporting from Kabul, said Pakistan's alleged aid to the Taliban on their territory had long been a problem for the Afghan government.

"Many Afghans believe the Taliban are playing for time because they want a role in the future of Afghanistan, and many are concerned that they might come back to power," Glasse said. "Their return would tighten the gains of the past decade such as women's rights."

Meetings frozen

Wednesday's meeting comes with bilateral and trilateral meetings (including the US) still frozen since the September assassination of Afghanistan's chief peace negotiator, Burhanuddin Rabbani, which

one Afghan minister blamed on Pakistani spies.

In December, Pakistan boycotted a major conference in Germany on the future of Afghanistan to protest against a cross-border US air strike that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers on November 26. It also closed down the crucial supply routes that NATO forces uses.

Khar meets her Afghan counterpart Zalmi Rasoul and Karzai amid tentative moves towards negotiations in Qatar involving the US and the Taliban, which was removed from power by a 2001 US-led invasion.

Karzai has given a lukewarm welcome to the Taliban opening a political office in the Gulf state, but is wary of being sidelined and has insisted that his government should have a central role in any peace talks.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2012/02/20122141357228690.html>

- **Pakistani forces clash with Taliban**

Fighting between government soldiers and Taliban fighters over a strategic

mountaintop in northwestern Pakistan has killed more than 38 people, a government official says.



The battle first started a week ago when government troops seized the top of Jogi mountain in the Kurram tribal area from the Taliban, sparking deadly clashes.

The fighters' retaliated by attacking the soldiers holding the post on Tuesday. The attack left 30 Taliban and eight Pakistani soldiers dead, according to the official.

Helicopter gunships were mobilised after "more than 300 Taliban attacked" the checkpoint at around midnight, a senior military official told AFP news agency.

The area is home to fighters loyal to Pakistani Taliban commander Hakimullah Mehsud.

The military launched an offensive in Kurram in July 2011 and declared victory

about a month later, but violence has continued.

A similar process has taken place throughout Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal region along the Afghan border. The military has launched a series of operations against the Pakistani Taliban in the past few years, and has often declared victory only to see fighting flare up again.

Drone attacks

The tribal areas have also been targeted by US unmanned drones in an attempt to dismantle sanctuaries for al-Qaeda affiliated groups such as the Taliban.

On Monday, the US president, in a rare public acknowledgement, confirmed that the drones have regularly struck tribal areas.

Barack Obama said “a lot” of the strikes had targeted “al-Qaeda suspects who are up in very tough terrain” in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), along the border with Afghanistan, long believed to be a hub of activity for armed groups.

“For us to be able to get them in another way would involve probably a lot more

intrusive military action than the ones we're already engaging in,” the president said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2012/01/201213111174380486.html>

- **Obama admits Pakistan drone attacks**

US President Barack Obama has confirmed that unmanned drones have regularly struck Pakistan’s tribal areas in his government’s efforts to dismantle what it alleges are al-Qaeda sanctuaries in the region.



Obama's rare public acknowledgement of the US drone programme in Pakistan came on Monday during an hour-long online video chat with users of the Google social network.

Obama said the strikes were a “targeted focused effort at people who are on a list of active terrorists”.

The president said "a lot" of the strikes had targeted "al-Qaeda suspects who are up in very tough terrain" in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), along the border with Afghanistan, long believed to be a hub of activity for armed groups.

"For us to be able to get them in another way would involve probably a lot more intrusive military action than the ones we're already engaging in."

The controversial drone programme run by the CIA has often been met with protests in Pakistan amid concerns of civilian casualties. The Pakistani government publicly protests the operations, but is believed to support them.

A spokesperson for Pakistan's foreign ministry reiterated the government's public protest in response to Obama's comments.

"Notwithstanding tactical advantages of drone strikes, we are of the firm view that these are unlawful, counterproductive and hence unacceptable," Abdul Basit said.

High death toll

The New America Foundation, a think tank in Washington, says drone strikes in Pakistan have killed between 1,715 and 2,680 people in the past eight years.

According to the AFP news agency, the number of missiles that struck the tribal region went down from 101 in 2010 to 64 in 2011.

Amnesty International, the UK-based rights group, called for the US to pay closer attention to the Pakistani civilians being killed by drones.

"The US authorities must give a detailed explanation of how these strikes are lawful and what is being done to monitor civilian casualties and ensure proper accountability," Sam Zarifi Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific director, said.

"What are the rules of engagement? What proper legal justification exists for these attacks? While the President's confirmation of the use of drones in Pakistan is a welcome first step towards transparency, these and other questions need to be answered."

Iraq use limited

Obama, however, played down the use of drones in Iraq, saying the programme was very limited and focused mainly on protecting the US embassy in Baghdad.

"The truth is we're not engaging in a bunch of drone attacks inside Iraq. There's some surveillance to make sure that our embassy compound is protected."

Earlier, the New York Times newspaper had reported that the increasing use of drones in Iraq had outraged Iraqi officials.

The paper, citing a senior US official, said the US government was in talks with the Iraqi authorities, seeking authorisation for the drone operations. But it quoted three Iraqi officials saying they were unaware of such efforts.

"I think that there's this perception that we're just sending in a whole bunch of strikes willy nilly," Obama added. "It is important for everybody to understand that this is kept on a very tight leash."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/01/201213135626588871.html>

- **Taliban "poised to retake Afghanistan" after NATO**

KABUL, (Reuters) - The U.S. military said in a secret report the Taliban, backed by Pakistan, are set to retake control of Afghanistan after NATO-led forces withdraw from the country, raising the prospect of a major failure of western policy after a costly war.

Lieutenant Colonel Jimmie Cummings, a spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, confirmed the existence of the document, reported by Britain's Times newspaper and the BBC. But he said it was not a strategic study.

"The classified document in question is a compilation of Taliban detainee opinions," he said. "It's not an analysis, nor is it meant to be considered an analysis."

Nevertheless, it could be interpreted as a damning assessment of the war, now dragging into its eleventh year and aimed at blocking a Taliban return to power.

It could also be seen as an admission of defeat and could reinforce the view of Taliban hardliners that they should not negotiate with the United States and President Hamid Karzai's unpopular

government while in a position of strength.

The U.S. military said in the document Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) security agency was assisting the Taliban in directing attacks against foreign forces.

The allegation drew a strong response from Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman Abdul Basit. "This is frivolous, to put it mildly," he told Reuters. "We are committed to non-interference in Afghanistan."

The Times said the "highly classified" report was put together by the U.S. military at Bagram air base in Afghanistan for top NATO officers last month.

Large swathes of Afghanistan have been handed back to Afghan security forces, with the last foreign combat troops due to leave by the end of 2014.

But many Afghans doubt their security forces will be able to take firm control of one of the world's most volatile countries once foreign combat troops leave.

The document may leave some policy makers in Washington wondering whether the war was worth the steep cost in human lives and funding.

As of late January, 1,889 U.S. soldiers had been killed in Afghanistan in a conflict launched after the September 11, 2001, attacks that has drained almost half a trillion dollars from U.S. coffers.

"The unfortunate reality is that this is a failure of the allied strategy in Afghanistan. They have not been able to achieve the goals they set out to achieve," said Mahmud Durrani, a former Pakistan army general and ambassador to Washington.

Fresh accusations of Pakistani collusion with the Taliban will likely further strain ties between Western powers and Islamabad, which has long denied backing militants seeking to topple the U.S.-backed government in Kabul.

Critics say Pakistan uses militant groups as proxies to counter the growing influence of rival India in Afghanistan. The belief that Pakistan supports the insurgents is widely held in Afghanistan.

"It is obvious that the Taliban get support from Pakistan, but I don't think that as soon as foreign troops leave they will return to power," said Afghan telecommunications worker Farid Ahmad Totakhil.

"It would be a mistake now for the international community to leave Afghanistan, and drop us in a dark ocean," he said.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar was visiting Kabul on Wednesday on a mission to repair strained and to meet Karzai to discuss possible peace talks with the Taliban.

TURBULENT HISTORY

Pakistan is reviewing ties with the United States which have suffered a series of setbacks since a unilateral U.S. raid that killed Osama bin Laden on Pakistani soil in May last year humiliated Pakistan's powerful generals.

A November 26 cross-border NATO air attack that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers deepened the crisis, prompting Pakistan

to close supply routes to NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Pakistan is seen as critical to U.S. efforts to stabilise Afghanistan, a feat one foreign power after another has failed to accomplish over the country's turbulent history.

Islamabad has resisted U.S. pressure to go after insurgent groups like the Taliban and the allied Haqqani network, and argues Washington's approach overlooks complex realities on the ground.

Pakistan says the United States should attempt to bring all militant groups into a peace process and fears a 2014 combat troop exit could be hasty, plunging the region into the kind of chaos seen after the Soviet exit in 1989.

"They don't need any backing," Pakistani Senator Tariq Azim, a member of the Senate's Defence Committee, told Reuters, referring to the Taliban.

"Everybody knows that after 10 years, they (NATO) have not been able to control a single province in Afghanistan because

of the wrong policies they have been following," he said.

Pentagon spokesman George Little said: "We have long been concerned about ties between elements of the ISI and some extremist networks."

The document's findings were based on interrogations of more than 4,000 Taliban and al Qaeda detainees, the Times said, adding that it identified only few individual insurgents.

Despite the presence of about 100,000 foreign troops, violence in Afghanistan is at its worst since the Taliban were ousted by U.S.-backed Afghan forces in late 2001, according to the United Nations.

The Taliban announced this month they would open a political office in the Qatari capital, Doha, to support possible peace talks with the United States.

But there has also been talk of efforts to hold separate negotiations in Saudi Arabia because Karzai fears his government could be sidelined by U.S. talks with the Taliban.

The U.S. military report could boost the Taliban's confidence and make its leaders less willing to make concessions on key demands for a ceasefire and for the insurgency to renounce violence and break ties to al Qaeda.

A Taliban spokesman rejected on Wednesday a U.S. demand for a ceasefire as a condition for peace talks, but he would not comment on the report.

"Our struggle and jihad will continue until we have installed a complete Islamic government in Afghanistan, regardless of the year 2014 or 2015 when the foreign troops say will leave Afghanistan," said the militant spokesman, Qari Yousuf Ahmadi.

Hoping to gain credibility with a population still haunted by memories of the Taliban's harsh rule from 1996-2001, the group has tried to improve its image as its fighters battle NATO and Afghan forces.

The Times said the document suggested the Taliban were gaining in popularity partly because the austere Islamist movement was becoming more tolerant.

Prominent Pakistani security analyst Imtiaz Gul described the report as alarmist, saying Afghan security forces backed by the international community would resist any Taliban takeover.

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

"This is simply preposterous to propagate this theory," he said.

<http://asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=28315>

**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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