



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

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ORSAM

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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
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1. IRAQ

- **Hakeem, Hussein Sadr discuss domestic regional situation**

Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), Ammar al-Hakeem, discussed with the religious authority Hussein Isma'el al-Sadr, means to solve domestic problems.

A statement issued on Thursday, Dec. 13, by the SIIC said that in the meeting, the two exchanged views on domestic and regional issues.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFDGHG

- **Hakeem, Barham Saleh discuss means to solve current political crisis**

Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), Ammar al-Hakeem, discussed with the Deputy Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Barham Saleh, domestic and regional situation.

In the meeting, discussion covered means to move current political crisis between Kurdistan Region and the Federal

Government through dialogue and abiding by the Constitution, a statement by the SIIC said.

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFDGGK

- **Khuzayi, delegation of Sadr Trend discuss political updates in Iraq**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Vice-President, Khudhir I-Khuzayi, discussed with a delegation of the Sadr Trend, the political updates in Iraq.

A statement by Khuzayi's office received by AIN on Thursday cited "Khuzayi received delagtion of the Sadr Trend at his office in Baghdad where he called the political sides to conduct dialogue and adhere to the constitution to settle the pending issues."

"Khuzayi discussed the exerted efforts to settle the current crisis between Kurdistan Region and the Central Government," the statement added.

The statement quoted Khuzayi, as saying "We are working to bring the various views closer to achieve the stability for the benefit of the Iraqi people."

“For its part, the delegation expressed its confidence in Khuzayi’s efforts to settle the crisis,” the statement concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24580:khyzayi-delegation-of-sadr-trend-discuss-political-updates-in-iraq-&catid=40:2011-11-19-15-20-50

- **Urgent...Talabani: Agreement reached to sustain security in disputed areas**

Baghdad (AIN) –The President, Jalal Talabani, announced reaching agreement between the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, and the President of Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani, over forming local forces from the citizens of the disputed areas to sustain security in these areas.

Presidential statement received by AIN cited "Due to the Presidency's adherence to sustain security and to preserve unity among the Iraqis, Talabani and the Vice-President, Khudair al-Khuzayi, exerted huge efforts recently with all sides," noting that "These efforts resulted in reaching agreement between Maliki and Barzani over stopping all media tensed statements, holding meetings for the

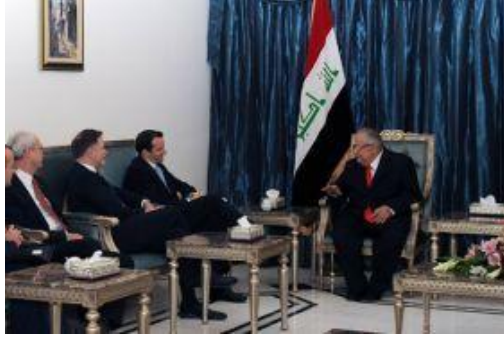
technical and military concerned committees to form local joint forces to assume the responsibility of the security file in the disputed areas to withdraw the forces that deployed recently in these areas."

"These procedures will provide the necessary atmospheres for conducting brotherly positive dialogue to achieve security and stability to start investment, services and progressive projects," the statement continued.

"Talabani called all the political sides to support these efforts through all possible means and urged the media outlets to avoid all that contradict the cooperative spirit and the dialogues," the statement concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24581:urgenttalabani-agreement-reached-over-forming-local-forces-to-sustain-security-in-disputed-areas-&catid=40:2011-11-19-15-20-50

- **Talabani discusses with US officials, means of settling political crisis**



Baghdad (AIN) – The President Jalal Talabani received the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Stephen Beecroft along with the advisor and member of the U.S. Council of Foreign Relations, Brett Maikark.

A presidential statement received by AIN cited "The visiting delegation expressed the United States keenness on Iraq's stability and unity."

"Talabani, for his part, stressed the importance to stop the stress in media which increases current disputes between political parties in Iraq," the statement added.

The statement pointed out "Talabani emphasized that all problems can be solved through transparent dialogue, the sense of responsibility, the commitment to the Constitution and take the national agreements into consideration."

"Brett appreciated Talabani's efforts to reach national understandings based on partnership and consensus in order to end the crises in Iraq," the statement concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24544:talabani-discusses-with-us-officials-means-of-settling-political-crisis-&catid=40:2011-11-19-15-20-50

- **Al-Maliki, US diplomat mull bilateral ties**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki discussed on Tuesday with US Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Nides ways of expanding bilateral relations.

"The premier received at his office in Baghdad Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Nides, with whom he discussed boosting bilateral ties and the regional developments, mainly crisis in Syria," said a statement released from al-Maliki's office received by Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%285ag51mjpbhj3bn0zltjor55%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=151721&l=1

- **New sentence to death on al-Hashemi**

Shafaq News / The Central Criminal Court announced on Thursday that it has issued a death sentence by hanging until death on the vice president accused of terrorism, Tareq al-Hashemi.

A judicial source said in an interview with "Shafaq News" that "the Central Criminal Court sentenced to death by hanging on the convicted Tareq al-Hashemi for possession of weapons and silencer guns."



The Central Criminal Court in Baghdad issued last September , two death sentences against Vice President , Tareq al-Hashemi and his office manager, Ahmed Qahtan for convicting them of "terrorist" issues.

Hashemi, who received an arrest warrant on charges of "terrorism", is currently living in Turkey since the 9th April, after he left Kurdistan Region, as he resorted to it after the Interior Ministry showed on 19 of December 2011 the confessions of a group of his bodyguards of carrying out acts of violence according to his orders.

The Turkish government granted Hashemi in 31 of last July, a permanent residence in the country to confirm its refusal to hand him over to the Iraqi authorities.

The International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) (ICPO) issued in the 8th of last May, a red notice against al-Hashemi based on suspicions that he was involved in leading and funding of terrorist groups in Iraq, as it stated that this procedure will limits from his movement and freedom significantly and allows the countries where he stay in to arrest him, while it confirmed that it is not an international arrest warrant.

It is noteworthy that the investigative body on al-Hashemi issue announced on 16 of last February that Hashimi and his bodyguards were involved in the implementation of 150 armed operations,

like detonating car bombings, roadside bombs and rocket launchers as well as targeting Iraqi, Iranian pilgrims, senior officers and members of the parliament.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/4353-new-sentence-to-death-on-al-hashemi.html>

- **Hundreds protest in Karbala on al-Maliki**

Shafaq News / supporters of the Sadrist movement in Karbala province protected Thursday, condemning the remarks of Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki on the leader of the Sadrist movement, Moqtada al-Sadr as protesters considered those remarks as "offensive" to Sadr.

"Shafaq News" reporter in Karbala said that "hundreds of supporters of Sadr movement marched in a demonstration before noon today condemning remarks by Prime Minister , Nuri al-Maliki to leader Muqtada al-Sadr," noting that "the demonstration witnessed the participation of members of local government belong to the Sadrist movement. "

The correspondent added that "the demonstration started from the Office of

the Martyr al-Sadr in the Mukhayem area in the center of Karbala and ended near the Central Library from the beginning of Imam Hussein street (PBUH)," noting that "there was a widespread of security services that cut off the road in front of vehicles to secure the demonstration."

The reporter added that, "demonstrators carried banners reading" No, no to corruption, "and chanted" Nuri al-Maliki Liar Liar ".



For his part, Chairman of the Health Committee in the province, Hussain Shadhan said in an interview with "Shafaq News", that "it is not right to describe the religious Marjiya as an organization of the civil society."

Shadhan called "Maliki to stop and his members in SLC from insulting our Mariya ".

As the leader in the Sadrist movement said in an interview with "Shafaq News", that "statement was provided by the demonstrators that has three demands as we demand for an official apology to all religious Marjiya and demand an official apology from the highest political and governmental levels."

"We demand Maliki to pay serious attention to services and restore the rights of the people instead of attacking others," considering "the assault to Sadr as an assault on the Iraqi people."

Hundreds of supporters of the Sadrist movement protested on Wednesday in Najaf province to condemn Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's position on the statements of Moqtada al-Sadr.

Basra province and Sadr city in eastern Baghdad have witnessed last Tuesday, demonstrations on the background of the recent statement issued by Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki waving to prosecute, Moqtada al-Sadr.

Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki has refused earlier Moqtada al-Sadr statements on arming the Iraqi army, threatening to sue

those who stir up such accusations if not proved.

Moqtada al-Sadr announced last Tuesday, in a statement in which "Shafaq News" received a copy of it that he supports arming the Iraqi army, on condition that the reinforcement must be "for Iraq not to other countries", not to be to lead by Dijla operations and not be armed by the Baathist. "

Iraq signed deals to buy Russian weapons worth \$ 4.2 billion that included, according to Russian reports, MiG-29 aircraft, 30 attack helicopters Mi -28, and 42 Pantsir - S 1, missile systems.

Iraq announced recently cancelling the Russian arms deal after marred by what is believed to be corruption, as media circulated the most prominent suspect's names.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4348-hundreds-protest-in-karbala-on-al-maliki.html>

- **Kurdistan Opposition Groups Turn Down Meeting with Maliki**

ERBİL, Kurdistan Region – Opposition parties in Iraq’s autonomous Kurdistan Region said they had turned down invitations to meet with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, adding they would refuse talks with Baghdad until it resolves a tense row with Erbil over troop deployments in the disputed territories.

War drums have been sounding ever since Maliki sent his newly-formed Dijla forces to take over security in the disputed territories and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which also claims the energy-rich lands, sent in thousands of its own Peshmarga forces.

Kurdish opposition groups have been united with the KRG in condemning Baghdad’s move to unilaterally take over security in the ethnically-mixed territories, which until now have been patrolled by joint forces.

The Islamic League (Komal), Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) and Change Movement (Gorran) all said they had received invitations for talks by Maliki, but had turned them down because they believed the premier was trying to drive a wedge among the Kurds.

“We believe that now is not a good time to meet with Maliki, when relations between the Kurdistan Region and Baghdad are in a deadlock,” said Jalal Jawhar, spokesman of Gorran, Kurdistan’s largest opposition group.



Jawhar said that his group would not meet with Maliki until he pulls Dijla troops out of the disputed territories, and dissolves the controversial force that has been criticized as unconstitutional.

“Maliki refused to implement the Kurdish demands to resolve the current crisis. For this reason, we don’t want to meet with him,” said Muhammad Ahmad, a senior KIU leader of KIU. He said the opposition groups also had called on the ruling parties to boycott negotiations with Baghdad.

Senior Komal official Muhammad Hakim said, “It is not a good time to meet with

Maliki, since he is persistent in his animosity toward the Kurdistan Region.”

Iraq’s Parliament Speaker Osama Nujeifi said last week that Baghdad and Erbil had reached an agreement on withdrawing troops. But on Monday the Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani told Peshmarga troops on the frontlines in Kirkuk that he was hopeful of a peaceful outcome to the crisis, but that war remained a possibility.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/5538.html>

- **Baghdad-Erbil Agreement on Troops Must Precede Peshmarga Withdrawal, Commander Says**

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Baghdad and Erbil must agree on a troop withdrawal in the disputed territories before a Peshmarga delegation agrees to travel to the Iraqi capital for discussions on pulling out the fighters, a senior commander said.



“Unless the Kurdistan political delegation reaches an agreement in Baghdad, a Peshmarga delegation will not go to Baghdad,” said the Peshmarga commander, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

“Even if a Peshmarga delegation visits Baghdad, it will do what the political delegation advises it to do,” he added.

Iraq has been plunged in a weeks-old crisis that was ignited after Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki sent in his newly-formed and controversial Dijla forces to take over security in the disputed northern territories, which are also claimed by the Kurds.

The autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government sent in thousands of its own Peshmarga fighters into the areas, which are potentially rich in energy reserves and

until now have been patrolled by joint Arab-Kurdish security forces.

The speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, Osama Nujeifi, said last week that Baghdad and Erbil had reached an agreement on withdrawing troops, but on Monday the Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani told Peshmarga troops on the frontlines in Kirkuk that, while he was hopeful of a peaceful outcome to the crisis war remained a possibility.

Rebwar Talabani, deputy head of the Kirkuk Provincial Council, told Rudaw that, “we are waiting for the parties to reach an agreement, but until the very last moment we want the Peshmarga troops to remain in Kirkuk.”

Talabani, who is a member of the Kurdistan Islamic Union, said that recent efforts by different parties had somewhat eased tensions in Kirkuk, an oil-rich prize that by some estimates contains 4 percent of the world’s oil reserves and is at the center of the dispute between Baghdad and Erbil.

Talabani said UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s visit to Baghdad earlier this

month, efforts by Nujeifi and a declaration by Iraq’s influential Shia saying that a war between the country’s Arabs and Kurds is religiously forbidden, “had positive results on the crisis.”

“But the people want the situation to normalize completely,” he said.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/5537.html>

2. IRAN

• Cuban President to Visit Iran Next Year

TEHRAN (FNA)- Cuban President Raul Castro, who has on many occasions lauded Iran's campaign against imperialism, is scheduled to visit Tehran next year, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez announced on Thursday.

The Cuban president is expected to pay an official visit to Iran next year, Rodriguez said in a meeting with Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for European and American Affairs Ali Asqar Khaji in Havana today.

He also said that his country fully backs the Islamic Republic of Iran at mutual, regional and international levels.

Rodriguez said relations between Tehran and Havana are strategic and Cuba supports Iran's legitimate right to make use of peaceful nuclear energy.

Iran has sought to expand ties and cooperation with Latin America, specially since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ascended to power seven years ago.

In line with the same policy, President Ahmadinejad has gone on several official trips to major Latin American countries, including Brazil, Cuba, Bolivia and Venezuela.

During his visits, Ahmadinejad has signed a number of agreements with the leaders of Latin America in a bid to strengthen Iran's foothold in South America.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107126793>

- **Iranian Deputy FM Meets Chinese Top Diplomat in Beijing**



TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Oceania Seyed Abbas Araqchi in a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on Thursday discussed the bilateral relations between Tehran and Beijing as well as the latest regional developments.

During the meeting in Beijing, the two sides called for settlement of Syrian crisis through peaceful means without interference of aliens.

Underlining the need for further expansion of Tehran-Beijing all-out relations, they studied the latest developments in the Middle East region mainly Syria and Afghanistan as well as Iran's peaceful nuclear program.

Meanwhile, the two sides studied sales of oil, investments of Chinese companies in Iran and expansion of bilateral trade transactions.

Araqchi arrived in China on Tuesday night to confer with the country's high ranking officials on regional and global developments.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107126781>

- **Diplomat: Iran-Iraq Trade Ties to Surpass \$12bln**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The value of the trade ties between Iran and Iraq will exceed \$12bln this year thanks to the two countries' growing cooperation, a senior Iranian diplomat announced on Thursday.

Iran's exports to Iraq worth some \$11 billion last year and the figure is expected to exceed \$12 billion this year, Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Hassan Danayeefer said in a meeting with a group of Iranian and Iraqi entrepreneurs in Tehran.

He also said that Iraq's free economy has created a suitable room for the country's exporters to play key roles in the world markets and the opportunity should be seized by Iranian companies to present their products to that country.



Iran and Iraq have enjoyed growing ties ever since the overthrow of the former Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, in 2003.

Both sides are working on a series of plans to take wide strides in expanding their ties, in economic fields in particular.

Iranian energy officials said in September that the country will start supplying natural gas to neighboring Iraq by the summer of 2013.

Head of the National Iranian Gas Company Javad Oji said Iran has completed more than 25 percent of a pipeline to Iraq that could carry up to 25 million cubic meters per day of its natural gas to Iraq.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107126777>

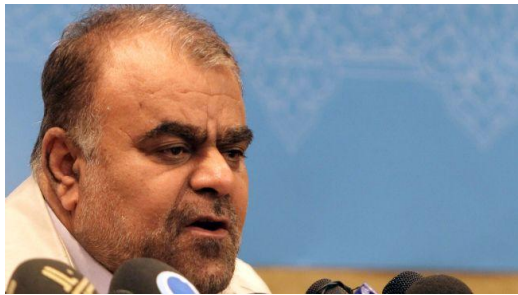
- **Progress made in talks with Iran in Tehran: IAEA**

The International Atomic Energy Agency says progress was made during the talks between the IAEA and Iran in the capital Tehran on Thursday.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/14/277953/iaea-progress-made-in-talks-with-iran/>

- **Iran has not withdrawn from OPEC chief candidacy: Oil minister**

Iran's Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi has rejected reports that the Islamic Republic has withdrawn its candidacy for the position of secretary general of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).



Talking to reporters on Thursday, Qasemi rejected reports that Iran had withdrawn its candidacy in favor of Iraq and added, "Iran still vies with Iraq and Saudi Arabia" to obtain the post.

He said that prior to the OPEC Wednesday meeting, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia had nominated candidates for the post but the member states did not reach an agreement during a closed session and thus they all agreed unanimously that the current secretary general Abdullah al-Badry remains in his post for another year.

He said that the Iranian candidate nominated for the post is qualified in every aspect, adding an impartial team would evaluate the candidates for the post.

Qasemi also said that the organization agreed to stick to its oil production ceiling of 30 barrels per day.

OPEC is a Vienna-based intergovernmental organization of 12 oil-producing countries.

It is made up of Algeria, Angola, Ecuador, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/14/277951/iran-still-vies-for-opec-chief-post/>

- **US imposes new sanctions on Iranian firms, experts**

The United States has imposed fresh sanctions on seven Iranian companies and five nuclear experts for contributing to the country's nuclear energy program.

"These entities and individuals were designated because they provide the Iranian government goods, technology and services that increase Iran's ability to enrich uranium and/or construct a heavy water moderated research reactor," US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said on Thursday.

The bans, imposed by the State and Treasury departments, will block any American business with the designated firms and people.

"We hope those financial institutions will act in a manner that preserves their access to the US financial system by cutting financial ties to these nuclear support companies," Nuland said.

The fresh sanctions came after the Senate approved a new round of sanctions against Iran's energy, port, shipping and shipbuilding sectors on November 30 in its

latest effort to mount economic pressure on the Islamic Republic over its nuclear energy program.

Iran has been under various sanctions mostly imposed by the United States over the past three decades since the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

Sanctions in the past years have been imposed based on the unfounded accusation that the Islamic Republic is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran vehemently rejects the allegations, arguing that as a committed signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it has the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities but has never found any evidence showing that Iran's civilian nuclear program has been diverted to nuclear weapons production.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/14/277940/us-imposes-fresh-sanctions-on-iran/>

- **Soltanieh: Iran, IAEA to talk again in Tehran in January 2013**

Iran's Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Ali Asghar Soltanieh says Tehran and the UN nuclear watchdog have agreed to hold a next round of talks again in Tehran in January 2013.

“At the end of this meeting, both sides agreed to have the next meeting on 16th of January,” Soltanieh told Press TV on Thursday after the conclusion of one day of negotiations between Iran and IAEA delegates in the Iranian capital.

“This round of talks was constructive and good progress was made,” he said, adding that the negotiations were “intensive.”

Soltanieh also noted that the two sides failed to reach agreement over a visit requested by the IAEA delegation to the Parchin site, which is located outside Tehran.

Previous to the Thursday negotiations, the two sides had met and talked in Vienna on August 24, 2012.

The United States, Israel, and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran argues that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the IAEA, it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities, but has never found any evidence of divergence towards military objectives in the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy program.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/13/277899/iran-iaea-to-talk-again-in-jan-2013/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Arab League calling in pledges to fund PA**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The Arab League has begun calling in donor pledges to Palestine from its members, but cannot confirm the exact date the so-called Arab safety net will be transferred to the government.



Assistant Secretary General of Palestine Affairs in the Arab League Mohammad Sbeih told Ma'an on Thursday evening that the group had opened communications with Arab states over the \$100 million monthly payment promised on Sunday.

He said the date of the first payment had yet to be determined.

Sbeih said they have yet to get official responses, and will send formal communiques to Arab states on Sunday to ascertain their position towards contributions.

Some Arab states might decline to contribute due to their own financial problems, he said. Meanwhile, he noted that Kuwait and Saudi Arabia recently transferred funds to the Palestinian Authority, while Egypt donated money for Gaza's electricity bill.

The monthly donation from the Arab League will be split according to each member states' contribution to the League budget, Sbeih said.

The safety net is meant to cushion the indebted Palestinian Authority government while Israel withholds part of its tax revenues, most recently after Palestine won a membership upgrade at the UN on Nov. 29.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=547838>

- **Thousands celebrate Hamas anniversary in West Bank**

NABLUS (Ma'an) -- Thousands of Hamas supporters rallied in the West Bank on Thursday for the first time since the movement's violent split from Fatah in 2007.

The festival in Nablus celebrated the 25th anniversary of the founding of Hamas under the banner "Sijjil stones are the path to freedom," in reference to a Quranic verse.

The secretary-general of Fatah's revolutionary council Amin Maqboul, Nablus governor Jibrin al-Bakri and other Fatah officials joined the rally, which began at the al-Nasr Mosque in the Old City of Nablus.

Khalif Assaf, who heads a coalition of independent leaders, said the festival marked the beginning of the end of national division.



"We tell all those who try to block the reconciliation, enough! The people have spoken that it's time to reconcile," Assaf told Ma'an.

Amid a sea of green Hamas flags, demonstrators chanted: "From Gaza to the West Bank, our unity is honorable, a national reconciliation, Fatah, Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine."

A day earlier President Mahmoud Abbas phoned Hamas chief Khalid Mashaal to discuss the possibility of ending the division according to prior agreements, a Fatah official said.

Azzam al-Ahmad said Abbas phoned Mashaal to accelerate implementing national unity. Abbas talked with him about his first visit to Gaza, and about Hamas' anniversary celebrations.

Al-Ahmad said he met Mashaal on Wednesday and a member in Fatah's central committee as part of new efforts to see if a reconciliation deal could finally be implemented.

Al-Ahmad said it was too soon to say when a meeting in Cairo with all the factions would take place, as Hamas officials were still in Gaza for the anniversary and Egypt is holding a constitutional referendum.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=547752>

- **Abbas Meets Portuguese President in Lisbon**

LISBON, December 13, 2012 (WAFA) – President Mahmoud Abbas Thursday met with his Portuguese counterpart Anibal Cavaco Silva and discussed the bilateral Palestinian-Portuguese relations.

Abbas and Silva discussed means of strengthening relations between the two countries in the light of the United Nations General Assembly vote that upgraded Palestine to a non-member observer state.

Abbas arrived in Portugal on Wednesday on a three-day visit.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21318>

- **European Parliament Issues Resolution on Israel's Decision to Expand Settlements**

STRASBURG, December 13, 2012 (WAFA) - The European Parliament Expressed its deepest concern regarding the Israeli government's announcement to build approximately 3000 new housing units in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, stressing that such expansion may represent a step undermining the prospects of a viable Palestine with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both it and Israel, Thursday said an EU press release.

Hereby is the full resolution:

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Charter of the United Nations,

- having regard to pertinent UN resolutions, in particular UN General Assembly resolution 181 (1947) and UN Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 252 (1968), 338 (1973), 476 (1980), 478 (1980), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), and 1850 (2008),

- having regard to the Oslo Accords (“Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements”) of 13 September 1993,

- having regard to the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 18 September 1995,

- having regard to the statements of VPC/HR Catherine Ashton, in particular those on settlement expansion of 8 June 2012 and 2 December 2012

- having regard to the decision of the United Nations General Assembly of 29 November 2012 to accord Palestine non-member observer state status,

-having regard to the Council conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process of 10 December 2012 and of 14 May 2012,

- having regard to Rule 110 (2) of its Rules of Procedure,

The Israeli government announced on 2 December 2012 the planned construction of 3000 new settlement units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; whereas, if implemented, the announced plans would

undermine the viability of the two-state solution, with special regard to the E1 area, where settlement constructions would divide the West Bank in two, rendering the creation of a viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian state impossible

B. whereas the Israeli government announced the withholding of USD 100 million in Palestinian tax revenues; whereas monthly tax transfers are a crucial element in the Palestinian Authority's budget; whereas Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz said that tax revenues were withheld to pay off Palestinian debts to the Israeli Electric Corporation;

C. Whereas the EU has repeatedly confirmed its support for the two-state solution, with the state of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable state of Palestine living side by side in peace and security,

D. whereas the Oslo Accords of 1993 divided the territory of the West Bank into three zones: Areas A, B and C; whereas Area C, which is under Israeli civil and security control, constitutes 62 % of the

territory and is the only continuous area, with most of the fertile and resource-rich land in the West Bank; whereas the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 1995 stated that Area C would be gradually transferred to Palestinian jurisdiction;

E. whereas the United Nations General Assembly decided on 29 November 2012 by an overwhelming majority, with 138 votes in favor, 9 against, and 41 abstentions, to accord Palestine non-member observer state status in the UN;

1. Expresses its deepest concern about the Israeli government's announcement regarding the planned construction of approximately 3000 new housing units in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem;

2. stresses again that such expansion may represent a step undermining the prospects of a viable Palestine with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both it and Israel;

3. Stresses that Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem are illegal under international law; calls for an

immediate, complete and permanent freeze of all Israeli settlement construction, expansion activities, and a stop to further evictions of Palestinian families from their homes and demolition of Palestinian houses;

4. Condemns the declarations made by the political leader of Hamas, Khaled Meshal, rejecting the recognition of the State of Israel and clearly refusing any Israeli presence in Jerusalem and calls on Hamas to recognize Israel's right to exist;

5. Deeply regrets the decision by the Israeli government to withhold USD 100 million in Palestinian tax revenues, which undermines the budget of the Palestinian Authority, and calls for the immediate transfer of these revenues and encourages involved parties to settle all outstanding financial disputes under the mediation of the EU;

6. Reiterates again its strong support for the two-state solution on the basis of the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as capital of both states, with a secure State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security;

stresses again that peaceful and non-violent means are the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians and calls in this context for the resumption of direct peace talks between the two parties; calls on all parties to refrain from any unilateral action which may undermine or hinder peace efforts and the prospects of a negotiated peace agreement;

7. Calls again for full and effective implementation of all existing EU legislation and EU-Israel bilateral agreements by the EU and its Member States, and stresses that all provisions of the EU-Israel Association Agreement concerning the respect of human rights of the Palestinians; reiterates the EU's commitment to ensure continued, full and effective implementation of existing European Union legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products;

8. Continues to call, in the same spirit, for Palestinian reconciliation, which is the way to re-unite Palestinians living in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, who are parts of the same Palestinian people;

9 Urges the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government to re launch the Middle East peace process; moreover stresses the importance of protecting the Palestinian population and its rights in Area C and in East Jerusalem, which is essential for keeping the viability of the two-state solution alive;

10. Urges the EU and the Member States again to play a more active political role, also within the Quartet, in the efforts aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians; supports the High Representative/Vice President in her efforts to create a credible perspective for re launching the peace process;

11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the EU Special Representative to the Middle East Peace Process, the President of the UN General Assembly, the governments and parliaments of the UN Security Council

members, the Middle East Quartet Envoy, the Knesset and the Government of Israel, the President of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Legislative Council.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21319>

- **Poll: Likud Beytenu down to 35 seats, Bayit Yehudi up to 16**

By GIL HOFFMAN

'Post' poll, done prior to AG's decision on Liberman, shows mandates shifting further to the Right; 54% think Israel's diplomatic situation has deteriorated over the past 4 years; 40% happy with Netanyahu as prime minister.

The joint Likud-Yisrael Beytenu list would win only 35 seats in the next Knesset – seven fewer than their 42 in the outgoing parliament – according to a Geocartography poll taken for The Jerusalem Post Group's Hebrew daily the Israel Post in honor of its inaugural weekend edition (Sof Hashavua), which will come out on Friday.

The poll of 500 respondents, representing a statistical sample of the country's

population, was taken on Wednesday, before Attorney-General Yehuda Weinstein announced his decision about Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman. It was the same day that Liberman's attacks on Europe at The Jerusalem Post Diplomatic Conference in Herzliya dominated headlines.

When asked whether the country's diplomatic situation had improved or worsened over the past four years, 54.1 percent of respondents said it had worsened, 15.4% said it had improved, and 23.6% said there had been no change.

The poll, which has a 4.2-percentage point margin of error, found that mandates from the Likud and Yisrael Beytenu would not shift to Center-Left parties, but to Bayit Yehudi, further to the Right, which would rise from three seats in the current Knesset to 16. The Tzipi Livni Party, which formed to attract votes from the Right by highlighting the diplomatic issue, would win only seven seats, according to the poll.



Labor would win 17 seats, Yesh Atid 12, Shas 10, United Torah Judaism and Meretz six each, Hadash and United Arab List four apiece, and Balad three.

Kadima, Am Shalem, Strong Israel and Green Leaf would not pass the 2-percent electoral threshold.

When asked about Binyamin Netanyahu's performance as prime minister, 40.3% gave him a good grade, 17.7% said he was average, and 34% called his performance bad. Asked whom they wanted to see as defense minister in the next government, 35.3% said Vice Premier Moshe Ya'alon, 32.3% said current Defense Minister Ehud Barak, 10.1% said Liberman, and 12.4% said none of the above.

Regarding the country's security situation, 28.6% said it had worsened over the past four years, 26.2% said it had improved, and 28.7% considered it the same.

Twenty-four percent of the respondents said their personal economic situation had improved over the past four years, 38.7% said it was the same, and 31.5% said it had worsened.

Nevertheless, Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz was still the top candidate for his post with 31.3% support, compared to 20.4% for Labor leader Shelly Yacimovich and 13% for Liberman; 24% said none of the above.

Asked if they believed Balad MK Haneen Zoabi should be permitted to run for Knesset, 69.4% said no, and only 13.4% said yes.

A Smith Research poll conducted for The Jerusalem Post on Wednesday found that 31% of Israelis blame Livni for the failure of the Center-Left parties to unite, 16% blame Yacimovich, 8% blame Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid, and 15% blame them all equally.

As for which of the three Center-Left parties they prefer to see in a Likud-led coalition, 28% said Labor, 24% said Yesh Atid, and 17% said The Tzipi Livni Party.

An overwhelming plurality (40%) preferred Bayit Yehudi as a coalition partner compared to haredi (ultra-Orthodox) parties, while 15% preferred Shas, 5% UTJ, and 38% none of the above.

The Smith poll predicted 29 seats for Likud Beytenu, up two mandates from Smith's last poll two weeks ago. Labor would win 19, Bayit Yehudi and Shas 10, Lapid's and Livni's parties nine each, UTJ six, Meretz, Hadash and Balad four each, and Am Shalem and UAL-Ta'al three apiece.

Kadima and Strong Israel would not pass the threshold.

The poll of 500 respondents had a 4.5-percentage point error margin.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=295918>

- **FM to consult lawyers on possible resignation**

By BEN HARTMAN, YONAH JEREMY BOB

After A-G says he will indict Liberman for fraud, breach of trust, FM says he sees no

reason to resign despite calls for him to do so.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman responded defiantly on Thursday to Attorney-General Yehuda Weinstein's decision to charge him with fraud and breach of the public trust, while clearing him on more serious allegations including money-laundering and bribery.

Liberman denied all wrongdoing and called for expedited legal proceedings.

"According to the legal opinion given to me, I do not have to resign," an upbeat Liberman told applauding supporters in Tel Aviv. "A final decision will be made after consultation with my lawyers and in the consideration of not hurting the voting public."

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu welcomed the attorney-general's decision to drop the biggest charges against Liberman, brushing aside the planned indictment for fraud and breach of public trust.

"I believe in the legal system in Israel and respect it," Netanyahu said. "The right it

gives each citizen in Israel to defend himself applies to Minister Liberman as well, and I wish him the best in proving his innocence on the single issue that is left.”

The indictment focuses on alleged obstruction of justice in Liberman’s efforts in 2009 to promote former ambassador to Belarus Ze’ev Ben-Aryeh, who had leaked him privileged information about a police probe pertaining to Liberman.

The foreign minister struck a defiant tone at a Yisrael Beytenu Youth function held at the Fashion Bar club in Tel Aviv on Thursday night.

He said he wanted to “set the record straight” and described himself as the victim of one long investigation that never let up for a single day since he became director of then-prime minister Netanyahu’s office in July 1996.

“Since July 1996, I’ve been under one long investigation, since then, not a single day has passed that I was not an investigative target...all part of one long investigation, with the name changing from time to time,” he said.

Liberman said no promotion had been given to Ben- Aryeh, nor was there any conflict of interest, adding that while he was in Minsk for a visit as an opposition MK, he had met with Ben- Aryeh in his hotel room. He said Ben-Aryeh had given him an envelope and “I opened it. At first I didn’t understand what this was. I took a look, I told him to leave this nonsense alone. I threw it aside and I left the hotel. That was it.”

Liberman said that he later hired Ben-Aryeh at the Foreign Ministry because of his talents and expertise, and that he's thought many times about what happened, but doesn’t think he would act differently if given the chance.

“I think like any other reasonable person, I would not have acted differently. Here I try to replay everything that happened, if I would have acted differently, and told him, from now you're fired and then go and testify about the story to everyone, I would think that in the morning I wouldn't have been able to look at myself in the mirror. That’s the whole story.”

“If after all these years, that’s the story and I have to pay the price, I’ll pay the

price,” Lieberman said, adding that he would give up his parliamentary immunity and hope for as quick a trial as possible.

Lieberman said that while in the past he had vowed to resign immediately if indicted “back then that dealt with a serious indictment, this is a different case.”

He also said there is public interest involved, and since Yisrael Beytenu was elected by over 400,000 voters, there would be an infringement on the desires of the public if he were to resign.

He added that he would consult with his lawyers about resigning, and make a decision while also taking into account the public consideration.

“I’m sure I’ll make the right decision,” Lieberman concluded.

Weinstein’s decision to charge the Yisrael Beytenu chairman with fraud on Thursday was a shocking last-second turn of events in what was overall supposed to be a major Lieberman victory of being indicted only for breach of public trust.

Weinstein took the first step in the indictment process when he sent the text of the charge sheet to Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin, asking him to remove Lieberman’s parliamentary immunity so that the indictment could be filed in court.

Debates had swirled about whether Lieberman would not need to resign, since the applicable law and the courts are not clear on whether breach of public trust is a serious crime.

Fraud, on the other hand, is the paradigm financial crime, and the only thing worse in financial crimes is bribery.

A resignation is not certain, as this is only an indictment and not a conviction.

The law and judicial decisions do not require resignation for all indictments.

But there is case law that serious charges, among which most would include fraud, require resignation.

To the extent that Lieberman may not need to resign, it would likely be because his alleged fraudulent “sins” were mostly

ones of omission, meaning not doing something he should have done.

Some consider that less serious than actively committing fraud.

But failure to report Ben- Aryeh's illegal conduct was not all that Weinstein hit Liberman with. The indictment also essentially alleges that Liberman gave Ben- Aryeh new Foreign Ministry jobs as "payment" for the illegal leaks to him.

There is no allegation that there was a deal cut beforehand, but that may not make a difference.

The "main" case (known as such because it started between six and 16 years ago, depending on whom you ask) which was closed had involved allegations against Liberman of receiving millions of dollars from private business people through straw companies between the years 2001 and 2008, while he was a member of Knesset and a cabinet minister.

The foreign minister had already undergone an unusual three pre-indictment hearing with the state attorney, and many times Weinstein has

said he would decide whether to submit an indictment against him.

But on November 8, the State Attorney's Office responded to a petition to the High Court of Justice demanding a decision on the case, stating that Weinstein would decide within about a month and before the January 22 election.

Three years after the prosecution first received the case, Weinstein finally came through with the decision to close the case.

The Ben-Aryeh indictment alleges that Liberman and Ben-Aryeh knew each other for years before Ben-Aryeh worked for him as an ambassador in the Foreign Ministry.

The indictment alleged that Ben-Aryeh received a request for legal assistance from the Justice Ministry on February 27, 2008, which he was supposed to transmit to the Belarus officials as an official request to help the ministry gather evidence against Liberman in Belarus, including documents and witness testimony.

Sometime between October 19 and 23, 2008, Liberman visited Belarus.

Ben-Aryeh met him at Liberman's hotel and asked to meet with Liberman in private, said the indictment.

During the private meeting in Liberman's room, Ben-Aryeh showed Liberman the investigative material that he was entrusted to transmit to the Belarus officials, including a note with some of the key information that Liberman reviewed and placed in his pocket, the indictment said.

The indictment said that Liberman accepted the information knowing that Ben-Aryeh was trying to aid him illegally in combatting the investigation against him.

Subsequently, Liberman offered Ben-Aryeh a position as an adviser in his bureau in the Foreign Ministry, which Ben-Aryeh started at on April 16, 2009.

From October to December 2009, Liberman aided Ben-Aryeh in moving forward to receive the ambassadorship to Latvia, omitting at several opportunities to

reveal that Ben-Aryeh had illegally shared information with him, said the indictment.

Ben-Aryeh was approved for the new post and would have started it, except that the investigation against him for leaking to Liberman became public.

Last May, Ben-Aryeh was convicted of obstruction of justice as part of a plea bargain, and it is assumed that he has provided the state with significant evidence.

Reacting to Thursday's announcement, Liberman was defiant, if in a slightly more understated tone than typical.

He accused the state of conducting a 16-year rolling investigation against him, pledged that at least for the moment, he would not resign pending discussion with his lawyers, and detailed his narrative of why he was innocent.

The narrative was essentially that he did not really review what Ben-Aryeh tried to show him, gave it back to Ben-Aryeh telling him to "stop fooling around," and that when he helped to promote Ben-Aryeh it was a unanimous decision with

other members of a panel because of his strong credentials.

Liberman did not directly explain why he believed it was acceptable that he “forgot” the matter and failed to report on Ben-Aryeh.

Liberman may eventually not have a choice about resigning. Even with political support and with Weinstein not directly calling for his resignation, Weinstein's condemnation, including in the main case that was closed, was apparent.

Weinstein may not defend Liberman in court if and when a petition is filed with the High Court to compel his resignation.

Liberman had previously committed publicly to resigning if indicted, but he had been referring to the main case, not the Ben- Aryeh matter, which came later.

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=295860>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Leader of main Moroccan Islamist opposition group dies**

Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine who formed Morocco's biggest Islamist movement al-Adl Wal Ihsane and the major player in last year's protests that led the monarchy to institute constitutional reforms, dies

The leader of Morocco's main opposition group al-Adl Wal Ihsane died on Thursday, raising questions over the future of an Islamist group that played a central role in Arab Spring protests last year.

Abdessalam Yassine formed the group 1981. It is banned from formal politics but is believed by analysts and diplomats to be the only opposition organisation capable of mass mobilisation in the North African state.

It was a major player in protests last year that led the monarchy to institute constitutional reforms to dilute some of its extensive powers - an usual step for a group previously more focused on religion than politics and protest.

The protests petered out after Al-Adl Wal Ihsane (Justice and Spirituality) withdrew over disputes with secularists.

"With a heavy heart Al-Adl Wal Ihsane announces to its members, sympathisers, the Moroccan people and the Islamic nation the death of one of its great men, the great guide Abdessalam Yassine," a statement on its website said.

Hassan bin Najeh, spokesman for the group's youth section said Sheikh Yassine, born in 1928, had been suffering from influenza and his health had been frail for some time.

His funeral is set to take place in Rabat on Friday and could become a focus for anti-government protest.

It was not clear who would succeed Yassine, who served several terms in prison for opposition to the monarchy, and analysts saw conflict over the future direction of the group.

"He was one of the great opponents of the monarchy. He could have gathered hundreds of thousands of people in a city like Casablanca but never did because he wanted avoid confrontation," said political scientist Maati Monjib.

"After his death, there will be a fight between the different wings of Al-Adl Wal Ihsane that want to focus on politics and preaching, which could cause a split."

Constitutional Changes

The group stands apart from the Islamist PJD party, which was formed in the late 1990s and won elections last year that had been brought forward as part of the king's efforts to end the protest movement.

While King Mohammed allowed the PJD leader Abdelilah Benkirane to form the first Islamist-led government in Morocco, Sheikh Yassine's group remained outside the system for its refusal to recognise the king's self-styled status as "Commander of the Faithful".

That position would almost certainly have to change if the group sought to move into the political mainstream.

"People will be waiting to see who will replace him and whether that results in a new direction. Number one issue is whether they'd move to forming a political party," a Western diplomat said. "The constitution is clear that you have

can't political parties that are overtly anti-monarchy."

The group also views the constitutional changes that, on the face of it, limited royal control to military, security and religious affairs, as only cosmetic.

"People are now convinced the steps taken in Morocco are more or less superficial, which is exactly how the regime responded to pressure in the past," its spokesman Fathallah Arsalane told Reuters last week.

"It's become clear that it is the monarchy in control."

Many Arab Sunni clerics disapproved of the strong flavour of Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, to Yassine's group, which was not close to organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Ennahda in Tunisia that have risen to power after the uprisings there. That limits their danger for the authorities.

Yassine, who hailed from a Berber village in the south of Morocco and grew up in Marrakech, was jailed for three years after he addressed a letter to King Hassan in the

1974 calling for implementation of sharia, or Islamic law.

He was held for two years again after forming his political group and spending 10 years under house arrest until King Hassan's son succeeded him in 1999.

He called on the new king too to turn to the "true Islam" and surrender the monarchy's assets to the state but while the authorities left him alone, his party remained banned.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/60464/World/Region/Leader-of-main-Moroccan-Islamist-opposition-group-.aspx>

- **Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church to take part in constitutional poll**

Pope Tawadros II says Egypt's Coptic Church will not push its congregants to vote either 'yes' or 'no' in upcoming referendum on draft constitution

At a Thursday meeting with the Council of Catholic Churches in Egypt, Pope Tawadros II, head of Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church, said that Christians in Egypt enjoyed "complete freedom" to

participate in the upcoming constitutional referendum, stressing that Copts should "go and vote."

Tawadros II also stressed at the meeting that the Orthodox Church would not push Christians to vote either 'yes' or 'no' in the upcoming poll.

The Orthodox Church sent a memo earlier on Thursday to the presidency regarding constitutional draft articles that it did not approve of.

Meanwhile, the Anglican and Catholic churches in Egypt announced their intention to take part in a third round of national dialogue – aimed at resolving the current political impasse – to be hosted by the presidency on Thursday.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/60439/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-Coptic-Orthodox-Church-to-take-part-in-cons.aspx>

- **Opposition denies presidency attempts at dialogue**

President Mohamed Morsy on Sunday appointed former Court of Cassation Vice

President Mahmoud Mekky as vice president.
other

Vice President Mahmoud Mekky held a third national dialogue session on Thursday with a number of political figures and legal experts to discuss the new draft constitution and ways to resolve the political crisis surrounding it.

The first session was on Saturday, but civilian forces rejected the president's invitation unless he would postpone the rushed constitutional referendum in order to allow for true political dialogue. A second meeting was held earlier this week.



During Thursday's session the Committee of Experts, which was selected in the first session and chaired by former presidential candidate Mohamed Selim al-Awa,

discussed proposed amendments to the draft constitution. They also discussed the nomination criteria for Shura Council membership.

The presidency issued a statement on Thursday, saying it has relayed the results of the session to the political forces that did not attend in order to explore their views, adding that dialogue would remain open with these forces so as to reach national consensus as far as possible on the draft constitution.

Opposition forces have however denied this, describing the gesture as “a lie.”

“We received nothing from the presidency,” said Emad Gad, vice president of the Social Democratic Party. “It was a session for the president and his supporters.”

Ahmed Bahaa Eddin Shaaban, coordinator of the National Association for Change, also said he did not receive anything from the presidency. “The president only invited the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist groups,” he said.

Mahmoud al-Alaily of the Egyptian Liberal Party said the National Salvation Front, which is the largest opposition group, did not receive anything either.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/opposition-denies-presidency-attempts-dialogue>

Carter Center says won't supervise constitutional referendum

-

US Congress delegation monitors presidential elections, Dokki, Giza, 23 May, 2012. Voting will take place on 23 and 24 May. Around 50 million voters will choose the new president from among 13 presidential candidates.

The Carter Center said on Thursday it would not send observers during the constitutional referendum scheduled for 15 and 22 December.

“The late release of regulations for observers precludes the Center from conducting a comprehensive assessment of all aspects of the referendum process, consistent with its methodology for professional observation of elections,” the center said in a statement.

At a press conference on Wednesday, the National Council for Human Rights announced that the High Judicial Elections Committee (HJEC) sent it 20,000 authorizations for civil society observers to monitor the referendum, and had granted it the power to decide which observers are to be authorized.



Human rights organizations said in a statement on Wednesday that the HJEC is the only body empowered to decide on permits for observers. They criticized the human rights council for imposing its guardianship, noting that the majority of its members belong to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Constituent Assembly at the same time, and therefore are not neutral.

Eight members have resigned from the council in protest against recent political

developments that followed the announcement of the controversial November Constitutional Declaration that exempted President Mohamed Morsy's decisions from judicial challenge, and in rejection of the president's insistence on holding a referendum on the draft constitution despite objections from a number of political forces.

The Carter Center said in its statement that a technical expert team may release further analysis of the process at a later date.

The statement added that the center "hopes to witness the upcoming Peoples' Assembly elections if the circumstances are conducive to meaningful observation and urges the Egyptian electoral authorities to take steps to ensure early accreditation of domestic and international election witnessing organizations."

The Carter Center previously deployed accredited witnesses throughout Egypt for both the parliamentary and presidential elections.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/carter-center-says-won-t-supervise-constitutional-referendum>

- **Libya PM seeks regional meeting to secure borders**

Libya's Prime Minister Ali Zeidan on Thursday called for a meeting to secure regional borders, as slain dictator Moammar Qaddafi's son shelters in Niger.

"We want to hold a meeting in Libya with Niger, Mali, Chad and Sudan to reach an agreement to secure the borders," Zeidan said after talks with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir.

"Libya will not support armed opposition groups and will not allow terrorists to cross the border supporting armed opposition groups which historically belonged to the Qaddafi regime," he said.

Zeidan's visit to Sudan came after a stop in Niger, where on Wednesday he reiterated a call for the extradition of Qaddafi's son Saadi.

Libya's neighbor Niger granted Saadi Qaddafi asylum in September 2011.

Saadi, who found shelter in Niger when his father's regime was crumbling, was best known as the head of Libya's football federation and a player who paid his way into Italy's top-flight football league.

Niger justified the move on "humanitarian" grounds, arguing it had insufficient guarantees Libya's new rulers would give Saadi Qaddafi a fair trial.

Around 30 senior officials from Qaddafi's regime are believed to have crossed into Niger at the same time, but the authorities in Niamey have not said how many remain on their soil.

When Qaddafi's regime fell last year to a popular uprising backed by NATO warplanes, his Tuareg hired guns fled south across the Sahara to their former homes in Mali and Niger in heavily armed convoys of off-road pick-up trucks.

The scattering of arms and fighters across the region after the Libyan conflict has created security problems, especially in Mali, where a Tuareg rebellion led to a military coup and an ensuing power vacuum that has enabled Islamist groups

to seize control of the north of the country.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/international/libya_pm_seeks_regional_meeting_to_secure_borders

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Opposition MPs comment on meetings with Lebanese speaker

Several Lebanese opposition MPs commented on their last round of meetings with Speaker Nabih Berri concerning the March 14 coalition's boycott of parliamentary activities.

"The meeting was positive," Samir al-Jisr said in remarks published by As-Safir newspaper on Friday.

The MP also said that the March 14 coalition's basic requirement was centered around providing the necessary protection for its MPs, adding that this did not contravene their readiness to discuss the electoral draft law referred by the government.

In other remarks made in an interview with Voice of Lebanon (100.5) radio

station, Jisr said that the meeting with Berri also discussed the idea of holding "one meeting inside parliament" for the sub-parliamentary committee charged with studying the electoral draft law for the 2013 parliamentary elections

Meanwhile, Kataeb bloc MP Elie Marouni told the Beirut daily that the opposition MPs will meet with the parliament speaker "for a third time" after two meetings, the latest of which took place on Thursday to the security of oppositions MPs and the safety of attending parliamentary meetings.

The opposition coalition, however, earlier this week voiced its readiness to take part in the meetings of a parliamentary sub-committee despite an earlier decision to boycott government and parliamentary activities.

Their decision to cut ties with the government came as a response to the recent return of political assassinations targeting figures associated with the opposition.

In turn, Future bloc MP Mohammad al-Hajjar told Voice of Lebanon (93.3) radio

station that during the meeting with Berri the MPs raised their concern over the attitude of March 8 toward the security threats faced by March 14 politicians.

“There are some in March 8 who do not accept that the sub-committee meetings should be held at the residence of a March 14 MP [as a security measure].”

Divisions across the political spectrum in Lebanon have pitted the March 8 group – whose politicians form the majority of the current government – and the March 14 opposition coalition, who have been at odds mainly over the crisis in neighboring Syria and its repercussions on Lebanon.

Concerns were raised about the attitude of March 8 toward the security threats faced by March 14 politicians.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonne/ws/opposition_mps_comment_on_meetings_with_lebanon_speaker

- **Charbel: Lebanon judiciary decides legality of Syria warrants**

Lebanon’s interior minister said that the country’s judiciary, and not its security forces, had the competency to rule

whether the arrest warrants issued by the Syrian authorities against Lebanese MPs were legal or not.

“The extent of the legality of the arrest warrant is not the responsibility of the security forces... The judiciary ultimately decides whether they are legal or not,” Marwan Charbel said in an interview with NOW.

“We do not study the case of lifting the parliamentary immunity off MPs, but it is rather the judiciary that does.”

Meanwhile, Future bloc MP Samir al-Jisr told NOW said that the Syrian authorities’ decision was a reaction to the request made by a Lebanese judge for two Syrian security officials to be questioned in Lebanon.

“Everybody knows that this is a reaction to the arrest warrants issued by the military public prosecution in the case of Mamluk-Samaha.”

On Monday, Government Commissioner to the Military Court Judge Saqr Saqr requested the questioning of two Syrian security officials - National Security chief

General Ali Mamluk and another Brigadier General who was identified only by his first name Adnan - implicated in the case of former Lebanese minister Michel Samaha.

The ex-information minister was indicted for a plan to foment terrorist plots in Lebanon.

The Lebanese judge's request was followed by the Syrian authorities decision to issue arrest warrants against Future Movement leader MP Saad Hariri and Future bloc MP Okab Sakr, as well as a spokesperson of the Free Syrian Army, Louay Almkdad, for allegedly arming Syrian rebels.

An expert in international law and international penal law also commented on the issue, telling NOW that the public prosecutor in Lebanon has the authority to request lifting the parliamentary immunity off the two Lebanese MPs targeted by the Syrian arrest warrants.

"If he decides otherwise, their trial would remain suspended," Shafiq al-Masri said.

Another international law expert told NOW that the Syrian judicial system had the right to rule in the case of arming the Syrian rebels, since "the crime was committed and it was admitted by the person who incited, escalated the matter, or committed the crime."

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/charbel_lebanon_judiciary_decides_legality_of_syria_warrants

- **Lebanese PM in favor of new government, against political vacuum**

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Miqati said that he is in favor of the formation of a new government but against political vacuum.

"I am with the formation of a new government but I will not leave the country to go into political vacuum, that is out of the question," Miqati tweeted on Thursday.

The Lebanese premier also said that "after we hold the dialogue and agree on a new electoral law, then the government will resign and a new one will be formed."

Late October, the March 14 opposition coalition announced that it was cutting all ties with the current government of Prime Minister Najib Miqati following the assassination of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces Intelligence Chief Wissam al-Hassan on October 19 in Beirut's Ashrafieh.

About the cabinet's decision regarding mobile phone messages data, Miqati said on his Twitter account that "the cabinet's decision was based on two primary issues: the freedom preserved by the constitution and the law on tracking communication traffic."

The Lebanese cabinet rejected on Wednesday the request made by security agencies to provide them with data of all mobile phone messages in the two months prior to the assassination of Internal Security Forces Intelligence Chief Wissam al-Hassan.

Regarding the Tripoli conflict, Miqati said that "the government is doing everything in its power to handle the situation," adding that "the solution to the city's security problem is through the true reconciliation of the two parties."

Tripoli has repeatedly been the locus of sectarian conflict linked to the troubles in Syria between pro- and anti-Syrian regime gunmen from Sunni and Alawite groups, whose rival districts — Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, respectively — are divided by the main thoroughfare Syria Street.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese_pm_in_favor_of_new_government_against_political_vacuum

6. SYRIA

• **Kurdish Council Agrees to Join Syrian Opposition Coalition**

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands — Syria's Kurdish National Council (KNC) has agreed to join the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), the largest umbrella of opposition forces against President Bashar al-Assad's regime, a senior official of the group said.

Abdulkhaleq Bashar, a member of the KNC executive bureau, said that the agreement came after discussions and negotiations with the SNC's leadership last week.

“The executive bureau of the KNC decided to participate in the (SNC) coalition, and there will be an official declaration in this regard soon,” Bashar told the Welati News Network on Monday.

He added that negotiations between the Kurdish and SNC delegations would continue on some unresolved issues during an upcoming conference of the Friends of Syria groups in Morocco.



“We insisted on the importance of responding to the demands of the Kurdish people in Syria, and we will keep negotiating with the different political forces in the Syrian National Coalition until we reach a fair solution for the Kurdish issue,” Bashar said.

He denied that the decision to join the SNC was taken without the consent of the Kurdish Supreme Committee, a Kurdish political coalition that includes the KNC

and the Popular Council of Western Kurdistan.

“We have been discussing this matter within the Kurdish Supreme Committee for a while. In fact, most of the Arab parties welcomed the participation of the KNC in the opposition coalition, but at the same time they refuse to accept the Popular Council of Western Kurdistan in their factions. Therefore, we decided, as KNC, to join the coalition after long negotiations with our partners.”

The KNC’s decision drew both support and criticism from Kurdish activists and academics, with some saying it would strengthen the Kurdish voice among the Syrian opposition, and others saying it would lead to divisions among the Kurds themselves.

Assad’s regime has been locked in a 20-month popular uprising that monitors say has so far killed more than 40,000 people.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/news/syria/5533.html>

- **Russia says regime losing control of Syria**

Assad regime losing control of 'more and more' of Syria, Russian deputy foreign minister says

A top Russian diplomat on Thursday said that the regime of President Bashar al-Assad is losing "more and more" control of Syria and a victory by the opposition cannot be ruled out.

"As for preparing for victory by the opposition, this, of course, cannot be excluded," Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov was quoted as saying by the ITAR-TASS news agency. "You need to look the facts in the eyes -- the government regime is losing more and more control over a large part of the country's territory.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/60412/World/Region/Russia-says-regime-losing-control-of-Syria.aspx>

- **Syria minister wounded in bombing: Security source**

Bomb attack targeting Ministry of Interior in Damascus wounds Syrian Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim Al-Shaar, kills five and leaves 22 others injured

Syrian Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim al-Shaar was wounded in a deadly bomb attack targeting his ministry on Wednesday but his condition is not serious, a security source told AFP.

"He was wounded in the shoulder when the ceiling fell in his office," the source said on Thursday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"He was taken to hospital but his condition gives no cause for concern and he should be discharged rapidly."

The triple bombing, using a booby-trapped car and two other devices, was made possible by a betrayal within the ministry's own protection service, the source said.

"It is impossible to get near the ministry gate except in an official vehicle," he added.

The attack killed five people and wounded 23, the state SANA news agency reported.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said nine people were killed.

It is the second time that the interior minister has been wounded in an attack.

Shaar narrowly escaped being killed in a spectacular July 18 bombing that claimed the lives of four other top security officials, including the defence minister and the brother-in-law of President Bashar al-Assad.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/60409/World/Region/Syria-minister-wounded-in-bombing-Security-source.aspx>

- **US: Russia 'finally waking up' to reality in Syria**

The United States Thursday welcomed an apparent shift in Russia's stand on Syria, saying it appeared Moscow was "finally waking up to the reality" that the regime was on its way out.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said earlier the Syrian regime "is losing more and more control over a large part of the country's territory."

Moscow has been a staunch ally of President Bashar al-Assad since opposition

rebels first launched their bid to topple him in March 2011.



With China, it has vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions, backed by the United States, aimed at imposing sanctions.

But Washington believes Moscow may be re-evaluating its stand.

"We want to commend the Russian government for finally waking up to the reality and acknowledging that the regime's days are numbered," State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland said.

"I think the question now is, will the Russian government join those of us in the international community who are working with the opposition to try to have a smooth democratic transition?"

The United States has called on all nations with influence in Syria to try to persuade Assad to quit and allow a political transition to begin.

"Our concern is that if we do not all use our influence with those in Syria, we will have a further ripping of the fabric of the country," Nuland told journalists.

"We will have further destruction to important infrastructure, important communities. We will have more tension between communities, which is just going to make it harder to rebuild Syria in a democratic, unified, peaceful, stable direction later."

Russia surprised the United States last week when Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed to take part with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in three-way talks with UN peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi in Dublin.

Top level officials then met at the weekend on Geneva, at which they held "constructive talks," Brahimi said. They discussed ways "to move forward a peaceful process and mobilize greater

international action in favor of a political solution to the Syrian crisis."

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala_testnews/us_russia_finally_waking_up_to_reality_in_syria

- **Scud use sign of desperate Syrian regime, analysts say**

Syria's use of Scud missiles against rebels, as claimed by Washington and rebel fighters, is a desperate move by a regime that has exhausted its military capacity, analysts say.

A US official told AFP on Wednesday that the regime had fired Scuds, and a former Syrian officer who served in a battalion specializing in surface-to-surface missiles also claimed troops had done so.

Damascus denied that it had used the missiles.

Karim Bitar, research director at the Institute for International and Strategic Relations, said: "Scuds are cumbersome, inaccurate and very expensive and there is no military justification for using them."

"Their use is therefore clearly part of the regime's psychological war against the rebels and countries that support them," he said.

Bitar said using Scuds was an indication that the regime was bracing for a decisive battle in Damascus, which "could change the rules of the game."

Riad Qahwaji, founder of the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA), said Scud missiles "are weapons of terror."

"They are used to make up for an inability to control the ground."

Scuds were last used by Libya's regime in the final days before Moammar Qaddafi was killed, said Qahwaji, referring to the 2011 NATO-backed rebel offensive against the longtime strongman.

"Here we are seeing a similar scenario," said Qahwaji. "It just shows the level of desperation. The regime has exhausted its military capabilities."

"It is like somebody with different size hammers. You use a small hammer first

and it doesn't work, so you use a bigger one till you reach the sledge-hammer."

Qahwaji said he believed the regime had a sizeable store of such weapons in army-controlled locations between Damascus and the Alawite heartland of Latakia on the coast.

Former first lieutenant Aaraba Idriss said he was still in contact with officers and members of his former Battalion 57, part of Brigade 155, despite defecting 10 months ago.

He said they told him they fired five Scud missiles for the first time on Monday from their location in Nasiriyeh on the highway between Damascus and the central Syrian city of Homs.

Idriss said the "Golan-1" missiles were either Russian-made or Russian modified" and had a range of up to 300 kilometers.



The Syrian foreign ministry categorically denied those claims, calling them "biased and conspiratorial rumors."

"It is known that Scuds are strategic, long-range missiles and are not suited for use against armed terrorist gangs," the Foreign Ministry said on Thursday.

However, a security source in Damascus told AFP on condition of anonymity on Thursday that the army had used a smaller, Syrian-made version of the Scud.

These developments come as the conflict, which has reportedly claimed more than 42,000 lives, enters its 22nd month.

In recent weeks, rebels have captured a series of key army bases and consolidated their grip on large swathes of northern and eastern Syria.

This has prompted Syria's long-time ally Russia to admit on Thursday that the increasingly bloody conflict in Syria might culminate in a rebel victory.

An AFP correspondent in northwestern Syria on Wednesday witnessed what

rebels said was the impact of a Scud, one of six missiles that hit around the Sheikh Suleiman army base, which they captured earlier this month.

"There were 21 olive trees here, now they're all gone," said the owner of the land where one of the missiles struck just outside the town of Darret Ezza.

No one was killed but the missiles shook the town, breaking windows and sparking fears of more attacks.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala_testnews/scud_use_sign_of_desperate_syrian_regime_analysts_say

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

• Saudi Arabia begins aluminium production

Built through a joint venture between Saudi Arabian Mining Company and US giant Alcoa, Saudi Arabia's first smelter has just begun aluminium production

Saudi Arabia on Thursday began aluminium production at its first smelter built through a joint venture between the

Saudi Arabian Mining Company (Ma'aden) and US giant Alcoa, a statement said.

"Today we see the first aluminium produced in Saudi Arabia, and the launch of a new industry," Ma'aden President and CEO Khalid al-Mudaifer said at the inauguration of production in Ras al-Khair in Eastern Province.

The Ma'aden Aluminium joint venture is 74.9 percent-owned by the Saudi group, with the rest held by Alcoa.

The smelter is part of a joint venture agreed in 2009 to construct a giant industrial complex costing \$10.8 billion.

In addition to the smelter which will have an initial annual capacity of 740,000 metric tonnes, the complex includes a bauxite mine with an initial capacity of four million metric tonnes per year, and an alumina refinery with an annual initial capacity of 1.8 million metric tonnes.

The complex also comprises a rolling mill with a capacity of 380,000 metric tonnes annually.

The smelter was built by Bechtel in 29 months.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/60437/World/Region/Saudi-Arabia-begins-aluminium-production.aspx>

- **New Bahrain call for talks as violence grows**

Concern that Al Wefaq is losing the Bahraini street in absence of dialogue as radicals step in

A policeman fires tear gas towards protesters during a demonstration supporting Bahrain human rights activist Nabeel Rajab, who was imprisoned for taking part in anti-regime protests.

Manama: Bahrain's crown prince has made a renewed appeal for dialogue to end the political impasse in the country, a call welcomed by the opposition, despite no end in sight to violent protests. Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa, widely viewed as a moderate member of the government took the opportunity when hosting a global security conference last week to invite the opposition to sit down and talk.

“We had our own experience of the so-called Arab Spring last year. It divided the nation, and many wounds are still to be healed,” he told the conference.

“I am convinced... that dialogue is the only way forward” he said. But he also said “opposition leaders must condemn violence on the streets. Silence is not an option,” while insisting that “political groups must be reconciled.”

For her part, State Minister for Information Samira Rajab told AFP that “dialogue is the only solution; a consensual dialogue between all forces to reach a comprehensive solution.”

Al Wefaq, the largest Shiite opposition formation, seized on the crown prince’s proposal and responded positively, but demanded a “serious dialogue” and said the results must be subject to a referendum.

The crown prince’s latest overture is just one in a series of calls he has made since February 2011.

The opposition has repeatedly said it was ready for a meaningful dialogue, but has

stuck to its demands for a real constitutional monarchy with an elected prime minister.

Khalil Al Marzouq, a former Al Wefaq MP, said the group was ready to talk.

“We are ready for dialogue without any conditions,” he said, reiterating his movement’s position, which does not challenge the government but demands that “the prime minister be named by the elected parliament.”

Current Prime Minister Prince Khalifa Bin Salman, an uncle of the king, has been in office since 1971.

Calls for his removal echo in almost every demonstration organised by Al Wefaq or any other Shiite opposition group.

But on the walls in Shiite villages outside Manama, graffiti calls for more: the departure of King Hamad.

In those villages black flags of mourning fly and portraits of the revered seventh century Emam Hussain are displayed next to posters of radical Shiite opposition

figures jailed following last year's crackdown on dissent.

Despite a clampdown in which a protest camp at Manama's Pearl Square was demolished and protesters were chased back to their villages, it was not long before demonstrators were back on the streets.

According to the International Federation for Human Rights, a total of 80 people have been killed in Bahrain since the violence began on February 14, 2011.

Confrontations between mostly youthful protesters and police occur frequently after calls made on social media networks by the "February 14 Movement," which was behind last year's protests.

The demonstrations in Shiite villages often turn violent with protesters using petrol bombs and police responding with tear gas and birdshot.

Key ally Washington urged the Bahraini authorities in November to exercise self-restraint.

Some observers questioned whether traditional opposition groups, mainly Al Wefaq, are in control over protests, as radical groups appear more active.

"We have not lost control of the street," insisted Al Marzouq, but adding that protesters' demands have become "stern," and acknowledging that "violence has increased."

Manama came under strong criticism from international rights group over last year's deadly crackdown.

An international panel commissioned by King Hamad found that excessive force and torture was used against protesters and detainees.

The government claims to have begun a robust implementation of the special commission's recommendations.

"Almost all those sacked" for taking part in protests, estimated at around 4,400 people, "have been reinstated in their jobs," and police have adopted a "new code of conduct," Rajab said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/news-bahrain-call-for-talks-as-violence-grows-1.1118270>

- **Saudi king leaves hospital after back surgery**

Abdullah had operation to correct ‘a ligamentary slackening in the upper back’

Riyadh: Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz left hospital on Thursday, nearly a month after undergoing back surgery, the royal court announced.

The 89-year-old monarch left the King Abdul Aziz Medical City in Riyadh on Thursday afternoon, the court said in a statement carried by the official SPA news agency.

On November 18, the royal court announced that Abdullah had undergone an operation to correct “a ligamentary slackening in the upper back.”

He appeared on state television on November 28 for the first time after the surgery, sitting in a wheelchair to receive royal dignitaries in his hospital suite.

He has made no further appearances since then.

The king’s absence from the public gaze had sparked growing rumours about his health on social networking website Twitter.

The king had a similar operation in October 2011.

In November 2010, he underwent surgery in New York for a slipped disc, complicated by a blood clot that put pressure on his spine. He then had a further operation that December before convalescing for a month in Morocco.

The king’s age and frequent hospitalisations have raised concerns about the future leadership of the world’s key oil producer.

The heir to the throne is his half-brother Crown Prince Salman, 76, who was named to the succession on the death of Prince Nayef in June.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-king-leaves-hospital-after-back-surgery-1.1118492>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Suicide Bomber Targets Afghan NATO Base**

December 13, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

A suicide car bomb attack on a NATO air base in southern Afghanistan has killed at least two people and injured 11 including three foreign troops.

Afghan officials said the attack happened after nightfall on December 13 and targeted the gate leading to the military airfield in the southern city of Kandahar.

The attack came hours after U.S Defense Secretary Leon Panetta had visited Kandahar.

A spokesman of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force confirmed the attack but did not provide any details.

Security in southern Afghanistan improved in the aftermath of a surge of international troops in 2010 but the former Taliban stronghold is still the scene of frequent Taliban attacks.

Based on reporting by AP, AFP, and Reuters

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

- **US-led foreign soldier killed in Kandahar car bomb attack**

Press TV

December 13, 2012

A US-led soldier has been killed and three others wounded in a car bomb attack that targeted an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) convoy outside a military base in southern Afghanistan, Press TV reports.

According to Afghan officials, the incident occurred on Thursday when a bomber detonated his explosive-laden vehicle on a road near the Kandahar airfield, the largest US air base in southern Afghanistan.

The blast hit NATO's ISAF forces as they were entering the base, a senior provincial police official said, adding that two civilians were also killed and at least 16 others wounded in the attack.

A spokesman for ISAF confirmed the attack, but stopped short of giving details of any ISAF casualties.

Last week, Taliban militants, armed with rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons, attacked a NATO base at Jalalabad airport in eastern Afghanistan.

The attackers killed five people and wounded several foreign troops in the two-hour battle, which also left a total of eight assailants dead.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power but led to massive civilian casualties that have continued to date.

The increasing number of military losses in Afghanistan has also caused widespread anger in the US and other NATO member states, undermining public support for the prolonged war.

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

- **10 injured as car bomb hits Kandahar airport**

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan, Dec. 13 (Xinhua) -- At least 10 Afghans were wounded Thursday in a suicide car bombing at the entrance of airport in southern Kandahar province, a provincial government spokesman said.

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

- **Armed men open fire in western Afghan town, kills, 2 police, wounds 1**

HERAT, Afghanistan, Dec. 13 (Xinhua) -- Unknown armed opened fire on a police van in the western Herat city 640 km west of Kabul on Thursday, leaving two police dead and injuring another, police spokesman in the western region Abdul Rauf Ahmadi said.

"Unknown armed men driving a car opened fire on the vehicle of a senior police officer in Herat city in the morning rush hour killing two police constables and wounding another," Ahmadi told Xinhua.

However, the senior police officer escaped unhurt, Ahmadi asserted without giving more details.

The attackers made their good escape, he confirmed.

Taliban militants fighting the government
and often target the government interests
are yet to comment.

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

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanrıverdi O. 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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