



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

**Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset**

**The Restructuring Proces of Iraq**

**Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci**

**Energy Security**

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## 1. IRAQ

- **Federal Government, KRG reach agreement regarding disputed areas (alliraqnews)**

Wednesday, 26 December 2012 22:18

Baghdad (AIN) –The Ministry of Defense of the Federal Government declared reaching a comprehensive agreement with the Kurdistan Regional Government regarding the management of the security file in the disputed areas.

The Acting Minister of Defense, Saadon al-Duliami, reported in a joint press conference with the Minister of Peshmerga, Sheikh Jaafar Mustafa, held in Baghdad after the joint meeting between the delegations of the FG and the KRG on Wednesday "The two sides have reached a comprehensive agreement regarding the management of the security file and to reduce all tensions' manifestation in the disputed areas."

"A delegation from Baghdad will head towards Erbil on next Sunday to sign the final agreement, "the statement added.

The Office of the Commanding General of Armed Forces declared that the agreement that was concluded between the Iraqi Federal Army and the Peshmerga Forces to withdraw their military elements deployed in the disputed areas after the recent crisis.

- **Jafari, Maliki stress necessity to preserve unity, overcome hardship (NINA)**

26/12/2012 23:01:00

Baghdad (NINA) – Leader of the National Alliance, Ibrahim al-Jafari, discussed with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, political developments and regional situation.

A statement to the press issued on Wednesday, Dec. 26, by the Media Office of the National Alliance said that Jafari received al-Maliki, discussing latest developments Iraqi and regional arenas are witnessing.

It added that Jafari and Maliki stressed necessity to preserve Iraq's national unity and overcome hardship facing the political process, as well as the necessity for Iraq to play its pioneer role in the area.

- **KRG: "Talabani's health improves" (alliraqnews)**

Wednesday, 26 December 2012 22:58

Sulaimaniya (AIN) –The Government of Kurdistan Region confirmed that "The health of the President Jalal Talabani, is constantly improving."

The Office of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan cited "The member of the political bureau, Emad Ahmed, of the PUK has a meeting with the Vice-President of Kurdistan Region with the attendance of Sulaimaniya Governor Mohamed Salih."

The statement added "The meeting included, discussions to provide the best services for citizens," stressing that "The representatives of the PUK should be as responsible as they can be and loyal to their duties."

He pointed out that "The President Jalal Talabani is the leader and secretary of the PUK, as well as being the President of Iraq with all the Iraqi communities, Arab, Kurdish, sects and others."

- **IHEC announces approving 50 political alliances (alliraqnews)**

Wednesday, 26 December 2012 16:20

Baghdad (AIN) –The Deputy Head of the Commissioners Board of the Independent High Electoral Commission, Qatea al-Zubai, announced that the IHEC has approved 50 political alliances that comprise 174 political parties.

A statement by the IHEC received by AIN quoted Zubai, as saying "The IHEC approved 50 political alliances that comprise 174 political parties to participate in the next elections of the provincial councils."

He called "The political parties to expedite submitting the names of their candidates to the IHEC," noting that "The dead line to submit the names is the end of December 2012 which is not extendable."

- **Russian arms committee limits the responsibility for the deal to eight people (Shafaq News)**

26 Dec. 2012 - The investigation committee in the Russian arms deal revealed on Wednesday, the [limiting] of

the responsibility of the deal on eight people, including a Lebanese, a Russian and an adviser in the Iraqi presidency.

The member Committee, MP Ahmed al-Jubouri told "Shafaq News", that "the Committee voted unanimously on the Russian arms report deal after hearing more than 30 people."

He added that " the committee has been able to limit the responsibility of the deal on eight people only, including a Lebanese, a Russian and someone who works as an adviser in the presidency," noting that "the committee has not been confirmed to the moment of the eight people involvement."

"The adviser had gone alone to Russia without a mandate from the president or the Ministry of Defense, as the investigative committee is convinced that there are some people involved in the deal, which is something that will be discovered by the Integrity investigation Commission and prosecution."

Jubouri said that the committee had sent a letter to the military adviser to Russian President (Yoweri) as a party to the deal

by the Foreign Ministry as he stressed that the latter agreed to come as a witness and not as an accused to testify. "

The parliamentary investigation committee in charge of Russian arms deal had revealed last Thursday that it has completed the investigation with 30 figures involved in the investigation, noting that some of those figures received promises of "commissions" from the Russian side.

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

Iraq announced that it had canceled the deal after marred by what is believed to be corruption, as media circulated most prominent suspects' names including some close to Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki.

- **Issawi: Government creating crisis, must be toppled (NINA)**

26/12/2012 18:36:00

Ramadi / NINA /-- Finance Minister Rafie al-Issawi said Anbar demonstrations [...] embodied the public will.

Issawi said in a speech addressed to the demonstrators near the international highway in Ramadi: "Detective informant post must be abolished and as well as dealing using of paragraph four of what called anti-terrorism act, as pretext to launch arbitrary arrest against innocents and torturing exercises in prisons of the state stressed that a government create crises must be toppled as it proved its failure pointing to the multiple crisis noting the crisis earlier created with the Kurds, the Sadrist and today crisis with the Sunnis."

- **Issawi: The gathered mass in Anbar represents all components of the Iraqi people (NINA)**

26/12/2012 18:39:00

Ramadi / NINA/-- Finance Minister Rafie al-Issawi confirmed in his speech addressed to the demonstrators in Ramadi today that the mass gathered in Ramadi and in other cities of Anbar province does not represent a certain range, but represents all components of Iraqi people,

noting that he refuses to be called Sunnis gathering.

Issawi added: "you who merged in the streets only have the right to judge the legitimate demands, noting that the Iraqi judiciary is politicized and infiltrated by a specific goals.

Issawi ended as saying: "we will return to Baghdad and you will continue your noble task in order to achieve your demands as well as he warned demonstrators to be attentive and watching those who want sabotage, as he said.

- **Samarra' demonstrators reject Baghdad government policies (Aswat al-Iraq)**

12/26/2012 6:09 PM

SALAHAL-DIN/ Aswat al-Iraq: Security sources said here today that a protest demonstration took place against what called "denominational policies of the central government".

Coordination Center here told Aswat al-Iraq that more than two thousand demonstrators took part with slogans

denouncing denominationalism, racism and neglecting Sunni sect.

The source added that the demonstration lasted for three hours with the attendance of three parliamentary members, number of Salahal-Din provincial council members, tribal sheikhs, clergymen and NGOs.

On the other side, Anbar province witnessed massive peaceful demonstrations for the last four days in protest of arresting the bodyguards of Finance Minister Rafi' al-Issawi.

- **Governmental silence on Anbar demonstration criticized, MP (Aswat al-Iraq)**

12/26/2012 6:36 PM

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: State of Law MP Abdul Mehdi al-Khafaji criticized central government's silence on the "coup d'état" headed by political blocs, in reference to Anbar protest demonstrations.

He added that these demonstrations will lead to denominational war inside the country.

In a press statement, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, he added that these moves are made under the slogan of "opinion freedom", but added that "it the government kept silent, this move will be confronted with popular will".

He pointed out that some ex-regime elements are moving against the political process in the country, thus "we denounce governmental silence against this coup d'état".

Anbar demonstrations demanded stopping violating the rights of the political partners by premier Maliki and neglecting the Sunni sect.

- **Demonstrators reject "suspicious" goals, MP (Aswat al-Iraq)**

12/26/2012 6:28 PM

ANBAR/ Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqiya MP Ahmed al-Alwani said, during his participation in Anbar protest demonstration, that the demonstrators will not permit any political or party circles to use this event for "suspicious" goals.

Alwani told Aswat al-Iraq that that the demonstrators came to demand to put

things right, prevent Iranian interventions and will not permit using this event for suspicious ends.

On the other hand, Finance Minister Rafi' al-Issawi, during his participation in the sit-in, said that the negotiators should approach Anbar people, because they represent the Iraqi people in all its components.

He told Aswat al-Iraq that Anbar people are the only component that will negotiate.

He warned against attempts to penetrate into the demonstrators lines, but "the people are aware of such schemes".

Ramadi, center of the province, lies 110 km west of the capital, Baghdad.

- **Beecroft renews during meeting with Nechirvan Barazani his country's support to efforts [to solve] the crisis (NINA)**

26/12/2012 23:11:00

Erbil (NINA) – US Ambassador to Iraq, Robert Beecroft renews his country's support to the efforts toward solving

disagreement and current crisis between Federal and Regional governments.

This came during his meeting on Wednesday, Dec. 26, with Kurdistan Region's Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barazani.

A statement issued on Wednesday, Dec. 26, by the Government of Kurdistan Region said that Prime Minister Nechirvan Barazani received Ambassador Beecroft and the delegation accompanying him. The two sides discussed current situation and latest developments in Iraq and the area. The two shed light on the efforts being exerted to defuse the crisis between Kurdistan Region and Baghdad.

The American Ambassador described the visit by the Region's delegation to Baghdad, to resume negotiations toward calming the situation as, as positive; renewing his country's support for the efforts to solve disagreement and current crisis.

For his part, Nechirvan Barazani affirmed the Region's stance in support of finding peaceful solution to the current crisis.

He added that Kurdistan Region believes in the principle of peaceful dialogue to solve all disputes within the mechanism of Iraqi Constitution, asserting that the visit of Kurdistan Region's delegation to Baghdad is based on the belief of solving all disputes through peaceful means.

Ambassador Beecroft enquired about President Talabani's health situation, expressing wishes for the President for a speedy recovery. The two also talked of the recent joint meeting of the politburos of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

- **Large Egyptian economic delegation visits Iraq next month (NINA)**

26/12/2012 20:18:00

Baghdad (NINA) – A large Egyptian economic and commercial delegation is to visit Iraq early next month.

Source at the Egyptian Embassy in Baghdad told NINA on Wednesday, Dec. 26, that a large Egyptian delegation headed by the Minister of Industry and Trade, Hatem Saleh, includes businessmen is to visit Iraq in a step to expand trade

and economic cooperation between Iraq and Egypt in the coming era.

- **Parliament seeks to implement agreement on exchanging detainees between Iraq, Saudi Arabia (alliraqnews)**

Wednesday, 26 December 2012 23:24

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Rafi Abdul Jabbar, of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee confirmed that the Committee seeks implementing the agreement of exchanging the detainees and the prisoners between Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

He stated to AIN "Such agreements will preserve the security and stability in the region," noting that "The continuity of the talks between Iraq and Saudi Arabia indicates that the latter has a genuine desire in this regard."

"The issues related to the borders and the security are the most important files in the region because the economy in the regional countries depend on the security situation," he added.

"The Arab countries have no future without eliminating the crises and the wars in the region," he concluded.

## 2. IRAN

### • Iranian Parliament to Hold Conference on Caspian Sea

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission is due to hold a two-day conference in January on the Caspian Sea to study different problems and opportunities in the waterway.



The National Conference on Caspian Sea is due to be held in the Northern province of Mazandaran on from January 18 to 19.

"The conference will be held by the Caspian Sea committee of Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission in presence of members of the parliamentary commission, Members of

Parliament, the foreign minister, minister of the interior and officials from Department of Environment and Iranian Ports and Shipping organization," member of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mehdi Sanayee said.

He added that the conference will examine different issues such as the Caspian Sea energy resources, the environment, security problems and issues related to shipping, maritime and territorial waters.

The Caspian Sea is estimated to contain between 17 billion and 33 billion barrels of proven oil reserves.

The Caspian Sea is the largest enclosed body of water on earth by area, variously classed as the world's largest lake or a full-fledged sea.

The Caspian Sea littoral states consist of Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107130799>

- **Turkey: No Demand from US to Reduce Oil Purchase from Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yıldız announced that Washington has not demanded Ankara to reduce its oil purchase from Tehran and Turkey will continue buying Iran's crude.



"Under any circumstances we will continue purchasing crude oil from Iran like in the past," Yıldız told reporters on Wednesday.

"There is no new demand from the US to reduce the amount of crude oil which we get from Iran," he said.

Trade between Turkey and Iran has risen sharply over the past decade.

According to the figures released by the Turkish Statistical Institute, Iran becomes

Turkey's third biggest business partner with a trade exchange of \$17.52bln.

Turkey imported \$8.94 billion in goods from Iran, and exported \$8.58 billion in goods to the Islamic Republic during this period.

Turkey was Iran's fifth-largest oil customer in 2011, buying around 200,000 barrels per day, 30 percent of its total imports and more than 7 percent of Iran's oil exports.

The two countries officials stressed the necessity for stronger relations and pursuing the planned increase of mutual trade to \$30bln by 2015.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107130769>

- **Latest Iranian Ocean-going vessel inauguration**

TEHRAN, Dec. 27 (MNA) – Inauguration was held for the Iran-ShahreKord container ship as the latest ocean-going vessel made inside the country. The Iran-ShahreKord container ship, Iran's newest home-made ocean-going vessel, was

unveiled at the 14th Conference on Marine Industry.

The ship has been awarded all necessary certificates from international standards organizations before being officially handed to IRI Shipping Lines (IRISL).

Iran-ShahreKord can take on board 2200 containers. After Iran-Arak, it is the second ship ordered by IRI and built in ISOICO Ship Building Complex.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1777259>

- **Short-term National currency devaluation favors exports**

TEHRAN, Dec. 27 (MNA) – The Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade has said that temporary national currency devaluation has worked to boost exports.

Mehdi Ghazanfari told reporters that the 2.5 times devaluation of RialagainstUSDollar has coincided with a boom in many of productive industries. “In the first 8 months this year, 30 million tons of good have been imported through northern and southern ports of the country,” he added.

He also said that shipping facilities accounts for 20 per cent of total imports, while 34 ship-building centers operated in port cities of the country, with annual product of 300 ships.

The Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade assessed the establishing of industrial clusters highly valuable for the country. “2.5 times devaluation of RialagainstUSDollar has worked to boost exportswith a boom in many of productive industries,” he explained.

He also pointed to 6 sessions held jointly with First Deputy President, “currently, the first priority is to collect the returns of investments of the past, and new investments are the second priority,” he stated.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1777221>

- **Nothing can stop Iran-Russia trade: Russian official**

TEHRAN, Dec. 27 (MNA) – The Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industries says nothing could prevent the development of

trade relations between Tehran and Moscow.

“Moscow will continue its trade cooperation with Iran and no problem can deter the development of trade relations between the two countries,” head of the Foreign Relations Department at the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industries Vladimir Padalko said.

Pointing to the U.S.-led sanctions against Iran, the Russian official stressed that Moscow observes the situation and does not allow cooperation between the two countries to decrease.

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

The U.S. and European Union have used this allegation as excuse to impose international and unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Iran refutes the West's allegation and argues that as a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency

(IAEA), it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1776866>

- **Iran's FM spokesman hails outcomes of South Africa ANC conference**

People of South Africa well remember the Islamic Republic's support for the movement fighting against apartheid and friendly relations between Iran and South Africa have been continued after apartheid.”

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast



Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast has praised the positive outcomes of the recent 53rd National Conference of the African National Congress (ANC) in Bloemfontein, Mangaung.

Mehmanparast on Thursday expressed hope that the reelection of South Africa's President Jacob Zuma as ANC president would guarantee the interests of the African country and result in positive consequences to bolster amicable mutual ties.

“People of South Africa well remember the Islamic Republic’s support for the movement fighting against apartheid and friendly relations between Iran and South Africa have continued after apartheid,” the Iranian spokesperson said.

The 53rd National Conference of the ANC was held from December 16-20 in Bloemfontein, Free State.

On December 18, President Zuma was reelected as the ANC leader, winning in a landslide victory over Kgalema Motlanthe, his deputy and only rival for the position.

Cyril Ramaphosa, a former trade union leader who became one of the country’s richest businessmen, was voted in as the ANC’s new vice president, taking over from Motlanthe, who declined nominations for the job.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/27/280362/iran-hails-s-africa-anc-conference/>

- **‘Turkey claims about Iran supporting PKK surprising’**



An Iranian deputy foreign minister has expressed surprise that Turkey has repeated claims about Tehran supporting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

“Relations between Iran and Turkey have always been based on respect and mutual trust and the repetition of such baseless claims is surprising,” Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Oceania Affairs Abbas Araqchi said on Wednesday.

Turkish Interior Minister Idris Naim Sahin claimed on December 24 that PKK members use Iranian territory for training and treating their injured as well as for transporting arms and funds.

Sahin called on Tehran to strengthen its border defenses.

The Iranian official said the Turkish interior minister is well-aware of the level of Iran's cooperation with Turkey over security issues which has led to the reduction of insecurity within the country.

Araqchi urged Turkish officials to refrain from making remarks that could harm good relations between the two countries under such complicated conditions.

The PKK has been fighting for an autonomous Kurdish region inside Turkey since the 1980s. The conflict has left tens of thousands of people dead.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/26/280276/iran-surprised-at-turkey-pkk-claims/>

- **Russia, India back Iran's nuclear rights**

Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh ahead of a meeting at Singh

Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh ahead of a meeting at Singh's residence in New Delhi on December 24, 2012

In a joint statement signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the two leaders have dismissed Western sanctions against Iran as counter-productive and unconstructive

The statement, issued at the end of the 13th India-Russia Annual Summit in New Delhi on Monday, also said the only way to deal with the issue is through political channels and diplomacy.

In addition, the two countries signed \$2.9 billion in contracts, according to which Russia will sell India military helicopters and technological kits for manufacturing warplanes.

On Friday, the European Union imposed new sanctions on Iran over its nuclear energy program, which include blacklisting an individual and a group of companies.



On December 13, the US Treasury Department also imposed sanctions on seven Iranian companies and five nuclear experts for contributing to the country's nuclear energy program.

At the beginning of 2012, the United States and the EU imposed new sanctions on Iran's oil and financial sectors with the goal of preventing other countries from purchasing Iranian oil and conducting transactions with the Central Bank of Iran.

The illegal US-engineered sanctions were imposed based on the unfounded accusation that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran rejects the allegations, arguing that as a committed signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) 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/2012/12/25/279977/russia-india-back-irans-nuclear-rights/>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Al-Malki: Qatari emir postpones West Bank visit**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- The emir of Qatar has postponed his visit to Ramallah until the end of January, the Palestinian Authority foreign minister said Thursday.



Sheikh Hamad Ibn Khalifa al-Thani was expected to visit the West Bank in

December but has delayed the trip, Riyad al-Malki said.

The minister said he did not know why the visit was postponed.

Meanwhile, Arab League chief Nabil al-Arabi will visit Ramallah on Saturday, al-Malki told Ma'an.

Al-Arabi was expected to arrive with a delegation of foreign ministers from the region, but al-Malki said that in a phone call with al-Arabi the officials agreed he would come alone instead.

During his trip to Ramallah, al-Arabi will arrange a separate visit for Arab foreign ministers at another time, al-Malki added.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=551486>

- **UNRWA closes West Bank offices amid protests**

HEBRON (Ma'an) -- UNRWA is closing three of its West Bank offices because protests are threatening the safety of its staff, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said Wednesday.



The UN Relief and Works Agency said in a statement that it was forced to close the offices after protests shifted from peaceful demonstrations to "illegal acts."

During protests, demonstrators stopped UN vehicles and their drivers, and one vehicle was chased away by protesters carrying stones. A female employee was treated badly by protesters, the agency said.

Protests have been held in refugee camps across the West Bank over UNRWA's decision not to renew the contracts of 114 employees due to budget cuts.

"UNRWA reiterates that the decision related to the 114 contracts was the best possible choice we had. We wanted to avoid harming our services as a result of budget limitations. As we made clear before, the safety of our properties and

our employees is a red line," the agency said.

UNRWA asked the Palestinian Authority to put an end to the protests, which it said were disrupting operations.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=551294>

- **Palestinian critically wounded in Yatta clashes**

HEBRON (Ma'an) -- A Palestinian man suffered a critical head injury on Wednesday in clashes with the Israeli army in Yatta in the southern West Bank.

Mohammad Kamal Abu Qbaieta was hit in the head by a tear gas canister and taken to Al-Mezan Hospital, a Ma'an reporter said.



Clashes broke out in Yatta after Israeli forces raided the town and detained Yousif Ibrahim Nawajaa, a disabled grocery store owner.

Locals threw stones at the soldiers, who responded by firing tear gas and sound grenades.

An Israeli military spokesman said on Wednesday that he was looking into the incident.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=551410>

- **British Foreign Office Minister Condemns New Settlement Activities**

JERUSALEM, December 27, 2012 (Wafa) – British Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt condemned the Jerusalem District Planning Board's approvals of building over 3150 units in Givaat Hamatos and 1242 units in Mordot Gilo South, said a Foreign office press release on Thursday.

Speaking after the announcements on 24 December that the Jerusalem District Planning Board issued approval for 1242 units in Mordot Gilo South, and that Ariel

College is to be upgraded to university status thereby creating the first university in a settlement illegal under international law, Burt said that taking such steps, despite the international community raises UK's profound concerns.

“Last week Foreign Secretary William Hague made clear our condemnation and deep disappointment at the approval of the East Jerusalem Ramat Shlomo plan.” He said, “These are further profoundly provocative actions that run contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention.”

Burt affirmed that such actions by the Israeli Government are damaging Israel's international reputation.

He said that UK is extremely disappointed in the decision to upgrade Ariel's university centre since Ariel is beyond the Green Line in a settlement that is illegal according to international law.

The decision, according to Burt, will deepen the presence of the settlements in the Palestinian territories and will create another obstacle to peace.

UK reiterated its call on Israel to reverse these decisions and take no further steps aimed at expanding or entrenching settlement activity.

Burt said, “When I spoke with President Mahmoud Abbas last week I expressed our appreciation for the measured response the Palestinian Leadership had been taking in response to Israel's recent settlement announcements.”

Burt called on Abbas and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to show the strong leadership needed to achieve a return to negotiations for a two-state solution, which will bring a just and permanent solution to this conflict.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21407>

- **Israeli Forces Raid Areas, Arrest Palestinians across West Bank**

WEST BANK, December 27, 2012 (Wafa) – Israeli forces Thursday arrested 10 Palestinians from across the West Bank, said security sources.

They told Wafa that soldiers arrested five Palestinians from the Hebron governorate,

south of the West Bank; three of them are from Beit Ummar.

The arrests came after raiding and inspecting several houses in the town of Yatta and the old city.

Media spokesperson of the National Committee against the Wall and Settlements in Beit Ummar, Yousef Abu Maria, told Wafa that Israeli soldiers arrested a 14-year-old child and two others aged 16 after raiding their homes and inspecting them, tampering with their contents.

Israeli Force also raided several neighborhoods in Hebron and erected checkpoints at the entrances of the surrounding towns and villages, pulling over residents and inspecting their personal papers.

Security sources added that Israeli soldiers arrested two brothers in Jenin and inspected another resident's house while interrogated its owners.

In Bethlehem, Israeli soldiers arrested three Palestinians from the town of Beit Fajjar, south of Bethlehem.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21406>

- **Cabinet Calls for Steps to Stop Israel's Settlement 'Onslaught'**

RAMALLAH, December 26, 2012 (Wafa) - The Palestinian cabinet Wednesday called on members of the United Nations Security Council and other powers to put a stop to Israel's settlement policy, which it described as "onslaught" that aims to undermine efforts to form a Palestinian state.

It condemned in a statement issued after its weekly cabinet meeting "the unprecedented settlement onslaught on our land, particularly the Israeli government's decision to build thousands of settlement units in Jerusalem and Bethlehem with the intent of completing the isolation of the capital from the rest of its natural surroundings and further strangling and isolating Bethlehem."

It condemned as well an Israeli government decision to grant a university status to a college in the illegal settlement of Ariel in the West Bank.

It stressed that “the danger of this onslaught lies in its aim to undermine the possibility of materializing the State of Palestine on the ground.”

The cabinet welcomed the position of the 14 member states of the Security Council as well as regional groups at the United Nations “who unanimously rejected settlements and settlement construction.”

It said the settlements are “a flagrant violation of the rules of international law as well as a violation of Israel’s legal obligations and responsibilities as an occupying Power towards our people, their rights and occupied land in accordance with international norms.”

The cabinet called on those countries “to assume their legal and political responsibilities and translate these valuable positions into practical steps that compel Israel to end these dangerous and destructive violations in a way that also accelerates at the same time ending the occupation and enabling our people to exercise self-determination and the materialize the State on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital.”

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21402>

- **Prisoner Temporarily Suspends Hunger Strike**

RAMALLAH, December 25, 2012 (Wafa) – Striking prisoner Ayman Sharawneh, who has been on hunger strike for 170 days in a row protesting his administrative detention without charge or trial, suspended his strike two days ago due to severe deterioration in his health that could lead to his death, the Palestinian Prisoner’s Club’s (PPC) said Tuesday.

A PPC lawyer said Sharawneh suspended his strike after a medical committee formed to examine his health condition pleaded with him to stop his strike or he will suffer severe health consequences that could either cause him a stroke, complete paralysis or sudden death.

The lawyer said that Sharawneh is already suffering from a kidney failure.

Sharawneh said he suspended his strike for 10 days awaiting a decision for his release, but that he will resume the strike if he is not released.

Another striking prisoner, Samer Issawi, who has been on a hunger strike for 151 days, is also suffering from severe deterioration in his health, said the PPC lawyer.

Issawi suffers from severe headaches, severe pain in the spine, in addition to severe pain in his chest caused after he was attacked by Israeli police in court last week.

Israeli police attacked Issawi, who was on a wheelchair, and his family when he appeared in court for a hearing on his release.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21394>

- **A-G submits Liberman indictment to Knesset**

No new charges in indictment against former foreign minister, charged for breach of trust and fraud; harsher indictment includes recently-surfaced evidence in Belarus ambassador affair.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman Photo:  
Flash 90

Attorney-General Yehudah Weinstein submitted an updated indictment against former foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman to the Knesset on Thursday afternoon. The indictment included no new charges, but was harsher than originally expected because of new evidence.

Thursday morning Army Radio reported that a conversation held between then-foreign minister Liberman and Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon would form the main evidence in a new indictment against Liberman.

Allegedly, while undergoing the process of choosing a new ambassador for Latvia in 2009, Liberman told Ayalon that he preferred Ze'ev Ben-Aryeh for the position. This occurred after Ben-Aryeh had allegedly illegally shared information with Liberman over charges against him.

The new evidence against Liberman, compiled from the conversation he had with Ayalon, indicates that the former foreign minister had an active role in promoting Ben-Aryeh - a charge far more serious than the one described in the prior version of the Liberman indictment.

Former foreign minister Avigdor Liberman was investigated on the matter late Tuesday night under suspicion of breach of trust as part of the Belarus Ambassador Affair.

The investigation, which was requested by the Prosecutor's Office, began at 10:00 pm and lasted around 40 minutes.

Earlier in the day, Liberman dismissed a flood of "rumors and quotes" about the Ambassador Affair, asserting they have no connection to reality.

Liberman issued a statement dismissing the reports the morning after Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon unequivocally denied reports broadcast Monday night by both Channel 2 and Channel 10 which claimed he had given police testimony against his former boss.

Liberman said that he wanted to emphasize that rumors and quotes attributed to him and his "associates" that were circulating in the media, "did not exist... and their purpose was not particularly sophisticated manipulation, to disrupt the proceedings and throw sand in the eyes of the public."

"Everything I have to say, I will say in the proceedings of the investigation by the police and the court," he added

According to the broadcasts, the deputy foreign minister was questioned only recently about the affair, which until then had only involved allegations that former ambassador Ze'ev Ben-Aryeh leaked investigative material to Liberman, after which Liberman passively withheld information on this from a Foreign Ministry committee that was considering Ben-Aryeh for a new posting in Latvia.

The new allegations against Liberman, which started to surface last week, are that he did not just passively withhold information, but actively interfered in the appointment process on Ben-Aryeh's behalf.

<http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=297516>

- **Far-Rightists confront Zoabi in court, clash with security**

Security whisks Balad MK Haneen Zoabi away through back exit after mob tries to block her following High Court hearing on

electoral ban; Ben-Ari: Ban Zoabi today or she'll bomb Knesset tomorrow.

High Court of Justice Photo: yonah jeremy bob

MK Michael Ben-Ari and his Strong Israel party co-founder Itamar Ben Gvir joined a group of some 30 right-wing activists attempting to physically block Balad MK Haneen Zoabi from leaving the High Court of Justice in Jerusalem on Thursday.

At the close of the court hearing, activists started yelling at Zoabi, and a number of them physically engaged with security personnel trying to escort her out. Activists began pushing the guards, who pushed back at the activists and successfully smuggled Zoabi out a back exit.

The court had met to hear the petition about Zoabi with a panel of nine justices, presided over by Supreme Court President Asher D. Grunis, and was expected to strike down the Central Elections Committee decision a week earlier to ban her run. It will announce its decision on Sunday.

Ben-Ari made a fiery speech at the High Court demanding that it uphold the ban.

Far-right activist ejected from court by security personnel

"If they don't disqualify Zoabi today, tomorrow she'll throw a bomb in the Knesset," he said after a group of around thirty activists tried to prevent Zoabi from leaving the court. "They need to throw them into Syria."

MK Haneen Zoabi also held a press conference following the confrontation, decrying the state of democracy in Israel. "I never imagined such a thing could happen," she said. "I feel that there has been incitement against me throughout the current Knesset so there's nothing new." She added that it was ironic that in a debate about equality that she was forced to leave through the back door for her safety.



Turning to the court hearing on the Central Elections Committee move to ban her from running in the next Knesset, Zoabi said "attempts to disqualify me are an attack on everybody who is against the occupation."

Balad party chairman Jamal Zahalka, who also spoke at the conference, said they had been set upon by a "group of fascists," and blamed court security for the incident.

The Committee passed the ban on grounds of supporting terrorism and rejecting Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

Earlier in the day, right-wing Likud-Beytenu MK Danny Danon told The Jerusalem Post that if the court allows Zoabi to run, he was prepared with a 'Plan B': amending the law to prevent future runs.

Danon, who led the move to disqualify Zoabi, told the Post that he believes he can win in court, despite the fact that it has never disqualified an Arab MK before.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=297495>

- **Posturing for coalition talks sets media abuzz**

Netanyahu denies he's considering Livni for FM; Shas slams Liberman for saying Likud Beytenu will take over Housing portfolio.

Man reads newspapers in Jerusalem.  
Photo: Marc Israel Sellem / The Jerusalem Post

With less than a month until general elections on January 22, media outlets were abuzz on Thursday with political maneuvering, posturing and speculation over winners and losers in the coalition talks that will follow.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu soundly rejected reports that he was considering Tzipi Livni to be his next foreign minister. According to Haaretz, he told ministers that beyond not retaking the foreign ministry, Livni would have no role in negotiations with the Palestinians.



"Livni handled negotiations badly, mistakenly and in way that is completely unacceptable to me, so there is no chance I would give her a foothold in this realm if she would be a minister in my next government," Haaretz quoted the prime minister as saying. "I think very differently from her when it comes to future negotiations with the Palestinians. My view on negotiations is not similar to hers, so these reports are baseless."

In response, Livni said the prime minister was "pathetic."

"The more Netanyahu weakens in polls the more he deals with giving out portfolios in press," she said. "We have news for him: The elections aren't over. We are here to replace him."

A report in Yediot Aharonot quoted Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Liberman saying he will demand the Interior and Housing

portfolios from Shas, but give them the Infrastructure and Tourism portfolios instead.

"I think [Construction and Housing Minister Ariel] Attias was not a bad minister at all, but we will be better," Liberman reportedly said. "Attias is fit to be tourism minister. He can travel around the world."

Shas MK Arye Deri slammed Liberman's Likud-Beytenu list in response, saying that Liberman's party had succeeded in a "hostile takeover" of the party.

"From the party of the people, the Likud has become the party of arrogance that represents Russians and Whites," Deri said. "They humiliated [Communications Minister Moshe] Kahlon and now they want to humiliate the rest of the Sephardi ministers."

Kahlon stepped down from politics in October, promising not to run in the upcoming elections.

"This should be a wake-up call for all Sephardim that only Shas will take care of

them in the next Netanyahu government," he said.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=297507>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Sudan's Bashir says ready to meet South Sudan counterpart to get oil flowing**

Sudan's President Omar Hassan al-Bashir said on Wednesday he was ready to meet his South Sudanese counterpart Salva Kiir to try to move forward with setting up a demilitarized border zone and restarting oil flows.



His comments raise the prospect that the two could set aside their differences after signing agreements in September meant to secure their disputed border and to allow the South to resume oil exports

after the two came close to war in April in the worst violence since Juba seceded last year.

However, neither country has yet withdrawn its army from either side of their shared border, a precondition to resume oil flows from the landlocked south through the north, a lifeline for both economies.

South Sudan had initially planned to resume exports by year-end after shutting down its output of 350,000 barrels a day in January because the two sides could not agree on an export fee.

Two weeks ago, the African Union, backed by Western powers, urged Bashir and Kiir to meet as soon as possible to resolve all their disputes. Delegations from both countries are scheduled to resume talks in Ethiopia in mid-January.

"I am ready to meet Salva Kiir to speed up implementing all agreements at the same time," Bashir said, after meeting Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn who is trying to mediate in the row.

"I am ready to meet Kiir at any place," Bashir said.

Desalegn said he would fly to Juba on Thursday to meet Kiir.

"I will be having the same discussion with President Salva Kiir to help us implement the already signed agreements," he said.

South Sudan seceded from Sudan under a 2005 peace agreement which ended decades of civil war. But both countries have yet to demarcate their disputed border which straddles oil production facilities.

The two rivals are also at odds over Abyei, a contested area between Sudan and South Sudan prized for its fertile grazing land.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/sudan-s-bashir-says-ready-meet-south-sudan-counterpart-get-oil-flowing>

- **Police clash with protesters in Alexandria**

Clashes erupted between security forces and protesters outside the Abu Qir

Fertilizers Company headquarters east of Alexandria Wednesday evening.

Residents of the Tabia district in Abu Qir surrounded the headquarters and prevented employees from entering. Objecting to the company's taking on 150 workers from a nearby neighborhood, they demanded jobs.

Eyewitnesses told Al-Masry Al-Youm that they were carrying weapons and Molotov cocktails,

State-run news agency MENA said that the police managed to disperse the crowd with tear gas, and arrested nine protesters.

After hearing gunfire, the armed forces intervened, a source within the company told Al-Masry Al-Youm, to avoid clashes between the workers and the residents.

For their part, hundreds of workers staged a demonstration outside the security directorate, in protest against the residents of Abu Qir besieging the company premises and preventing them from entering.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/police-clash-protectors-alexandria>

- **Morsy announces Cabinet reshuffle, calls for national dialogue**

The President Mohamed Morsy delivers his speech before thousands of his supporters, who gathering at Presidential Palace to support the Constitutional Declaration, Cairo, 23 November 2012. On other hand political forces called for mass rallies to reject that declaration.

Hossam Fadl

President Mohamed Morsy spoke on Wednesday, saying he is planning for a Cabinet reshuffle of the government of Prime Minister Hesham Qandil, who took office in August.

Morsy said, in a televised speech on the occasion of the adoption of the country's new Constitution, "I asked Qandil and consulted with him to make appropriate ministerial reshuffles suitable for [this] stage to face all problems, large and small problems."

Morsy praised the country's new Constitution "chosen by the Egyptian people."

He also renewed his call on all political and national forces to participate in the national dialogue, held by the president's office, to discuss all controversial issues related to the Constitution.

"Dialogue has become a necessity. I renew the call to all parties and political forces to participate in the national dialogue, which I personally sponsor, to complete the road map for this stage," he said.

"Ahead of us are days of work, effort, diligence and production from everyone."

Addressing economic issues, Morsy pledged, "I will do my best to boost the economy, which is facing huge challenges. I will make the necessary changes and decisions for the triumph of Egypt and its overall development."

The new Constitution is "a free Constitution, not granted by a king, imposed by a president, or forced by a colonial power," he said, reiterating that "it was chosen by the people of Egypt to give to themselves."



ORSAM

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES  
مركز الشرق الأوسط لدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ  
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT  
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION



Morsy added that legislative power has moved to the Shura Council, until the completion of parliamentary elections when the lower house of parliament will adopt these powers.

He also said the constitutional referendum was held in full transparency and under full judicial supervision by both the media and civil society organizations.

He praised the high turnout of citizens, and the role of the army and police in protecting the process. "I thank all those who participated in this great national endeavor," he said.

"The Constitution was approved by an almost two thirds majority, but a respectable segment of the people chose to say no," he said. "I thank both those who said yes and who said no."

"We do not want to go back to the era of a single dominant opinion," he said. "The referendum result shows a true cultural and democratic maturity."

"There have been mistakes in the past period that I take responsibility for," he said. "I have had to take many tough decisions, but now a new dawn shines and the goals of the people will be achieved."

"I do not seek power, for power is with the people," he added. "What I hope for now is renaissance."

At the end of his speech, Morsy renewed the presidential oath.

"As we begin this stage of transition from the First Republic to the Second Republic, the basis of which we lay in this strong Constitution that you chose, I hereby renew my oath before you that I will respect the law and the Constitution, safeguard the interests of the people fully, and preserve the nation and its territorial sovereignty," he said.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-announces-cabinet-reshuffle-calls-national-dialogue>

- **Brotherhood's politics may mean short term gains and long term losses**

Noha El-Hennawy

Experts on Islamist movements and democratization have long held that Islamist groups, if they are allowed to engage freely in the political system, tend to make significant ideological concessions, adopt democratic values, and act pragmatically.

Repeatedly referred to in these discussions is the example of the Turkish Islamist movement that culminated in the emergence of the Justice and Development Party. The party recognizes secularism, and this is taken as evidence to show that when Islamists are allowed to compete for power democratically, they find enough incentives to give up some dogma, reaching out to a wider base.

By the same token, these studies held that Arab authoritarianism was a major impediment to the moderation of Islamist groups. The lack of any prospect for rotation of power provides zero incentive to Arab Islamists to move towards the center of the political spectrum.

Then the Arab Spring came along, putting these theories and hypotheses to the test.

Looking back at the performance of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in 2012, these arguments show themselves to be somewhat simplistic.

While in 2011, the group had drawn on a more secular discourse seeking to position itself among liberal and leftist democratic forces in the wake of Hosni Mubarak's ouster, this year witnessed a major regression in this regard. In their pursuit to assert their dominance against the military and the secular elites, the Brotherhood drifted further to the right, drawing once again on an overtly religious vocabulary. This dualism has exposed the group's failure to develop a consistent political discourse that could help them build a larger constituency that goes beyond their conventional conservative support base.

From positive to repulsive

Soon after Mubarak's ouster, the group sent a multitude of assurances to non-Islamists, Christians and Egypt's western allies. Despite their apparent under-the-

table deals with the military — turning many revolutionaries against them — the Brotherhood’s discourse was in no way alarming as far as the relationship between religion and state was concerned.

In the first post-Mubarak poll, it was not the Brotherhood who primarily used religious propaganda to entice voters to back the military-sponsored constitutional amendments. It was the Salafis who employed religion in their campaigns, questioning the faith of the amendments’ detractors, and arguing that a “yes” vote was a vote for Islam.

Even later, in the run-up to the November 2011 legislative elections, the Brotherhood took everyone by surprise when they dropped their old controversial slogan “Islam is the Solution” for a more secular catchphrase “We Bear Good for Egypt.” The slogan attested to the group’s attempt to reach out to a wider audience on concrete rather than divine grounds.

Yet, the year 2012 witnessed a flagrant reversion in the group’s electoral discourse. The Brotherhood’s presidential campaign was a revealing milestone.

The Brotherhood rescinded their initial decision not to field a presidential candidate at the last minute, some suggest, after the generals’ reluctance to cede any power to the Islamist-dominated Parliament became clear. For them, winning the presidency was a life-or-death question. Amid threats that the Supreme Constitutional Court would dissolve Parliament, the presidency was seen as the group’s lifeline in their quest to cement control.

In this pressing situation, the group felt more comfortable reverting to their classic language of old.

After almost a year of preaching moderate politics and grooming themselves as the Egyptian equivalent of the Turkish Islamists, the Brotherhood leaned abruptly to the right. Once again, they employed old slogans and religious rhetoric, for example, declaring their presidential candidate Mohamed Morsy as the only Islamist nominee. His tours always featured Salafi cheerleaders who had tweaked the revolution’s famous slogan, “The people want to bring down the regime” into “The people want God’s

Sharia to be implemented.” And the group’s old slogan “the Quran is our constitution” resurfaced.

At one of the campaign rallies, Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie compared Morsy to one of the prophet’s most venerated companions and the first rightly-guided caliph. “The Ummah swore allegiance to Abu Bakr, and by the same token the Ummah will swear allegiance to Morsy as president of Egypt, God willing,” he said in May.

Meanwhile, Salafi preacher Safwat Hegazy, who had shadowed Morsy at most of his rallies, told the crowd, “We believe that the dream of reviving the Islamic caliphate will be realized by Morsy, the Brotherhood and his party. Jerusalem will be the capital of this caliphate.”

Since then, each time that the movement has faced a crisis — one that perhaps threatens its very existence — the Brotherhood has adopted the same language. The reaction to the opposition stirred by Morsy’s constitutional declaration passed on 22 November provides proof of this.

To back their man, the Brotherhood resorted, yet again, to their comfort zone. They mobilized their followers on religious grounds, giving enthusiastic backing to a rally in defense of “Sharia and Legitimacy” that was held in Giza in early December.

Meanwhile, the Brotherhood’s influential leader Khairat al-Shater appeared on television alongside controversial Salafi sheikhs to offer the movement’s analysis of the sweeping protests against Morsy’s decree. He held that ongoing resistance was part of a larger conspiracy that targeted Islamists and was primarily fomented by Christians and the remnants of the old regime. It was the first time since Mubarak’s ouster that a well-established figure made a statement with such flagrant sectarian connotations and language, undermining the group’s past attempts to build bridges with the Christian minority.

Egyptian context: Impediments to moderation

In fact, there are solid reasons explaining why the opening of the political system in Egypt has, so far, failed in compelling or

encouraging the Brotherhood to adopt a consistently moderate agenda.

Firstly, a democratic political system with an entrenched tradition of a rotation of power and protection of individual rights and liberties has not as yet been shaped.

Meanwhile, the Brotherhood and their Islamist partners are reaping the fruits of a procedural democracy that ensures all players free access to the ballot box, but gives the winner the absolute right to set the rules for the new order regardless of their democratic or autocratic inclinations. Hence, there is a great amount of leeway for undemocratic forces — whoever they may be — to abort the transition to fully democratic rule.

Secondly, the Brotherhood is faced with fierce far-right competitors in the form of a vast array of Salafi parties. After Mubarak's ouster, these Salafi groups revisited their aloofness from politics, and engaged heavily in elections. In only a few months, they had established themselves as a force to be reckoned with, taking almost one quarter of the parliamentary seats in the 2011 poll.

The fear of appearing less religious than their new Salafi contenders restricts the Brotherhood's ability to make ideological concessions or move towards the center of the political spectrum. The Brotherhood have chosen to appease the Salafis. The content of the Constitution is a case in point. In order to convince Salafis to sign off on a clause holding that "the principles" rather than the "rulings" of Islamic Sharia are the primary source of legislation, the Brotherhood included a more controversial article towards the end of the 236-article text widening the scope of the term "principles".

Gains and hurdles



On the surface, this alignment with the far right could be deemed beneficial as it helps the Brotherhood make electoral gains. It qualified them for the second round of the presidential race and

mobilized wide support for their Constitution. However, a deeper look may suggest that the radicalization of the Brotherhood political discourse may easily seal their fate.

The group's investment in the secular-Islamist divide has sown the seeds of civil strife. The street violence that erupted over the course of the past month suggests that the Islamist-secular animosity may spiral out of control. However, any future turmoil can be blamed only on the power holders — Morsy and the Brotherhood.

The continuation of the current political disorder coupled with street clashes may gradually inflict irreparable damage to the Brotherhood's legitimacy and credibility. Additionally, a tumultuous political scene will further delay economic recovery at a critical juncture, marked by brewing social disenchantment and the potential of an uprising. With the absence of economic growth, political closure is a risky path.

Meanwhile, the Brotherhood cannot live up to their ultraorthodox pledges, given their persistent efforts to appease western governments. The Brotherhood's

current alliance with groups that hold the US as the great Satan is practically hard to sustain at a moment when they are selling themselves to the West as a force that can maintain stability and peace with Israel. Sooner rather than later, the Brotherhood's far-right allies may bring to the public debate suggestions for ultra-orthodox bills envisaging a stricter implementation of Islamic Sharia or a challenge to Egyptian-western relations.

Here comes the question: Do the Muslim Brotherhood still have a chance to rethink their contradictory stances, develop a more consistent centrist discourse that could help them reach out to a wider base that goes beyond their conventional semi-rural conservative base of followers? Or have they already missed all their chances?

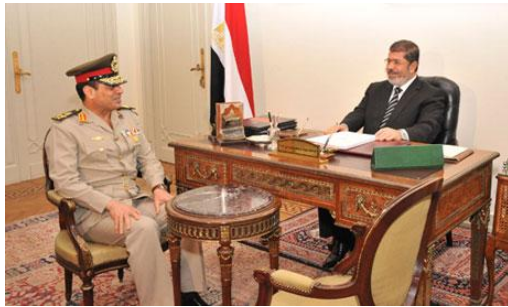
The answer remains to be seen.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/brotherhood-s-politics-may-mean-short-term-gains-and-long-term-losses>

- **Egypt: The president, the army and the police**

Sources report 'friction' between the presidency and some in the armed and police forces, but aides to the president say Morsi is doing more than enough to assure officers he supports their efforts

A recent decree issued by Minister of Defence Abdel-Fattah El-Sissi restricting the right to buy property in Sinai to second-generation Egyptian citizens had come against the wish of the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, according to a military source.



The decree, the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity, was issued after the minister became aware of a Palestinian-Qatari scheme to buy territory in Sinai "supposedly for tourism related projects."

The source added that the minister "informed" the president before taking he took the decision "with unprecedented

support from within the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the wider military community.

"Many of us [officers and soldiers] died to retrieve this land; we did so not knowing that Morsi would one day compromise the country's right to Sinai - for whatever reason. Whatever the reason, Sinai is a red line. We will support our Palestinian brothers in every way possible but Sinai is not for sale," the source said.

This decision by El-Sissi, who was appointed in August following Morsi's decision to remove his predecessor Hussein Tantawi along with the second in command Sami Anan, is more or less unprecedented. Usually, the source said, such decrees are issued by the president, whether in his executive capacity or in his capacity as the supreme commander of the armed forces. "But there was no other way because the anger was very intense in the army over news of plans to sell large parts of Sinai and some of the peninsulas in the Red Sea," he explained.

This is not the first sign of tension between Morsi and El-Sissi. Only two weeks ago the ministry of defence and the

presidency engaged in a tug of war over a scheduled roundtable meeting the minister of defence had called for in the midst of the political crisis over the constitution, which was finally passed this Tuesday with the approval of under two thirds of those who voted.

According to the same military source and to sources at the presidency, El-Sissi's call for dialogue, intended to reconcile the president and leaders of the opposition's National Salvation Front was initially undertaken with the approval of the president but was cancelled after the president changed his mind due to opposition from the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood, from which Morsi hails.

New tensions in relations between the president and the army add to existing unease and even anger between the presidency and both police and intelligence. Police sources say the overriding sentiment is that the president, despite positive statements regarding the police, is acting to replace the heads of departments with generals whose loyalty to him is greater than their loyalty to the institution.

For its part, the intelligence, according to two sources, was insulted by the fact that a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood went on air to accuse an intelligence lieutenant of being party to an attempt to overthrow the president.

A close aide to the president said that unease in the army is "totally unjustified."

"To suggest that the president would agree to anything that would compromise national sovereignty over Sinai or any part of Egypt is an unacceptable insult; the decision of El-Sissi was issued on orders from the president himself," the aide said.

According to the same aide, contempt in the police and intelligence is "even more unjustified because it is no secret that there were generals in both bodies who were helping with the campaign of Ahmed Shafiq [Morsi's adversary in the presidential runoffs], and that they are still in daily contact with him and with the Dubai police whose head openly attacked the president of Egypt."

"What would it take for the president to be liked by the police and the intelligence?"

I tell you no matter what the president does to please and reassure them, they will not be happy simply because they cannot accept that this man from the Muslim Brotherhood has become president," the presidential aide angrily said.

"They did everything they could to prevent him from winning; they provided information about other runners and broke into the secrets of their campaigns to make sure that Shafiq makes it to round two and today they have not given up; they cannot bow to the will of the Egyptian people who voted for Morsi and not Shafiq."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/P/1/61344/Egypt/Egypt-The-president,-the-army-and-the-police.aspx>

- **Blast kills two teens in Algeria's Bouira: Reports**

A bomb intended to take out soldiers killed two youths from the same family in the restive Bouira region of central Algeria, newspapers said on Thursday.

The two, aged 12 and 14, were on their way home from an olive grove when one

of them trod on the explosive device which had been buried in the ground, some reports said. Others said it had been placed in a bag under a tree.

The bomb was planted to target troops who use the area as a shooting range, said the newspapers, adding the security forces launched a hunt for the offenders in the nearby Ahl Regueb forest.

On December 20, an army colonel was killed in a gunbattle between troops and Islamists in the Bouira region, 125 kilometres (80 miles) southeast of the capital Algiers.

The clash reportedly broke out during a search operation for a "terrorist group" in the mountainous region after the arrest of a senior Al-Qaeda member in the area.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61358/World/Region/Blast-kills-two-teens-in-Algerias-Bouira-Reports.aspx>

- **Some advice to the Egyptian opposition**

The Egyptian opposition has acquired an image of being anti-Islam. It must correct

this image before taking part in upcoming parliamentary elections

For the sake of maintaining its credibility, or what has remained of it, the Egyptian opposition needs to engage in some deep soul-searching and to practice some self-directed accountability. This is not to say, of course, that the opposition represents all that is bad whereas the other side — the Islamists — represents all that is good.

Unfortunately, there seems to be a substantive gap between what the opposition claims to be and its public image in the minds of many people, Egyptians and non-Egyptians alike.

I don't claim to be an expert on Egypt. However, as an avid follower of developments in the Egyptian arena, I can say the opposition has much homework to do before taking part in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

True, the opposition is not monolithic in nature and is quite diverse politically and ideologically. Similarly, the opposition varies, occasionally sharply, in its national and moral credibility.

In general terms, however, the opposition has a negative image of being anti-Islam. True, opposition figures and spokespersons would vehemently deny any hostility to Islam. However, a fleeting glance at the opposition media discourse in the past few months shows that the Islamists, including democratically-elected President Mohamed Morsi, have been thoroughly demonised.

One Egyptian writer said that the opposition media was so virulently anti-Islamist that even a prophet of God would have been besmirched and distorted.

Indeed, opposition to the Islamists seems to have morphed into an all-out war on Islamist ideology per se. What else can be said about calling President Morsi a "thug," "Hitler" and "Mursilini," a snide play on Mussolini, the infamous Italian dictator?

To be sure, Morsi is not beyond reproach. He can be criticised and should be criticised, being responsible for catering for 90 million Egyptians. Nonetheless, criticism, however mordant and scathing, is one thing; vulgarity is an entirely different matter. Vulgarity is libelous,

defamatory and incompatible with civility and good manners.

More to the point, in many instances, vulgarity is counter-productive; it eventually boomerangs on the vulgar source, whether it is an individual, newspaper or TV station. This is why, even the most libertarian societies promulgate anti-defamation and anti-libel laws to protect the public from the excesses of the unbridled media.

#### Anti-Islam image

The anti-Islam image vindictively promoted by the bulk of the Egyptian opposition, especially the so-called secular and civil groups, is by all means a very serious charge. If consolidated and allowed to become a permanent feature in the collective public consciousness (or sub-consciousness), this charge could prove quite lethal for the opposition and its electoral chances.

Yes, propaganda coming from the Islamists camp played a certain role in the dissemination of the contentious anti-Islam image. However, it is also true that the opposition is not completely

blameless for the existence of this commonly-held notion.

It is well known, for example, that opposition media often ridicules Islamic principle as "Ikhwan (Brotherhood) principles" with regard to a host of issues such as women rights, status of non-Muslims, Christians, showbusiness, art and the economy.

Such insinuations are often interpreted by many ordinary citizens, correctly or otherwise, as suggesting that the opposition is really against Islam itself, not merely against the Islamist camp.

This point is further accentuated by the repetition of often virulent canards about Islamists, including the so-called "farewell intercourse with newly-dead wives" and the claim that Islamists are intending to impose poll taxes on Christians.

Needless to say, spreading such baseless lies exudes extreme malice, hatred and vindictiveness towards Islam since the ultimate goal behind the slanders is to make the public hate the religion that the vast majority of Egyptians adhere to.

This is why malicious disseminators of such obscenities ought to be severely punished, since freedom of speech doesn't include the freedom to malign, abuse and demonise, especially by way of lying.

Moreover, the opposition shoots itself in the foot when it chooses to remain silent whenever the symbols of Islam are targeted. For example, when Al-Kaed Ibrahim Mosque in Alexandria was surrounded and Sheikh Mahallawi was besieged for many hours by mobs of the opposition, the opposition refused to condemn the repulsive behavior as if besieging worshipers inside a mosque was a banal matter that didn't command the opposition's attention.

There is no doubt in my mind that the opposition would have gained a lot of popularity —and therefore earned a substantial political capital — had it hastened to sincerely and unequivocally condemn the "shameful taboo" of besieging a mosque in a country that prides itself on being the home of Al-Azhar.

Why didn't the opposition even contemplate doing this? This is a question I leave for each person's conscience.

The constitution

I believe the opposition didn't tell the people the whole truth about the real reasons behind the vociferous rallies and protests it held in several localities in Egypt. Was it really the draft constitution? Was it deep-seated ideological hostility to the Brotherhood, bequeathed from Nasser's era? Was it a certain desire to induce a coup against the president? Or was it a certain intent to generate chaos and turbulence in order to force the military to intervene and declare a state of emergency in the hope of nipping Brotherhood rule in the bud?

What exacerbated the incendiary situation further (some people even started speaking about civil war) was the lamentable fact that many of the protests held by the opposition were fraught with decidedly barbarian acts of sabotage and vandalism, including the torching of numerous offices of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party.

The torching of offices is an act of terrorism. Besides offices and furniture, it set fires in the hearts of millions of people who voted for the Islamist parties.

Finally, the opposition needs to make a real departure from its notoriously convulsive discourse to one based on reason and honesty.

In the final analysis, the opposition can't call itself "democratic" and at the same time refuse to allow the masses to have the final say. In fact, some segments of the opposition were so unreasonable that they vehemently refused the outcome of the latest referendum on the draft constitution.

Finally, the opposition cause suffered a sharp blow when some opposition protesters communicated to the public a truly childish and ignorant message when they chanted "Leave, leave, leave" outside the presidential palace at Ittihadiya in Cairo. Well, this behaviour, evidently music to the ears of the leaders of the opposition, encapsulates a stunning tendency to reject the rules of democracy.

I don't know how opposition parties will fare in the next parliamentary elections. However, I do believe that these parties will suffer miserably if they don't put their house, or houses, in order now. Perhaps a little humility, honesty and respect for their political opponents will help.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/P/4/61305/Opinion/Some-advice-to-the-Egyptian-opposition.aspx>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

### • **Lebanese MP: Syrian refugees abusing humanitarian situation**

Change and Reform bloc MP Simon Abi Ramia said that the Syrian refugees in Lebanon were taking advantage of the humanitarian situation to achieve political gains.

"There is new evidence across the Lebanese territory that indicate that many of the Syrian refugees are taking advantage of the humanitarian situation," Abi Ramia told OTV television on Thursday.

"We will not accept this violation of the Lebanese sovereignty and the abuse of

humanitarian criteria to achieve political goals.”

He added that the Lebanese arena should not turn into a welcoming environment for Jihadi activities.

Syria is witnessing a violent uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which has so far killed more than 45,000 people since its outbreak in March last year, a watchdog group said.

Lebanon is facing difficulties dealing with the increasingly high number of refugees fleeing Syria’s violence, which prompted its cabinet to address the issue in its latest meeting last week.

Meanwhile, differences emerged over the best way to control the situation with some politicians calling for closing the border with Syria while others dismissed the proposal and urged more humanitarian help for the displaced.

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese\\_mp\\_syrian\\_refugees\\_abusing\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese_mp_syrian_refugees_abusing_humanitarian_situation)

- **Lebanese Mufti withdraws call for council elections**

Grand Mufti of the Lebanese Republic Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Qabbani announced that he withdrew the call for an election of a new Higher Islamic Council.

The decision was announced on Thursday in a decree made public by the Mufti’s press office.

The elections of the new council were called for in a previous decree and scheduled to take place on December 30.

The Mufti’s decision came in light of disagreements within the council over the mechanism of the elections.

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese\\_mufti\\_withdraws\\_call\\_for\\_council\\_elections](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanese_mufti_withdraws_call_for_council_elections)

- **Abboud supports Bassil’s proposal for oil committee**

A Free Patriotic Movement-affiliated minister on Thursday voiced hope that the cabinet agrees on Energy Minister’s draft decree related to the six-member

committee tasked to oversee Lebanon's oil sector.

"I hope the issue will pass [in the cabinet] without any obstacles, especially that the Lebanese have waited long enough," Tourism Minister Fadi Abboud said during an interview with the Voice of Lebanon (93.3) radio.

Abboud also responded to statements made by a number of opposition MPs criticizing Bassil's proposal to assign high salaries to the members of the oil committee.

"Let's review the resume of the committee's members before deciding on the money that they will be paid, and that would amount to 23 million LL [for each] month," Abboud said.

Media reports have emerged recently that Bassil suggested to award a monthly allocations of around \$24,000 to each member of the oil sector committee, a proposal that has been rejected by several opposition MPs.

Earlier in November, the Lebanese cabinet approved of a committee to oversee oil

exploration off the country's Mediterranean coast. The decision, however, prompted some opposition lawmakers to criticize the way that seats in the newly approved commission were allocated.

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/abboud\\_supports\\_bassils\\_proposal\\_for\\_oil\\_committee](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/abboud_supports_bassils_proposal_for_oil_committee)

## 6. SYRIA

- **Brahimi's proposal very similar to Iran's**

TEHRAN, Dec. 26 (MNA) –Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has said that recent visit by Lakhdar Brahimi to Syria in a way involved in Iran's 6-point plan for Syrian crisis, since we had given him the plan as proposal.

Speaking to the press at the end of Cabinet meeting, Ali Akbar Salehi said that his Ministry will have a meeting with foreign ambassadors in Tehran on 6-point plan.

"In the frame work of this plan, other sub-plans are workable, Brahimi's visit to Syria being among them, since we have given

him the plan as proposal before,” he added.

He also asserted that Iran’s 6-point plan for Syria is a comprehensive plan bringing to the consideration all aspects. “currently, we are negotiating with Brahimi, Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia, Pakistan, and other countries with an interest in the Syrian issue to implement the proposal,” he said.

Salehi admitted that the implementation of the plan is difficult, but he believed that Islamic Republic of Iran acts in a way that parties to solution are Syrian-Syrian, and no other foreign version is forced on solution. “Foreigners should better know this,” he said.

“The west now sees itself with extremism in Syria which commits heinous crimes. Of course, everybody knows well who supports the extremism,” he said.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1776735>

- **Brahimi: Syria needs 'real change' to end conflict**

DAMASCUS (Reuters) -- International envoy Lakhdar Brahimi called on Thursday for real change in Syria to end 21 months of conflict and said a transitional government must be established with full powers to rule the country until new elections.

Brahimi, speaking in Damascus at the end of a five-day trip to Syria during which he met President Bashar Assad, did not spell out what measures were needed but said that only substantial change would meet the demands of ordinary Syrians.

"Certainly it was clear in Geneva, and it's even clearer now that the change which is needed is not cosmetic or superficial," Brahimi said, referring to an international meeting on Syria in Switzerland six months ago.



"I believe the Syrian people need, want and aspire to genuine change and

everyone knows what this means," he said.

"A government must be created ... with full powers. Full powers ... means this government must have all the powers of the state," Brahimi added. "This government will hold power during the transitional period."

Brahimi is due in Moscow on Saturday and said he also expected to have a third joint meeting with US and Russian officials soon following two rounds of talks earlier this month.

But he denied what he said were reports of a US-Russian plan to end the conflict in which 44,000 people have been killed.

The veteran diplomat, who took over as Syria envoy in August from former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, also said he was not yet proposing a "complete plan" to resolve the crisis.

"What is preferred is that we don't present such a plan until we feel that all sides have agreed to it. That way, implementing it is easy. If that doesn't happen, the other solution could be to go

to the (United Nations) Security Council to issue a binding resolution for everyone," he said.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=551472>

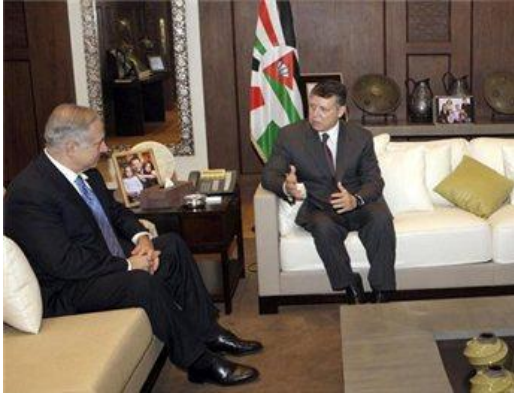
- **Reports: Netanyahu, Jordan's Abdullah discuss Syria chemical arms**

JERUSALEM (Reuters) - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has secretly met Jordan's King Abdullah in Amman to discuss the risk of Syria's chemical weapons falling into the hands of Islamist militants, Israeli media reports said on Wednesday.

Two TV stations and Israeli news sites quoted unnamed Israeli officials confirming a report in the London-based Arabic language daily, Al-Quds Al-Arabi, that such a summit had been held. Netanyahu's spokesmen have declined to comment on the reports.

As Syria's southern neighbor, Israel has been concerned about the risk of President Bashar Assad's chemical weapons falling into the hands of Islamist militants or Lebanese Hezbollah fighters as an uprising against him convulses a

country thought to possess a formidable chemical arsenal.



Israel has warned it could intervene if it felt there was a real risk of such a scenario unfolding.

Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty in 1994 and meetings between their leaders are not unusual and are often announced by both sides.

Israel's Channel 2 said the latest talks included a "very long discussion" about "cooperation with Jordan with regard to the fate of Syria's chemical weapons". It did not elaborate.

Israeli Vice Prime Minister Moshe Yaalon on Tuesday dismissed reports that Syrian government forces had fired chemical agents at rebels fighting to topple Assad's government.

"As things stand now, we do not have any confirmation or proof that (chemical weapons) have already been used, but we are definitely following events with concern," Yaalon said on Israel's Army Radio.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=551426>

- **Syria envoy urges 'real' change, transition government**

UN-Arab League envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi calls for the establishment of a transitional government during a press conference in Damascus

International peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi on Thursday called for "real" change in war-torn Syria and the installation of a transition government with full powers until elections can be held.

"We need to form a government with all powers... which assumes power during a period of transition. That transition period will end with (presidential or parliamentary) elections," the UN and Arab League envoy told reporters.



Brahimi made the remarks at a news conference in Damascus, during his latest bid to persuade Syria's warring parties to negotiate an end to the 21-month conflict estimated to have killed at least 45,000 people. The Algerian diplomat had arrived in Syria on Sunday for his first visit to the country since October.

A diplomat at the UN Security Council said, however, that the veteran troubleshooter had received no support from either side during his talks in Syria.

Brahimi is to hold talks on Saturday with Moscow, the most powerful ally of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, at the request of the envoy, Russia's foreign ministry said.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61355/World/Region/Syria-envoy->

[urges-real-change,-transition-governme.aspx](http://www.orsam.org.tr/urges-real-change,-transition-governme.aspx)

- **Top Syrian diplomat holds talks in Russia on conflict**

The Syrian Deputy FM denies to his Russian allies the presence of a US-involved plan to the country's political crisis during a meeting in Moscow

A Syrian government delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Muqdad on Thursday held talks at the Russian foreign ministry as Moscow denied the existence of a joint plan with the United States to end the crisis in the country.

Muqdad held talks in the morning at the foreign ministry in Moscow, foreign ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said, adding that the results would be announced later in the day.

"The meeting has taken place. We will announce the results later," he told reporters.

"This is of course a part of the efforts we are undertaking to encourage dialogue not just with the government but all opposition forces," he added.

It was not immediately clear who was present at the closed-door meeting but the ITAR-TASS news agency on Wednesday said Muqdad's visit would include talks with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.



The meeting came amid a flurry of end-of-year diplomacy in Russia over the Syrian crisis that will also see talks between UN-Arab League Syria peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi and Lavrov on Saturday.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohamed Amr is also arriving in Moscow later on Thursday for a visit that will include talks and a news conference with Lavrov on Friday.

Russia has to the fury of the West refused to cut cooperation with the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad in the conflict that according to activists has now claimed over 45,000 lives.

The diplomatic drive comes amid Western media reports of a new Russia-US initiative that would see Assad stay in power until 2014 while preventing him from further renewing his mandate.

But Lukashевич vehemently denied the existence of any such plan.

"There was not and is not such a plan and it is not being discussed," he said, adding that Russia's Syria policy was still based on an accord with world powers made back in June for an inter-Syrian dialogue.

Russia has always insisted it will not prop up Assad's regime but has also emphasised Moscow will not seek to persuade the Syrian president to step down, saying it is up to the Syrian people to decide the country's future.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61348/World/Region/Top-Syrian-diplomat-holds-talks-in-Russia-on-confl.aspx>

- **Russia denies existence of joint Russia-US plan on Syria, official says**

Russia on Thursday denied the existence of any joint plan with the United States on the crisis in Syria, after reports of an initiative that would see President Bashar al-Assad step down in 2014.

"There was not and is not such a plan and it is not being discussed," foreign ministry spokesperson Alexander Lukashevich told reporters, saying Russia's Syria policy was still based on an accord with world powers made back in June for an inter-Syrian dialogue.

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala\\_testnews/russia\\_denies\\_existence\\_of\\_join\\_t\\_russia-us\\_plan\\_on\\_syria\\_official\\_says](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala_testnews/russia_denies_existence_of_join_t_russia-us_plan_on_syria_official_says)

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Kuwait police using excessive force on protests: HRW**

Kuwaiti police used excessive force against peaceful protesters, Human Rights Watch says

Human Rights Watch on Thursday accused Kuwaiti police of using "excessive force" against opposition protesters and called

on the Gulf state's rulers to respect the right to peaceful assembly.



The New York-based group said riot police had on several occasions used "what appears to be excessive force to disperse largely peaceful protesters at a series of demonstrations".

"There is no justification for attacking peaceful protesters," said Eric Goldstein, deputy Middle East director at HRW.

"The authorities should show they will not tolerate abuses by investigating all allegations of abuse by security forces and punishing those responsible for violating rights."

During huge demonstrations staged by the opposition since October 15, police frequently used tear gas and stun grenades and beat up protesters, leading to the injury of dozens and the arrest of many more, said HRW.

The Islamist, nationalist and liberal opposition, angry over an amended electoral law, has been staging protests almost every night since the December 1 poll to demand the parliament's dissolution and scrapping the amendment.

The parliament, described as totally pro-government, has however begun normal business after it was inaugurated by Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah on December 16.

"Kuwait's rulers need to fully respect the right to assemble peacefully," Goldstein said. "Declaring a gathering 'unauthorised' does not give police licence to beat protesters."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61364/World/Region/Kuwait-police-using-excessive-force-on-protests-HR.aspx>

- **UAE busts Saudi-Emirati 'terror' cell: Official**

A cell of Saudi and Emirati members plotting terrorist attacks, allegedly linked to al-Qaeda, was busted by the UAE authorities, following a coordination

between security authorities in the UAE and Saudi Arabia

UAE authorities on Wednesday announced busting a cell of Saudi and Emirati members plotting "terror" attacks in the two countries and other states.

The suspects "imported material and equipment with the aim of committing terror acts," said an official statement on WAM state news agency. The arrests came after coordination between security authorities in the two Gulf states.

The suspects were described as members of the "deviant group," a term usually used in Saudi Arabia to refer to al-Qaeda-linked Islamists.

"Security authorities acted "after confirming that those elements were plotting to jeopardise security" in the UAE, Saudi Arabia and "other brother countries," the statement said, adding that they would be put on trial.

Unlike Saudi Arabia, the UAE has never seen attacks by Al-Qaeda, but authorities have in past months arrested dozens of

Islamists accused of links to the Egypt-born Muslim Brotherhood.

In July, Abu Dhabi said it dismantled a group plotting against state security without identifying their affiliation or the number of arrests.

The prosecutor general, Salem Said Kabish, said an unspecified number of people were being questioned for having formed "a group aimed at damaging the security of the state."

WAM said at the time they were also suspected of "rejecting the constitution and the founding principles of power in the Emirates" and of having links with foreign organisations.

The United Arab Emirates is a federation of seven sheikhdoms led by oil-rich Abu Dhabi, the capital, and also comprises Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al-Qaiwain.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61333/World/Region/UAE-busts-SaudiEmirati-terror-cell-Official.aspx>

- **Bahrain commutes death terms of police assailants**

Two Shiites convicted of killing two policemen had their sentences reduced to life imprisonment instead of death, while four others held for the same case will now be jailed for 15 years, instead of life imprisonment

A Bahraini appeals court on Wednesday commuted to life imprisonment the death sentences of two Shiites convicted of killing two policemen during last year's unrest, lawyers said.

Ali Abdullah Hasan al-Singace and Abdul Aziz Hussein, who were sentenced by a special Bahraini court in May last year, will now be jailed for life.

The court reduced the terms of four others held over the same case from life imprisonment to 15 years in jail, the lawyers said. A seventh defendant, whose sentence was also commuted to 15 years behind bars, remains at large.

The group, all Shiites, were accused of running over two policemen, Kashif Ahmed Manzur and Mohammed Farouk

Abdulsamad, during the uprising in the Sunni-ruled kingdom.

Their trial began on April 17 last year, with state media reporting at the time that the defendants were accused of committing voluntary homicide of public officials with "terrorist" intentions.

The national safety court's verdict the next month drew international condemnation, with Amnesty International urging Bahrain to scrap the executions.

The court was set up under a state of national safety, a lower level of emergency law declared by King Hamad in mid-March 2011. In June the same year, the king lifted the measure.

Since February last year, Bahrain has been shaken by Shiite-led opposition protests that the authorities accuse of being exploited by Shiite Iran across the Gulf.

At least 80 people have died since the start of the unrest in February 2011, according to the International Federation of Human Rights.

The opposition in Shiite-majority Bahrain insists the premier stand down and that the government be headed by the leader of the elected majority in parliament.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61303/World/Region/Bahrain-commutes-death-terms-of-police-assailants.aspx>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

### • Suicide Bomber Targets US Base in Afghanistan

VOA News

December 26, 2012

A suicide bomber has struck near a U.S. base in eastern Afghanistan, killing three Afghans.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, which took place Wednesday near the facility known as Forward Operating Base Chapman in Khost province.

Authorities say the bomber detonated a van full of explosives while a guard was checking the vehicle near the entrance of the base. The guard and two nearby civilians were killed.

Afghan Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed "more than a 100 joint enemies were killed or wounded." The insurgent group is known to exaggerate casualty figures.

There were no reports of NATO casualties in Wednesday's blast, which also left seven people wounded.

The attack is not the first time the American base in Khost has been a target of militants.

In 2009, seven U.S. Central Intelligence Agency employees and a Jordanian worker were killed at the base in a suicide bombing by an al-Qaida-linked agent.

The al-Qaida-linked Haqqani militant network is known to be active in Khost province, which borders Pakistan.

The attack comes two days after a female Afghan police officer shot and killed an American adviser in Kabul, an incident that once again raised concerns about the ability of Afghan authorities to manage security after most foreign troops pull out in 2014.

Afghan authorities said the female shooter is an Iranian national, but there was no initial evidence that she had ties to militant groups.

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

- **Afghans protest US night raids in Herat Province**

Press TV

December 26, 2012

People in Afghanistan's Western province of Herat have held a demonstration in protest against deadly night raids by US-led forces, Press TV reports.

The demonstration led by Afghan tribal elders condemned the ongoing NATO nighttime operations.

The protesters called on their government to help bring an end to the foreign forces' operations in Afghanistan.

Demonstrators say foreign forces have stormed residential areas in their villages and made arrests on numerous occasions.

This comes a few days after Afghan President Hamid Karzai blamed foreigners for widespread corruption in Afghanistan.

"The big corruption is in transactions and contracts involving outsiders in Afghanistan...these contracts are given to senior government officials or their relatives," said Karzai in a speech on December 22 in Kabul.

Karzai went on to say that when "foreign forces have left Afghanistan [in 2014]... their contracts, their administration will gradually disappear," adding, "This will help Afghanistan get rid of corruption, and it will be good for Afghanistan."

Foreign forces are scheduled to withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 and hand over responsibility for the country's security to the Afghan government.

On December 5, Karzai also blamed the NATO Western military alliance and the United States for increasing insecurity in the country in an interview with NBC Television Network.

The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of combating

terrorism. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity continues to rise across the country despite the presence of thousands of US-led troops.

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

- **3 insurgents detained in eastern Afghanistan: ISAF**

KABUL, Dec. 26 (Xinhua) -- Three insurgents were detained in operations in eastern Afghan provinces, said the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in a press release on Wednesday.

"Afghan and coalition forces detained three insurgents, located one weapons cache and cleared one improvised explosive device (IED) during operations in eastern Afghanistan throughout the past 24 hours," the ISAF's Regional Command-East (RC-East) said in the release.

The captured insurgents were arrested by the joint forces in Terezayi district, Khost province, 150 km southeast of Afghan capital Kabul, it said.

The IED and the weapons cache were found in Baraki Barak district, Logar

province, 60 km south of Kabul, according to the ISAF release.

"Operations in RC-East are ongoing," the release noted.

The Afghan security forces and more than 100,000 NATO-led coalition troops continue to press Taliban insurgents and other militant groups in the country, despite a decrease in violent attacks due to cold weather in an imminent winter in the militancy- hit country.

Earlier on Wednesday, an Afghan policeman and two Afghan civilians were killed in a Taliban suicide car bombing near a coalition base in eastern Khost province.

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

- **Taliban representation agreement in Qatar finalized: Rassoul**

By Sayed Jawad  
Khaama Press  
December 26, 2012

Afghan foreign ministry says agreement for the Taliban representation in Qatar is due to be finalized in a bid to prevent

sporadic sessions in other foreign countries with the Taliban group.

Afghan parliament house on Tuesday summoned foreign minister Zalmi Rassoul to brief Afghan lawmakers regarding the Paris conference on Afghanistan.

Foreign Minister Zalmi Rassoul told Afghan lawmakers, "We are working to codify the agreement with Qatar and it is almost finalized. This will be the only place outside of Afghanistan to hold talks. All other Afghan related talks will be held inside the Afghan soil."

He said there will be no need for Berlin or Paris in the future.

Zalmi Rassoul also said currently various nations are following the same practice as of 1990 and are organizing different sessions in order to bring stability in Afghanistan.

He insisted that Afghanistan is an independent country and all related issues to Afghanistan should be discussed within the Afghan soil. "All the issues that we face currently have agreement

environment in Afghanistan and there is no need to hold Afghan related talks outside the country. The Afghan government has not invited anyone to Paris but Afghan peace officials were present in the conference”, foreign minister Zalmay Rassoul said.

In the meantime a number of civil society organizations criticized Paris conference which was organized behind closed doors. The organizations warned that Afghan people will not agree with any peace deal that will comprise with the decade old achievements in human rights.

Deputy civil society network and independent human rights of Afghanistan Wazir Ahmad Khurami said, “The civil society of Afghanistan has a precise view and we welcome peace in Afghanistan. Afghans will never agree with any peace deal that will compromise with achievements towards human rights during the past ten years.”

This comes as the Taliban group in Paris conference said they do not agree with the current government and constitution.

Civil society representatives insisted that the agenda for any session related to Afghanistan should not be hidden from the Afghan people and decision regarding the future of Afghanistan should not be taken behind closed doors.

<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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