



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

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## 1. IRAQ

### • Iraq denies entry to Turkish minister

A plane carrying Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz to an energy conference in Iraqi Kurdistan has been denied permission to land by the central government in Baghdad.

A Turkish energy ministry official said the plane, which was en route from Istanbul to the northern Iraqi city of Arbil on Tuesday, was forced to land in Turkey's Kayseri, southeast of the capital Ankara.

The plane would not seek permission to land again and the minister would now not attend the conference, the official said.

It was not immediately clear why the minister's private aircraft had been denied permission and officials in Baghdad were not immediately available for comment.

Ties between Ankara and Baghdad have been strained for the past year since Shia Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered the arrest of Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, based on allegations that he ran death squads.

Turkey is now giving sanctuary to Hashemi.

Turkey accuses Maliki of sowing sectarian discord by trying to sideline his Sunni rivals while Maliki says it is Ankara that is stirring sectarian tension.

Both leaders have exchanged public insults and both countries have summoned each other's top diplomats over the past year in tit-for-tat manoeuvres.

Ankara has increasingly courted Iraqi Kurds as its relations with the Shia-led central government in Baghdad have soured.

Turkey is a major investment and trading partner for Iraq, especially for Kurdistan.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012124135957215550.html>

- **State of Law MP Denies rallying armed militias in Kirkuk, Nineveh and Diyala.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the state of law coalition, Yasser al-Yasiri denied rallying armed militias in Kirkuk, Nineveh and Diyala provinces and inciting them against Kurdish citizens.

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "What one of the Kurdistan Alliance MPs talked about this is not true and is just media escalations intended to create a different look to government's constitutional measures to the mixed areas, which were approved by most of the political parties."

Yasiri added that "Maliki's proposal that the residents of the mixed areas protect their areas, agreed upon by all political parties, except the Kurdistan Alliance, which wants to impose military control and this is illegal and unconstitutional in these areas."

The MP for the Kurdistan Alliance, Hamid Buffy said in a press statement that "The Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki form armed militias of one component in a number of areas of Kirkuk, Diyala and Nineveh and the number of its members about / 18 / thousand elements to incite them against the Kurds."

It is said that the Prime Minister announced that he sent a proposal to the Kurd stipulates that the residents of the mixed areas protect their areas, but the region did not respond to this proposal. / End

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

- **Al-Dabbagh arrives to the Parliament to be hosted about Russian arms deal.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The former Iraqi government spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh has arrived to the House of Representatives to be hosted by the common Parliamentary Committee from Integrity and the security and defense committees, on the issue of Russian arms deal.

The name of al-Dabbagh had been stated within the names of the characters that have had a role in the Russian arms deal, which resulted in the termination of his contract as the official spokesman of the government at 29, Nov. / End

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

- **Iraqiya: Nujaifi's initiative seeks to defuse the crisis between brothers.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The Iraqiya coalition's spokeswoman, Maysoon al-Damaloji considered that "The initiative of the President of the House of Representatives, and the Iraqiya leader, Osama Nujaifi between the center and the Kurdistan region, strongly seeks to defuse the crisis."

Damaloji told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "We support any initiative and we have said since the first day that we are against bloodshed between the sons of the country Kurds or Arabs".

She said: "Nujaifi's meetings with leaders of the center and the region come to meet with concern for the national unity and defuse the crisis and ensure the unity of Iraq."

The House Speaker Osama Nujaifi called, in a news conference, to calm between the central government and the Kurdistan region because of the seriousness of the current situation, which could lead to the extent of a military confrontation between the two parties. /End

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

- **Kurdistan spokesman rules out conflict between Peshmerga forces and Federal Army.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The Kurdistan Alliance spokesperson, Moa'id al-Tayyib ruled out any military confrontation between the Peshmerga forces and the federal army.

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / today 5, Dec that the province does not want to conflict with the central forces, and is depicted by others about the possibility of the outbreak of the clash between the Peshmerga forces and the federal army is untrue.

He explained: "Settling the current problem lies with the 2009 agreement, signed between the governments of the center and the region to maintain security in these areas."

Tayyib added: "The strategic alliance between the Arabs and the Kurds cannot be ended and it will continue and the Kurds, in all countries, feel strongly link with the Arab nation and not only with Iraq's Arabs." / End

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

- **Al-Nujaifi offers a new proposal to defuse the crisis after meeting with Barzani.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The House Speaker, Osama al-Nujaifi has offered a new proposal to defuse the crisis between the governments in Baghdad and the Kurdistan region, within his continuing efforts to pacify the situation.

A statement by Nujaifi's Office issued today 5, Dec said that the proposal includes the withdrawal of the Iraqi military forces and the Peshmerga from the tension points and replace them with the local police, in order to alleviate the crisis and ensure no direct military confrontation. This

proposal came after the meeting between Nujaifi with the President of Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani yesterday.

The statement added, "Barzani looked at the proposal positively, but said it should be put for discussion at the meeting of the "technical and military" committees to both sides of the crisis."

It is hoped that the head of the House of Representatives will hold a meet with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki after his return from Erbil. / End

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

## 2. IRAN

- **Iran air defense fully prepared to counter threats: Cmdr.**

A senior Iranian commander says Iran's Army air defense is fully prepared to repel any aggression or counter any threat against the country's territory.

"The air defense [of the Iranian Army] is fully prepared to deal with any aggression or possible threats by enemies," Commander of Khatam al-Anbiya Air Defense Base Brigadier General Farzad Esmaili told reporters on Tuesday.

"Today the Armed Forces, including the air defense, have increased their capability to counter any possible aggression by the enemies, and as they proved during the eight-year imposed war [with Iraq] they are steadfast in countering the enemies' hostile policies," he added.

Pointing to the US RQ-170 drone that was captured by the Iranian forces in late 2011, Esmaili said by using a radar capable of detecting this aircraft, the Army's air defense has showed its power to repel any violation of the country's territory.

He, however, stressed that Iran's policy was defensive not offensive, adding that the Islamic Republic does not pose a threat to other countries.

The US RQ-170 Sentinel stealth aircraft was downed, with minimal damage, by the Iranian Army's electronic warfare unit on December 4, 2011 while flying over the Iranian city of Kashmar, some 140 miles (225km) from the Afghan border.

The RQ-170 is an unmanned stealth aircraft designed and developed by the Lockheed Martin Company.

On Tuesday, Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) captured a US ScanEagle drone over the Persian Gulf waters upon its intrusion into the Iranian airspace.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276273/iran-army-ready-to-counter-threats/>

- **Iran will take legal action against US for drone incursion: Salehi**

Iran has vowed to take legal action against the United States at international courts for violating the Islamic Republic's airspace over the Persian Gulf.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said on Tuesday that the US ScanEagle drone, which had been captured by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) upon entering the country's airspace over Persian Gulf waters, would be used as evidence against the US at international courts, IRNA reported.

"We had formally protested such actions by the US and had announced that we would defend our borders by any means possible," Salehi said.

"We had told the Americans that according to international conventions, we would not allow them to violate our borders, but unfortunately they did not comply... Of course, we had objected to the Americans before, but they claimed they were not present in our territories. We will use this drone as evidence to pursue a legal case against the US invasion at relevant international bodies," he added.

Earlier in the day, IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi announced that the drone had been captured over the past few days.

Iran has released footage of the captured drone, which is a long-endurance aircraft manufactured by Insitu, a subsidiary of Boeing.

According to a report published by the Wall Street Journal on Sunday, Washington “has significantly stepped up spying operations” on the Bushehr nuclear power plant in southern Iran “over the past two months.”

On November 9, Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi said the Iranian military repelled an unidentified aircraft, which had entered the country’s airspace “above the territorial waters of the Islamic Republic in the Persian Gulf.”

On December 4, 2011, Iran announced that an electronic warfare unit of the Iranian armed forces took control of a US RQ-170 Sentinel stealth drone, which was flying over the northeastern Iranian city of Kashmar, and gave it the command to land in Iran.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276233/iran-will-take-legal-action-against-us/>

- **Iran won’t allow violation of sovereignty: Deputy foreign minister**

An Iranian deputy foreign minister has rejected the UAE claims to the ownership of the three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf, saying the Islamic Republic does not allow any country to violate its sovereignty.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran considers it its legal right to exercise sovereignty over the Iranian islands of the Greater Tunb, the Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa,” Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on Tuesday.

“We will not allow any parties to commit any acts of violation when it comes to the country’s sovereignty or national security and will take effective measures [in this regard],” he added.

On November 29, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirate (UAE) Anwar Mohammed Gargash claimed that the three islands belonged to the UAE.

Reiterating that such remarks contributed to the enemies' objectives in the region, Amir-Abdollahian voiced Iran's readiness to hold "constructive dialog" over the issue.

The United Arab Emirates has repeatedly laid baseless claims to the islands.

This comes as the islands of the Greater Tunb, the Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa have historically been part of Iran, the proof of which can be found and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276248/iran-wont-allow-sovereignty-violation/>

- **Western countries led by US are behind instability in region, world: Mehmanparast**

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast says some Western countries headed by the United States are the main reasons for regional and global instabilities.

Mehmanparast made the remarks at a press conference in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore on Tuesday night, IRNA reported.

"The main problems of the region are related to the West's dual policies, which are evident in the Persian Gulf region and in countries like Afghanistan," he stated.

Mehmanparast said the US and some of its allies "sow discord and tension in the region to achieve their own interests," and added, "Foreign troops in Afghanistan have created numerous problems for the Afghans and the people in the region."

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman also referred to Pakistan as a key player in Iran’s foreign policies and stressed the need to enhance the level of bilateral relations between the two countries in all areas, particularly in the media domain.

He went on to say that “the Western media is painting a black picture of Muslims” and that “the Islamic countries’ media must block the Western propaganda against Islam with proper planning.”

Mehmanparast, who heads an Iranian media delegation, arrived in Pakistan on Sunday.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276235/us-behind-regional-global-instability/>

- **War on Iran will cause enemies irreparable damage: Defense min.**

Iran’s defense minister has warned the enemies that any act of aggression against the Islamic Republic will cost them “irreparable” consequences.

“Any move [against Iran]...for military purposes and mistreatment of Iran will bring irreparable damages on the arrogant [powers],” Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi said on Tuesday.

He downplayed war threats against Iran, arguing that the enemies are aware of the country’s defense capabilities and readiness to ward off any invaders.

“The enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran are well aware of [its] deterrent capabilities and the consequences of military strikes against the country, and know about the preparedness of the Iranian Armed Forces,” he stated.

The Iranian commander's remarks follow frequent threats by the Israeli regime about a military strike on the Iranian nuclear sites.

Tel Aviv claims that the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy program has been diverted toward military purposes, but Iran has strongly rejected the allegation with its top military officials warning that any military action could result in a war that would spread beyond the Middle East.

In recent years, the country has made great achievements in military industry and attained self-sufficiency in essential military equipment and systems.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly stated that its military might poses no threat to other countries, reiterating that its defense doctrine is based on deterrence.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/04/276149/iran-strike-will-cost-enemies-dearly/>

### 3. SYRIA

- **Syrian foreign ministry spokesman 'defects'**

There are unconfirmed reports that the spokesman of the Syrian foreign ministry has defected.

Wael Merza, Syrian National Coalition presidential adviser, said that Makdissi had arrived in London. a claim Al Jazeera could not confirm.

Lebanons' Al Manar television station reported that Makdissi had been sacked for making statements that do not reflect the state's line.

"We know that in late July, he made comments saying that Syria was not going to use its chemical weapons, admitting, basically, to Syria having chemical weapons," Al Jazeera's Rula Amin reported from Beirut.

"Then there was a lot of effort by the government to try to defuse the statement," she said.

Makdissi's role had been scaled back since then, with fewer statements and press conferences.

"We've heard, from different sources, that he did leave Syria - at least he has not been in Syria for the past two days - through Lebanon and is now in London." our correspondent said, adding that British officials are neither confirming nor denying Makdissi's defection.

Makdissi often spoke at news conferences in Damascus to set out Syria's response to the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.

In June of 2011, the Syrian government also fired spokeswoman Reem Haddad for saying that Syrians were seeking shelter in Turkey in order to visit their relatives there.

Hisham Jaber, director of the Middle East Centre for Studies and Research, told Al Jazeera that he believes Makdissi was given permission to visit his family in Lebanon and that he flew to London from Beirut.

"I think he had a reason, maybe, to leave the country, and he made his choice," he said.

"Of course the gentleman is not in the position to have a lot of secrets, but he was very close to the regime and has a lot of information. He's also a very brilliant person and can use his skills among the opposition."

There is no official confirmation on Makdissi's status from the Syrian government.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012123163314873741.html>

- **Syria militants ruin shops in Aleppo**

Images taken in Syria's northwestern city of Aleppo show shop owners selling goods out on the streets due to the destruction of their stores by the militants fighting the country's government.



The militants, mostly foreign nationals, damage and loot the shops. Reports say they also rob wheat and sell it in Turkey.

Moreover, bread and fuel have become extremely expensive in Aleppo over the past few months as the fighting has damaged the city's economy.

On September 29, a massive fire destroyed hundreds of shops in a medieval marketplace in the Old City of Aleppo, which has been declared a world heritage site by UNESCO. The fire started during heavy fighting between the militants and the Syrian troops.

The Old City of Aleppo was placed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1986 in recognition of its "rare and authentic Arab architectural styles."

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011. Many people, including large numbers of army and security personnel, have been killed in the turmoil.

The Syrian government says certain Western states, especially the United States, and their regional allies are fueling the turmoil.

Damascus says a very large number of the militants operating in Syria are foreign nationals.  
<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276246/syria-militants-ruin-shops-in-aleppo/>

- **Russia rebuffs West's claims on Syrian WMDs**

Russia has rejected the Western claims that Damascus might have plans to use chemical weapons against foreign-backed militants in Syria.

The West is aware that its claims about the Syrian chemical weapons do not stand up to scrutiny, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a ministerial meeting of 28 NATO countries in Brussels on Tuesday, The Independent reported.

Lavrov stated that “as soon as we get these rumors [about chemical weapons] we engage in constructive demarche; when we get confirmation that nothing of that type is happening we share this information with our American colleagues.”

On Monday, US President Barack Obama claimed that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad intends to use chemical weapons against the militants.

There would be consequences if Assad were to use these weapons, Obama said.

"The use of chemical weapons is and would be totally unacceptable and if you make the tragic mistake of using these weapons there will be consequences and you will be held accountable," he stated.

Syrian officials have dismissed the allegations that they intend to use chemical weapons to end the crisis, saying that Syria will never use weapons of mass destruction against its own people.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Russia foreign minister said there had been an exaggeration of the threat faced by Ankara to justify NATO’s deployment of advanced Patriot missiles in Turkey along the Syrian border.

Lavrov added that any deployment of Patriot missiles by Turkey “is creating the risk that these arms will be used.”

On November 21, Turkey formally asked its NATO partners to deploy the surface-to-air Patriot missiles to defend its border with Syria.

On Tuesday, NATO agreed to send Patriot missiles to Turkey.

"To the Turkish people we say: We are determined to defend you and your territory. To anyone who would want to attack Turkey we say: Don't even think about it," NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said after the Western alliance made the decision in Brussels.

The Syria crisis began in March 2011.

The Syrian government says that the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

Militant groups, supported by certain Western states and their regional allies, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, have been trying to topple the Syrian government for over 20 months.

Several international human rights organizations have accused the foreign-sponsored insurgents of committing war crimes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276238/russia-rebuffs-wests-claims-on-syrian-wmd/>

- **Syrian troops kill dozens of gunmen on outskirts of Damascus**

Syrian Army soldiers have killed dozens of foreign-sponsored militants during mop-up operations on the outskirts of Damascus.

A number of al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra (Victory Front) gunmen were killed during intense clashes with Syrian troops near Khulafa al-Rashideen Mosque in the Cornish neighborhood of the town of Daraya, which is located 8 kilometers (5 miles) southwest of Damascus, on Tuesday, the SANA news agency reported.

Syrian soldiers also killed a number of armed men during battles close to the town's financial center.

In addition, Syrian Army soldiers clashed with anti-government gunmen in the town of al-Ziyabiyeh, killing dozens of them in the process.

The gunmen had terrorized citizens, causing them to flee their homes, and destroyed public and private property.

Syrian troops destroyed several cars used by militants and seized a large amount of munitions after the battle.

Elsewhere, a unit of Syrian forces attacked gunmen and killed a large number of them in the town of al-Hejjeira.

In addition, Syrian Army troops defused four explosive devices in the town of Arabeen as they were patrolling the area.

Syrian troops also unearthed bombs, some weighing as much as 50 kilograms, near the Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque in Arabeen.

The bombs had been hidden in holes dug by militants in the basements of residential buildings in the area.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011. Many people, including large numbers of security forces, have been killed in the turmoil.

The Syrian government says that the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276234/many-rebels-slain-on-outskirts-of-damascus/>

- **Syrian rebel attack on school kills 29 students, teacher: TV**

A rebel mortar attack on a school in a camp for displaced people near Damascus on Tuesday killed 29 students and their teacher, Syrian state television reported, calling it a “horrific crime.”

The mortar smashed into Bteiha school in Wafideen camp about 20 kilometers (15 miles) northeast of Damascus, the report said. Wafideen is home to some 25,000 people displaced from the Golan Heights by the Israeli occupation since 1967.

“They were killed by a mortar launched by terrorists,” said the broadcaster, using the Syrian regime’s term for rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad’s forces in the country’s raging civil war.

Battles east of Damascus have grown especially bloody in past days as troops try to push back rebels in the Eastern Ghouta region as they inch closer towards the capital.

On Tuesday alone, a total of 16 people were killed in violence in the province of Damascus, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which also reported the killings in the Wafideen camp.

The Britain-based watchdog also reported raging battles on Tuesday at a checkpoint near the strategic road linking Damascus to the international airport.

The army meanwhile shelled several towns and villages in the outskirts of Damascus, both southwest and east of the capital, it said.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/04/253333.html>

- **Syria’s top 10 businessmen flee to Egypt**

With mounting violence in Syria, a large number of businessmen have started transferring their money and business to Egypt, Turkey’s state Anatolia News Agency reported this week.

The businesses, established by Syrian entrepreneurs range from real estate, stock market investments, to smaller projects and retail sales.

“The top 10 Syrian businessmen have fled to Egypt in the past few days,” said Khalil al-Egeili, a Syrian activist living in Egypt. “I cannot, however, say their names.”

Egeili explained that most Syrian businessmen who fled their homeland preferred to settle down in Egypt where they transfer their money and start new businesses.

“Millions of dollars have been deposited in Egypt by Syrian businessmen but it is hard to know the exact amounts.”

According to Egeili, one third of the Syrian economy was transferred to Egypt following the eruption of the revolution.

“Many businessmen preferred to invest in the stock market or deposit their money in the banks until they see how things will turn out.”

Syrian investments in Egypt are estimated at \$400-500 million, while others argue they exceed those amounts.

Nezar al-Kharat, a Syrian businessman and head of the Egyptian branch of the Syrian Revolution Coordination Committee, said that a large number of businessmen came to Egypt after the regime started targeting their companies and factories.

“Most of those are from Aleppo and they are now working on establishing a union for Syrian businessmen in Egypt.”

According to Bassem al-Kwaifi, a Syrian investor living in Egypt, former head of the Damascus Chamber of Commerce, and member of the Syrian Transitional Council, the number of Syrian businessmen coming to Egypt has doubled in the past three months.

“A lot Syrian investors preferred to start small and medium projects with the money they brought.”

Kwaifi estimated the percentage of Syrian businessmen who fled to Egypt at 30% of their total number (about 50,000 businessmen).

Although some go to the Gulf region or Europe, Kwaifi explained, most Syrian businessmen prefer Egypt for many reasons.

“It is easy to enter Egypt and get a residence permit and there is also a lot of cheap labor.”

Kwaifi noted that billionaires known for their close ties to the Syrian regime preferred going to other countries.

He explained that among the most common projects Syrians started in Egypt were restaurants, cafes, tailor shops, and textile factories.

According to Khaldoun al-Mowakaa, head of the Syrian Egyptian Business Council, Syrian investments in Egypt exceed \$500 million, basically concentrated in textile and clothing.

“These businesses were started in several industrial cities across Egypt,” he said in a press statement.

Ahmed Ghanam, member of the Damascus Chamber of Industry and a refugee in Egypt, said that most middle class Syrians in Egypt live in the suburbs of Cairo while laborers live in working class areas.

“Many of the middle class refugees started projects that cost 500,000 - 600,000 Egyptian pounds.”

However, Ghanam added, transferring money from Syria is not always easy owing to the obstacles imposed by the Syrian regime.

“That is why most of the money was transferred from Lebanese banks.”

Abdel Aziz al-Saedi, branch manager of the Societe Arabe Internationale De Banque (SAIB), said that banks have witnessed a remarkable increase in Syrian deposits.

“Egyptian banks offer a lot of facilities for Syrian refugees. For example, they are not required to submit residence documents to open an account.”

In addition to Lebanese banks, he said, several transfers are also made from Saudi Arabian banks.

The Syrian Investment Authority revealed that Syrian investments have decreased by 74 percent between January and September 2012 not only because of the conflict between the regime and the opposition, but also owing to the sanctions imposed on several sectors of the Syria economy.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/04/253308.html>

#### 4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **Israel joins US in claim on Syria ‘WMDs’**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has joined US President Barack Obama in the psychological war on Damascus, claiming that the Syrian government might use chemical weapons.

Netanyahu said on Tuesday that the Tel Aviv regime would monitor the ‘potential use of chemical weapons’ in Syria.

On Monday, Obama said in reference to the Syrian government, “The use of chemical weapons is and would be totally unacceptable and if you make the tragic mistake of using these weapons there will be consequences and you will be held accountable.”

Damascus strongly dismissed the US allegations.

On December 3, the US magazine Atlantic reported that the Israeli regime was seeking “permission” by the Jordanian government to bomb the “chemical weapons sites” inside Syria.

The magazine stated that Netanyahu had sent intermediaries of the Israeli spy agency, Mossad, to Amman twice over the past two months with plans to bomb the Syrian sites. The plan, however, has so far been rejected by Jordan.

The Atlantic report added that Israeli and US spy drones have been flying over the Jordan-Syria border recently.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011. Many people, including large numbers of army and security personnel, have been killed in the turmoil.

The Syrian government says certain Western states, especially the United States, and their regional allies are fueling the turmoil.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276251/israel-joins-us-in-claim-on-syria-wmds/>

- **Israel demolishes West Bank mosque for second time in two years**

Israeli forces have demolished a mosque in the occupied West Bank village of al-Mufağara, south of al-Khalil (Hebron), for the second time in two years.

Witnesses say Israeli forces backed by bulldozers and heavy machinery attacked the village at dawn and forcibly evicted all who were inside the mosque preparing to perform morning prayers.

Israeli forces did not even allow the locals to remove books and other objects from inside the mosque before demolishing it.

Israel Radio said the mosque was built without a license. But al-Mafqara residents say such demolitions are part of a larger Israeli plan to expand Jewish settlements on occupied Palestinian territories.

Al-Khalil's governor Kamel Hmaid condemned the demolition of the mosque as a "collective punishment."

Meanwhile, Palestinians have vowed to rebuild it.

He said the mosque was destroyed after a team of European Union diplomats visited the village, stressing that the move was "an Israeli challenge to the countries that stood beside the Palestinian right" and voted in favor of upgrading of Palestine's status at the UN.

The mosque was first destroyed in 2011.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/04/276171/israeli-forces-demolish-west-bank-mosque/>

- **Israel has right to respond to PA provocation'**

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu departed for Germany Wednesday morning, where he was expected to push the message that if the Europeans want to prevent Israel from responding further to the recent Palestinian victory at the UN, they should "encourage a positive Palestinian dynamic" and keep the PA from "further provocative actions," diplomatic officials said on Tuesday.

Netanyahu is scheduled to dine with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and hear sharp criticism of plans to build 3,000 housing units in the settlement blocs and east Jerusalem, as well as push forward the planning of E1 in Ma'aleh Adumin.

Netanyahu gave an indication of what he will say in Europe, telling a gathering of the National Public Diplomacy Forum that met on Tuesday to summarize Operation Pillar of Defense, that the Gaza "war" was over Israel's existence.

"We left territories we took during the Six Day War, such as Gaza, and they fire rockets on us," he said. "The root of the conflict is not the settlements, not the territories; it is the very existence of Israel and their desire to wipe us off the map."

The prime minister's message, according to the officials, will be that if the Palestinians continue with provocative steps, Israel reserves the right to respond.

He will say that it is important for the Europeans to use their influence with the Palestinians to encourage a positive dynamic, not a negative one.

This message is one that Israeli officials have been telling their European interlocutors since the tidal wave of criticism over the recent settlement plans began: The ball is in the EU's court, and they should get the Palestinians to avoid further unilateral steps.

John Gatt Rutter, the EU representative in the West Bank and Gaza, said at a briefing with journalists that the Palestinians made clear before the vote at the UN General Assembly last Thursday that afterward they would be willing to negotiate with Israel without preconditions.

He also said there were "positive signals" from the PA regarding the issue of hauling Israel before the International Criminal Court, something that Israeli officials have indicated would elicit an even tougher Israeli response than the one already taken.

Gatt Rutter said that Israel's decision to withhold NIS 450 million in tax revenue it collected for the PA places the PA in difficult economic straits. It was not clear whether this was a "prolonged measure" or just "one shot," he said. If it is sustained, the "impact on the PA would be devastating."

While that is an immediate concern, the EU official said the intention to build in E1 was a "strategic" concern that would call into question the viability of the peace process and the two-state solution.

He also said that the EU was supporting PA reconciliation efforts, and hoped Fatah and Hamas "can move forward in a meaningful way on the basis of what the EU can support." He reiterated that the EU still stood by its demands that Hamas accept the Mideast Quartet's conditions for engagement – recognizing Israel, accepting previous agreements and forswearing violence. While

some Hamas leaders have made comments in that direction, the EU was awaiting more clarity, Gatt Rutter said.

Andrew Standley, the EU's ambassador to Israel, said he knew of no European plans to take immediate action against Israel, and that the EU's foreign ministers would discuss the matter Monday in Brussels. The EU's goal was to get the sides back to negotiations, and it wanted to create an environment that made that possible.

His comments were echoed by British Foreign Secretary William Hague, who told Parliament in London that European sanctions against Israel in response to the settlement plans were not an option, though the EU's foreign ministers were discussing formulating "incentives and disincentives" to bring the sides back to negotiations.

"I don't think there is enthusiasm around the European Union... about economic sanctions in Europe on Israel. I don't believe there would be anywhere near a consensus nor is that our approach. We continue to try to bring both sides back to negotiations," Hague said. "Nevertheless, if there is no reversal of the decision that has been announced, we will want to consider what further steps European countries should take."

France on Monday also dismissed the prospect of European sanctions against Israel.

Nevertheless, according to Standley the furious reaction by a number of EU states over Israeli moves was a reflection of frustration that consistent messages conveyed by the EU regarding settlement construction had gone unheeded.

Despite European calls for Israel to "reconsider" the recent measures, the messages coming out of Jerusalem did not indicate any intention to do so, he said.

"Rather we hear statements that Israel will act according to its strategic interests," Standley said.

Among the EU countries, Finland and Ireland called in Israel’s ambassadors on Tuesday to protest the settlement plans, following Britain, France, Sweden, Denmark and Spain that did so the day before. Australia also called in the ambassador to protest, as did Brazil and Egypt.

Even before Israel’s recent announcement of settlement plans, Merkel has been a consistent critic of Israel’s settlements policy. Germany abstained last Thursday at the UN vote, even though over the weekend Merkel expressed unstinting support for Israel’s security.

Before traveling to Germany for the annual government-to-government meeting, Netanyahu will stop in Prague to thank the Czech government in person for its support at the UN vote last Thursday. The Czech Republic was the only EU country to vote with Israel and against the Palestinian move at the UN, and Netanyahu decided after that vote to add a Czech leg to his previously scheduled trip to Germany.

“The history of Israel and the Czech Republic has taught us that there is a need to adhere to truth even when the majority is not with you,” the prime minister said on the eve of his trip.

In addition to the PA move at the UN and the settlements, a number of other issues will be on the agenda of the talks in Berlin, including Israel’s unhappiness at the German sale of tanks to Saudi Arabia and of submarines to Egypt, and the situation in Syria.

Netanyahu will be accompanied on his two-day trip by Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman, Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz, Science and Technology Minister Daniel Herschkowitz, Agriculture Minister Orit Noked and Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon.

Meanwhile, the Palestinians wrote a letter to UN Secretary- General Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday accusing Israel of planning to commit further “war crimes” by expanding settlements.

The letter said Israel was behaving “in a rogue, hostile and arrogant manner, contravening all principles and rules of international law and reacting with contempt to the will of the international community.”

According to the letter, written by PLO UN observer Riyad Mansour, “A clear message must be sent to Israel that all of its illegal policies must be ceased or that it will be held accountable and will have to bear the consequences if its violations and obstruction of peace efforts.”

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=294677>

- **Hamas seeks to reopen airport in southern Gaza**

The Hamas government is working toward reopening the only airport in the Gaza Strip.

Named after Yasser Arafat, the airport, which is located close to the Egyptian border, opened in 1998, when the Palestinian Authority was still in control of the Gaza Strip.

The airport was closed in 2001 after being damaged by the IDF.

Ziad al-Thatha, Hamas’s deputy prime minister, said that his government has asked the Egyptians to help reopen the airport. He did not say when and if it would resume operations.

It is also not clear whether the PA leadership in the West Bank would allow Hamas to run the facility.

In the past, the PA opposed the presence of Hamas representatives at the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.

The Hamas official, who headed his movement’s delegation to the recent Egyptian- sponsored cease-fire talks with Israel, said that Israel has agreed to allow construction material into the Gaza Strip.

He said that understandings reached with Israel and Egypt also permit the export of agricultural products, furniture and clothes from the Strip.

Thatha did not say whether the Egyptians had agreed to discuss the issue of the airport with Israel.

The airport was built with funding from Japan, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Germany and Egypt. It was designed by Moroccan architects and cost more than \$85 million.

Meanwhile, a senior Hamas official in the Gaza Strip, Issa al- Nashar, announced that Khaled Mashaal, chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, is expected to visit the Gaza Strip Thursday for the first time.

Nashar said that Mashaal and other Hamas leaders would participate in celebrations marking the anniversary of the founding of the Islamist movement and "victory" over Israel during last month's Operation Pillar of Defense.

"This is an historic visit," he said. "It comes in the aftermath of our big victory."

Nashar said Mashaal would be accompanied by his deputy, Musa Abu Marzouk.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=294642>

- **PA: Israel must be held accountable for settlements**

UNITED NATIONS - The Palestinians accused Israel in a letter to the United Nations of planning to commit further "war crimes" by expanding Jewish settlements after the Palestinians won de facto UN recognition of statehood, and warned that Jerusalem must be held accountable.

In the letter to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the UN Security Council, the Palestinians said Israel was behaving "in a rogue, hostile and arrogant manner, contravening all principles and rules of international law and reacting with contempt to the will of the international community."

After the UN General Assembly upgraded the Palestinians' status at the world body on Thursday from "observer entity" to "non-member state," Israel said on Friday it would build 3,000 more settler homes in the West Bank and east Jerusalem - areas Palestinians want for a future state, along with Gaza.

Approximately 500,000 Israelis and 2.5 million Palestinians live in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

"A clear message must be sent to Israel that all of its illegal policies must be ceased or that it will be held accountable and will have to bear the consequences if its violations and obstruction of peace efforts," Palestinian UN observer Riyad Mansour wrote in the letter dated Monday.

After winning the UN status upgrade, the Palestinians might now be granted access to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which prosecutes people for genocide, war crimes and other major human rights violations and where it could complain about Israel.

The Palestinians have said they will not rush to sign up to the International Criminal Court, but have warned that seeking action against Israel in the court would remain an option if Israel continued to build illegal settlements.

Prior to the UN vote, some Western nations unsuccessfully pushed for a Palestinian pledge not to pursue Israel in the ICC.

Brazil and Australia on Tuesday became the latest countries to summon their envoys over the Israeli plans.

The moves followed similar actions in Europe including Spain, France, Britain, Sweden and Denmark.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=294596>

- **Palestinians to sue Israel at ICC**

The Palestinian Authority says it will use the new UN status for Palestine to sue Israel at the International Criminal Court if the Tel Aviv regime goes ahead with a new plan to expand illegal settlements in the occupied territories.

Nabil Sha'at, a senior member of the Palestinian Authority, said on Tuesday that Palestinians would file a complaint at the ICC if the Israeli regime sticks to its recent plan to build thousands more settler units in East al-Quds and the West Bank, including in the controversial E1 area.

“By continuing these war crimes of settlement activities on our lands and stealing our money, Israel is pushing and forcing us to go to the ICC,” Sha’at said.

On November 29, the 193-member UN General Assembly voted 138-9 with 41 abstentions to upgrade Palestine’s status to non-member observer state.

The Israeli regime announced the plan for the construction of the new settlement units following the UN vote.

Meanwhile, Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestine Authority official, said the international community should propose sanctions on Israel.

“We have to move to concrete steps so Israel knows it has something to lose and will be held accountable, in accordance with international law,” Ashrawi said.

Many countries, including some of Tel Aviv’s allies, have criticized the settlement expansion plan.

However, sources close to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have said that the Tel Aviv regime would “continue to stand up for its vital interests even in the face of international pressure.”

More than half a million Israelis live in over 120 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds.

The settlements are considered illegal by the UN and much of the international community.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276279/palestinians-to-sue-israel-at-icc/>

## 5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Clashes outside Egypt's presidential palace**

Egyptian police have fired tear gas at opposition protesters demonstrating against Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's drive to hold a snap referendum on a controversial draft charter, as the country plunges deeper into crisis.

Live television footage showed that some protesters broke through police lines and got too close to the presidential palace late on Tuesday night.

Al Jazeera's Rawya Rageh, reporting from Cairo said: "We saw thousand of people surrounding the palace on all four corners, outnumbering the police and getting close to the presidential walls.

"Opposition has announced there's going to be a sit-in outside the palace.

"The message coming out of here is that the president has failed to prove to Egyptians that he is the president of all of Egypt, as opposed to a leader in the Muslim Brotherhood group.

"Morsi is preparing for the referendum, he is under a lot of pressure from the opposition, but he does not seemed to be phased by the protests".

Thousands had taken to the streets waving Egyptian flags, chanting for the downfall of the president and denouncing the Muslim Brotherhood, from which Morsi emerged, for having "sold the revolution" that toppled Hosni Mubarak last year.

The strikes were part of a planned campaign of civil disobedience that could bring in other industries.

'Stand up to tyranny'

Also on Tuesday, at least eight influential daily newspapers, a mix of opposition party mouthpieces and independent publications, suspended publication for a day to protest against what many journalists see as the restrictions on freedom of expression in the draft constitution.

The move, according to independent daily Al-Tahrir, was aimed at "standing up to tyranny".

The country's privately owned TV networks are planning their own protest on Wednesday, when they will blacken their screens all day.

A November 22 decree issued by Morsi expanding his powers and subsequent announcement to hold a referendum on a draft constitution rejected by liberals have sparked strikes and deadly protests.

The charter has become the focal point of a political and ideological battle in Egypt between the Muslim Brotherhood and their Islamic allies and the largely secular-leaning opposition.

"The country is deeply divided over Morsi's legitimacy, the opposition are saying they are not against his election which was legitimate, but his actions and decrees are not legitimate," said our reporter.

Morsi's decision has not only placed his decisions beyond judicial oversight but also barred any judicial body from dissolving the panel that drafted and approved the new constitution, sparking a conflict with the country's judges.

As he faces his worst crisis since taking office in June, Morsi insists the measures are aimed at ending a tumultuous transition following the popular uprising that toppled Mubarak in early 2011.

But his opponents have accused him of choosing the same path of autocracy that finally cost Mubarak his presidency.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012124163243352275.html>

- **Egypt's Mursi leaves palace as police battle protesters**

CAIRO, (Reuters) - Egyptian police battled thousands of protesters outside President Mohamed Mursi's palace in Cairo on Tuesday, prompting the Islamist leader to leave the building, two presidential sources said.

Police fired teargas at demonstrators angered by Mursi's drive to hold a referendum on a new constitution on December 15. Some broke through police lines around his palace and protested next to the perimeter wall.

Several thousand people had gathered nearby in what they dubbed "last warning" protests against Mursi, who infuriated opponents with a November 22 decree that expanded his powers. "The people want the downfall of the regime," the crowd chanted.

"The president left the palace," a presidential source, who declined to be named, told Reuters. A security source at the presidency also said the president had left the building.

Mursi ignited a storm of unrest in his bid to prevent a judiciary still packed with appointees of ousted predecessor Hosni Mubarak from derailing a troubled political transition.

Riot police at the palace faced off against activists chanting "leave, leave" and holding Egyptian flags with "no to the constitution" written on them. Protesters had assembled near mosques in northern Cairo before marching towards the palace.

"Our marches are against tyranny and the void constitutional decree and we won't retract our position until our demands are met," said Hussein Abdel Ghany, a spokesman for an opposition coalition of liberal, leftist and other disparate factions.

Despite the latest protests, there has been only a limited response to opposition calls for a mass campaign of civil disobedience in the Arab world's most populous country and cultural hub, where many people yearn for a return to stability.

A few hundred protesters gathered earlier near Mursi's house in a suburb east of Cairo, chanting slogans against his decree and against the Muslim Brotherhood, from which the president emerged to win a free election in June. Police closed the road to stop them from coming any closer, a security official said.

Opposition groups have accused Mursi of making a dictatorial power grab to push through a constitution drafted by an assembly dominated by Islamists, with a referendum planned for December 15.

Egypt's most widely read independent newspapers did not publish on Tuesday in protest at Mursi's "dictatorship". Banks closed early to let staff go home safely in case of trouble.

Abdelrahman Mansour in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the cradle of the anti-Mubarak revolt, said: "The presidency believes the opposition is too weak and toothless. Today is the day we show them the opposition is a force to be reckoned with."

After winning post-Mubarak elections and pushing the Egyptian military out of the political driving seat it held for decades, the Islamists sense their moment has come to shape the future

of Egypt, a longtime U.S. ally whose 1979 peace treaty with Israel is a cornerstone of Washington's Middle East policy.

The Muslim Brotherhood and its allies, who staged a huge pro-Mursi demonstration on Saturday, are confident that enough members of the judiciary will be available to oversee the mid-December referendum, despite calls by some judges for a boycott.

Cairo stocks closed up 3.5 percent on Tuesday as investors took heart at what they saw as prospects for a return to stability in a country whose divisions have only widened since a mass uprising toppled Mubarak on February 11, 2011.

Mohamed Radwan, at Pharos Securities brokerage, said the Supreme Judicial Council's agreement to supervise the referendum had generated confidence that the vote would happen "despite all the noise and demonstrations that might take place until then".

"NO WAY PERFECT"

Prime Minister Hisham Kandil, a technocrat with Islamist sympathies, said in an interview with CNN: "We certainly hope that things will quiet down after the referendum is completed."

He said the constitution was "in no way a perfect text" that everyone had agreed to, but that a "majority consensus" favored moving forward with the referendum in 11 days' time.

The Muslim Brotherhood, now tasting power via the ballot box for the first time in eight decades of struggle, wants to safeguard its gains and appears ready to override street protests by what it regards as an unrepresentative minority.

It is also determined to stop the courts, which have already dissolved the Islamist-led elected lower house of parliament, from further obstructing their blueprint for change.

Mohamed ElBaradei, coordinator of an opposition National Salvation Front, has said Mursi must rescind his decree, drop plans for the referendum and agree on a new, more representative constituent assembly to draft a democratic constitution.

In an opinion piece published in the Financial Times, he accused Mursi and the Brotherhood of believing that "with a few strokes of a pen, they can slide (Egypt) back into a coma".

ElBaradei, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who once headed the U.N. nuclear watchdog, wrote: "If they continue to try, they risk an eruption into violence and chaos that will destroy the fabric of Egyptian society."

Despite charges that they are anti-Islamist and politically motivated, judges say they are following legal codes in their rulings. Experts say some political changes rushed through in the past two years have been on shaky legal ground.

A Western diplomat said the Islamists were counting on a popular desire for restored normality and economic stability.

"All the messages from the Muslim Brotherhood are that a vote for the constitution is one for stability and a vote against is one for uncertainty," he said, adding that the cost of the strategy was a "breakdown in consensus politics".

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32047>

- **Tunisian Islamists, leftists clash in Tunis after job protests**

TUNIS, (Reuters) - Tunisian police broke up a clash in Tunis on Tuesday after pro-government Islamists attacked labor union leaders they blamed for inciting protests last week against the Islamist government.

Several hundred Islamists with knives and sticks charged a gathering of the UGTT main labor union body in the capital and broke its office windows with stones, a Reuters witness said. Police then intervened to separate the two groups.

"UGTT, you are thieves, you want to destroy the country," the Islamists chanted. They also carried banners.

Hundreds of leftist union members, who backed days of protests over lack of jobs and development in the deprived town Siliana last week, had been chanting slogans in the streets by the UGTT headquarters calling for a general strike and downfall of the government led by the Islamist Ennahda party.

Ennahda came to power last year after an uprising brought down veteran ruler Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, whose police state had repressed Islamists and promoted secularism.

Ennahda accused leftists who lost last year's elections of fomenting the unrest in Siliana by provoking Tunisians in impoverished areas into confrontations that would drive away foreign investors.

The protests, which led to at least 252 injuries including some cases of blinding by birdshot, began after a call by the UGTT to take to the streets to demand jobs, investment and the removal of Ennahda's Islamist governor of the province.

The government on Saturday temporarily removed the local governor, promised jobs to victims of the 2010 uprising, and police stopped using birdshot after criticism of "excessive force" from the U.N. Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay.

The protests were the fiercest since conservative Salafi Islamists attacked the U.S. embassy in Tunis in September over an anti-Islam film made in California, in violence that left four people dead.

The clashes on Tuesday did not appear to involve Salafis.

"This is a message from Ennahda to stop union activism. It's the same method used by Ben Ali," said UGTT figure Fethi Debek.

The shift to slogans against the Islamists in Siliana seemed to wrong-foot the government, which has been absorbed so far with violent disputes between Salafis and liberals over the future direction of what was once a bastion of Arab secularism and securing international funding to meet budget targets.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32051>

- **Mursi prepared for dialogue with opposition - Presidential source**

Cairo, Asharq Al-Awsat – At a time when several parties are conducting consultation to resolve the Egyptian crisis, including al-Azhar and the Constituent Assembly, a source within the Egyptian presidency informed Asharq Al-Awsat that President Mursi had met numerous political figures in this regard, but this did not include any meetings with opposition symbols. The Egyptian presidential source, speaking to Asharq Al-Awsat on the condition of anonymity, said “the president has opened the door to dialogue, but nobody has responded to this until now.”

A massive rally was planned for Tuesday by opposition activists to protest against President Mursi’s controversial constitutional declaration, which granted him nearly unrestricted powers, as well as the disputed draft constitution, a referendum on which is scheduled to take place on 15 December. Egyptian military sources revealed that armed forces intend to deploy soldiers, tanks and military vehicles to protect the presidential palace and prevent any aggression on the part of the protesters. In addition to the scheduled protest march, eight influential Egyptian daily newspapers – a mix of opposition party mouthpieces and independent publications – suspended publication for a day on Tuesday to protest against reported restrictions on freedom of expression in the draft constitution. Whilst Egypt’s privately-owned television networks have planned their own protest for Wednesday, suspending programming and broadcasting a back screen for the day.

The Egyptian president has defended his constitutional declaration, stressing this was temporary. Speaking after receiving the final draft of the constitution, Mursi said “I renew my call for opening a serious national dialogue over the concerns of the nation, with all honesty and impartiality.” He added “we must move beyond the period of confrontation and differences, and get on to productive work.”

For his part, Al-Azhar University Grand Imam Ahmed El-Tayeb launched a dialogue initiative to deal with the current crisis being witnessed in Egypt, meeting with Constituent Assembly President Judge Hossam El-Gheriany and others on Monday. El-Tayeb announced that this dialogue initiative aims to “bridge the divide” over the draft constitution. All those who attended the Monday meeting will seek to contact Egypt’s various political parties and groups, including the opposition, to resolve the damaging political crisis currently raging in the country.

However former International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] Mohamed ElBaradei had called on the people of Egypt to uphold their protest against the constitutional decree, saying “to the people of Egypt, gathered in all squares nationwide, for freedom and dignity: stand your ground.” In another tweet, ElBaradei said that the draft constitution “undermines basic freedom and violates universal values” adding “the struggle will continue.”

ElBaradei, who is the founder of the liberal Dostour Party, has participated in several Cairo marches in protest to Mursi’s constitutional declaration and draft constitution.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32048>

- **Arab Spring nations slip in corruption index**

Egypt has fallen in a global league table of perceived official corruption in the past year, and the Arab Spring revolutions have yet to produce serious anti-corruption action across the region, Transparency International (TI) says.

In its annual Corruption Perceptions Index, released on Wednesday, the Berlin-based group said Egypt had fallen six places to 118th out of 176 countries as levels of bribery, abuse of power and secret dealings remain high in the Arab world's most populous nation.

"We know that frustration about corruption brought people out onto the streets in the Arab world," Christoph Wilcke, TI director for the Middle East and North Africa, said.

"We've observed that in countries where substantial change occurred they're still struggling to put in place new systems of governance. That's reflected in these scores. The hope hasn't materialised yet in more serious anti-corruption programmes."

The public-sector league table from the - on which the higher the ranking, the cleaner a country is - produced a mixed picture for nations swept up in last year's unrest.

Tunisia slipped two places to 75th while Morocco, which experienced less turmoil, fell eight spots to 88th.

Syria, which is engulfed in a civil war, dropped 15 places to 144th but Libya managed an improvement from a very low base, rising to 160th from 168th.

In five-way tie

Egypt was in a five-way tie with the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Indonesia and Madagascar with a score of 32.

Mohamed Morsi became Egypt's first freely elected president in June this year after a period of direct military rule following the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak last February.

Corruption ranging from the petty to the grand scale was one of the main grievances that toppled Mubarak.

However, hopes that the problem would ease remain far away as people waiting for paperwork complain that low-level graft has become even worse since the uprising because of lax law enforcement.

Morsi has talked of sweeping out corrupt elements in the state and among those doing business with the government.

Wilcke said that Morsi has made a number of speeches in which he said fighting corruption was a top priority.

"But as far as we can tell, very little has happened on the ground in making this a reality, as far as putting in place systems that we know work to prevent corruption," he said. "Strengthening the independence of the judiciary is just one of them."

Greece has scored the worst ranking of all 27 European Union nations, falling below ex-communist Bulgaria as public anger about corruption soars at a time of crisis.

The index on state sector corruption also showed other struggling eurozone countries scoring poorly such as Italy which ranked below Romania.

Greeks have long complained about corruption but anger has soared, particularly about tax evasion among the rich, as the government has imposed wave after wave of austerity that the country's international lenders have demanded.

The EU has kept Bulgaria and Romania out of its Schengen zone, which allows passport-free travel between member states, due to concerns about corruption.

A recent study showed Bulgarians gave about 150,000 bribes to civil servants every month last year, more than in 2010.

Portugal and Ireland, which like Greece have received eurozone rescues, were placed 33 and 25 respectively in the table.

#### Public recognition

TI said there was a stronger public recognition worldwide, including in big emerging BRIC economies such as China and Brazil, of the costs of corruption and a growing refusal to accept it as an inevitable fact of life.

"Today corruption is the world's most talked about social problem. It is very positive that people around the world are demanding more accountability ... This could be a big game changer," Cobus de Swardt, TI managing director, said.

Overall, Denmark, Finland and New Zealand were in a first-place tie with scores of 90 on a new scale where 100 stands for most clean and 0 for most corrupt. Somalia, North Korea and Afghanistan shared last place.

Among the major global economies, the US ranked 19, up from 24, Germany was at 13, up from 14, Japan and Britain tied for 17th place and France was at 22, up from 25 last year.

China saw its ranking slip to 80 from 75 last year, but Swardt said the Beijing leadership showed a greater understanding of the dangers of ignoring corruption, including among Chinese companies operating both at home and abroad.

Elsewhere among the BRICs, Swardt said Russia's new restrictions on non-governmental organisations would make it harder to monitor and check corruption. Russia ranks 133rd in the 2012 global rankings, up from 143 last year.

With Russia taking on the rotating presidency of the Group of 20 leading economies, Moscow should try to "lead by example and not by the lowest common denominator in terms of bribery", Swardt said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012125884268449.html>

## 6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Sunni-Alawite clashes break out in north Lebanon**

BEIRUT, (Reuters) - Clashes broke out in the Lebanese port city of Tripoli on Tuesday between gunmen loyal to opposing sides in neighboring Syria's civil war, wounding one person, residents said.

Tensions had been rising since the reported death in a Syrian town close to the border of at least 14 Lebanese and Palestinian gunmen from north Lebanon. They appeared to have joined insurgents pursuing a 20-month-old revolt against President Bashar al-Assad.

The sectarian makeup of Tripoli has made it a flashpoint within Lebanon reflecting the worsening conflict in Syria, an uprising that is being waged mostly by Sunni Muslims and largely opposed by minorities like Assad's own Alawite sect.

Tripoli is a majority Sunni city with a small Alawite minority and has erupted in clashes several times since the Syrian revolt began.

Residents said violence flared overnight when rocket-propelled grenades were fired by gunmen in the Sunni neighborhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh and the Alawite area of Jabal Mohsen.

Fighting broke out on Tuesday morning after Sunni gunmen approached some Alawite shops. One person was wounded in Jabal Mohsen, residents said.

Tripoli had been on edge since news of the death and detention of the men from north Lebanon, which is largely sympathetic to the Syrian revolt. At least 14 were killed and three others detained, a Syrian security source told Reuters.

Syrian state television aired graphic video of the dead men, riddled with gunshot wounds and lying in the grass.

Families of the dead and missing have been protesting in Tripoli, demanding that the Lebanese government return the bodies and determine the whereabouts of those missing.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32042>

- **Fresh Tripoli clashes leave two dead**

At least two people have been killed and seven others injured as fresh clashes break out between supporters and opponents of the Syrian government in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli.

Security forces, speaking on condition of anonymity, said fierce street battles broke out in the Jabal Mohsen neighborhood of the port city, situated 85 kilometers (52 miles) north of the capital Beirut, on Tuesday, English-language The Daily Star newspaper reported.

Two people were shot dead in the process, while seven others sustained injuries.

The Lebanese army cut off all the roads in the Mallouleh roundabout of Tripoli, and tightened security measures in the region.

The security situation in Tripoli remains fragile following recent clashes that have led to a number of deaths and injuries.

The army units are still tracking down the gunmen and have managed to seize a quantity of machine guns, hand grenades, ammunition, and military equipment.

Although the violence in Tripoli is linked to the current conflict in Syria, some people in the city blame the Lebanese government for the continuation of the fighting.

Tripoli has been the scene of clashes between the two groups over the past months. Several people have been killed and injured in the clashes and the fighting has forced residents to leave the volatile neighborhoods.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/04/276219/fresh-tripoli-clashes-leave-two-dead/>

- **Fatal sectarian clashes in Lebanon's Tripoli**

Two men have been killed and three other wounded in sectarian clashes in the Lebanese port city of Tripoli between gunmen loyal to opposing sides in neighbouring Syria's civil war.

Lebanon's LBC channel confirmed the dead men as Mohammad Ibrahim, who was killed in the city's troubled Jabal Mohsen neighbourhood on Tuesday.

The other man, 26-year-old Abdel Rahman Nassouh, was fatally shot in Bab al-Tebbaneh, a Sunni neighbourhood, by sniper fire from Jabal Mohsen, the source added.

Tuesday's violence also wounded 12 people -- two in Jabal Mohsen and 10 in Bab al-Tebbaneh.

Residents said violence had flared overnight when rocket-propelled grenades were fired by gunmen in the Sunni neighbourhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh and the Alawite area of Jabal Mohsen.

Fighting then broke out on Tuesday morning after Sunni gunmen approached some Alawite shops.

All those shot were hit in Jabal Mohsen by sniper fire, a security source and residents said.

The report added that the Lebanese army sent out patrols in the area separating the rival Bab al-Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen neighbourhoods as well as deploying throughout the rest of Tripoli's main squares.

Flashpoint within Lebanon

Tensions had been building since the reported death of at least 14 Lebanese and Palestinian gunmen from north Lebanon in a Syrian town close to the border on Friday.

They appeared to have joined fighters prosecuting a 20-month-old revolt against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Syrian state television had showed graphic footage of the dead men, riddled with gunshot wounds and lying in the grass.

Lebanon's Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour asked the Syrian ambassador to hand over the bodies of the men after their families protested in Tripoli to demand the Lebanese government return the corpses and determine the whereabouts of the missing.

Tripoli's sectarian makeup has made it a flashpoint within Lebanon where violence from Syria has sometimes spilled over.

The Syrian uprising is mostly being waged by Sunni Muslims and largely opposed by minorities like Assad's own Alawite sect.

Tripoli is a majority Sunni city and mostly supports the uprising next door, but the coastal city has an Alawite minority and clashes have erupted several times since the revolt began.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012124152513238762.html>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Yemen: Investigations ongoing into Saudi diplomat assassination**

Sanaa, Asharq Al-Awsat – Speaking exclusively to Asharq Al-Awsat, Director-General of Public Relations at Yemen's Interior Ministry, Brigadier General Mohammed al-Qaedi, revealed that the investigation into the assassination of Saudi diplomat Khalid Al-Enazi, an official at the Saudi

military attaché office in Sanaa, is still ongoing. Corporal Khalid Al-Enazi was shot dead last week by gunmen dressed in Yemen Central Security uniforms, along with his Yemeni bodyguard Jalal Mubrak Hadi Shaban.

The Yemeni Interior Ministry spokesman informed Asharq Al-Awsat that “the Interior Ministry, along with the security apparatus, are continuing to investigate the assassination operation and, God willing, we will reach the criminals and perpetrators who tried, via this assassination, to despoil the friendly relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Republic of Yemen.”

He stressed that the government and people of Yemen were hurt by the assassination of the Saudi diplomat and his Yemeni bodyguard, adding “the brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have stood with Yemen in the worst circumstance” adding “the assassination of the Saudi diplomat was a shock for everybody in Yemeni society.”

The Yemeni official refused to speculate on who could be responsible for this crime until the investigations have been completed, saying “the security apparatus are conducting their operations to the best of their abilities and the present activities of terrorist organizations is proof that they are present.”

Al-Qaeda added "it is as if they [the terrorists] wants to say that we are present and we are carrying out assassinations in the capital itself, as well as other cities."

However he stressed that "the state, government and ministries in particular have a zero tolerance policy towards these terrorist groups that undermine the security and stability of the homeland."

He confirmed that when such groups target a Saudi diplomat, this also represents a targeting of the Yemeni state, and its relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Brigadier General al-Qaeda also did not rule out domestic political forces being behind such security transgressions, saying “in light of a lack of understanding of democracy, and in the presence of political conspiracies, such talk is not out of the question.”

He said "perhaps some parties wanted to harm a certain party or the government but did not understand that this would harm the homeland and society."

Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] Secretary-General, Dr. Abdullatif Bin Rashid Al-Zayani condemned the assassination of Corporal Khalid Al-Enazi last week, describing this as a "terrorist attack" which contravenes the principles of Islam, diplomatic relations and international laws.

The GCC Secretary-General expressed his confidence that the Yemeni security authorities would be able to uncover the motive and perpetrators of this crime.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32050>

- **Saudis urge release of political inmates**

Protesters have taken to the streets in the central Saudi Arabian province of al-Qassim, calling for the release of political prisoners, Press TV reports.

Dozens of demonstrators took part in the rally, held in Buraidah, the province's capital, on Monday, to voice their opposition to the detention of political activists.

The protesters also condemned the detention of dozens of women and children, who were arrested last week in a peaceful demonstration to demand the release of their detained relatives.

A similar demonstration was held on Sunday in the Qatif region, with protesters calling for the immediate release of senior cleric Sheikh Tawfiq al-Amer.

Al-Amer was arrested last year for criticizing the ruling Al Saud monarchy.

Since February 2011, protesters have held demonstrations on an almost regular basis in Saudi Arabia, mainly in Qatif and Awamiyah in Eastern Province, primarily calling for the release of all

political prisoners, freedom of expression and assembly, as well as an end to widespread discrimination.

However, the demonstrations turned into protests against the repressive Al Saud regime, especially after November 2011, when Saudi security forces killed five protesters and injured many others in the province.

In October, Saudi authorities warned that they would deal "firmly" with protests after hundreds of Saudis gathered outside the Tafiya prison, north of Riyadh, in September to demand the release of their relatives.

Amnesty International has criticized the country over the warning and urged the authorities to "withdraw their threat."

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/04/276106/saudis-urge-release-of-political-inmates/>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **British soldiers in Afghanistan accused of killing four Afghan boys**

British forces in Afghanistan have been accused of killing four boys in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand in October.

According to a report published by the Guardian on Tuesday, a group of lawyers recently sent a letter to British Defense Secretary Philip Hammond, demanding that the UK government investigate the alleged killings.

The lawyers, acting on behalf of the relatives of two of the victims, said that during an operation in the village of Loi Bagh in the Nad Ali district of Helmand on October 18, the UK troopers shot dead the Afghan boys while they were drinking tea.

The victims were identified as 18-year-old Fazel Mohammed, Naik Mohammed, 16, Mohammed Tayeb, 14, and 12-year-old Ahmed Shah.

The British troopers were on a joint operation with Afghan forces.

“We submit that all of the victims were under the control and authority of the UK at the times of the deaths and ill-treatment,” the letter to Hammond read.

“The four boys killed all appear to have been deliberately targeted at close range by British forces. All were killed in a residential area, over which UK forces clearly had the requisite degree of control and authority.”

Major Adam Wojack, a spokesperson for the foreign forces in Afghanistan, has confirmed the operation. However, he has claimed that four “Taliban enemies in action” were killed.

The letter also includes a statement by the relatives of the victims, rejecting “any suggestion that any of the four teenagers killed were in any way connected” to the Taliban. “All four were innocent teenagers who posed no threat whatsoever to Afghan or British forces.”

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276261/uk-troopers-murdered-afghan-boys/>

- **Pakistan, Iran to cooperate against human trafficking**

ISLAMABAD: An a delegation of Iranian parliament led by Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman, National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of Majlis-i-Shura, met with Pakistan’s Federal Interior Minister Rehman Malik on Tuesday, DawnNews reported.

The meeting was also attended by Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) leader Mushahid Hussain Syed.

During the meeting both the countries agreed to cooperate against human trafficking and to exchange name of agents involved.

Federal interior minister said that border control management was vital on the Pak-Iran border area.

<http://dawn.com/2012/12/05/pakistan-iran-to-cooperate-against-human-trafficking/>

- **US to fulfil Pakistan’s urgent defence needs**

ISLAMABAD: The United States agreed on Tuesday to fulfil Pakistan’s urgent defence needs in the fight against terror.

“Recognising the enduring security requirements on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the two delegations agreed to cooperate on a prioritised set of Pakistan’s defence requirements,” a statement issued at the conclusion of a two-day meeting of the Pakistan-US Defence Consultative Group said.

Defence Secretary Lt Gen (retd) Asif Yasin Malik and the US Undersecretary of Defence for Policy, Dr James Miller, led their sides at the talks held in Rawalpindi.

Officials from both countries identified areas of future defence cooperation for achieving shared objectives and committed to a “strong defence relationship”.

It was not clear what military hardware would be provided to Pakistan to meet urgent requirements in the fight against militants in tribal areas. Pakistan’s intended shopping list has always been a very long one, but there are some critical needs, like spares for maintenance of helicopter fleet.

The decision on furnishing Pakistan’s defence requirements appears to have been made in principle.

Officials from both sides will meet in Washington in March for a follow-up session where Pakistan will present its wish list. The Pakistani delegation will be led by the defence production secretary.

The 21st meeting of the consultative group marked the resumption of defence talks under the 'strategic dialogue' after a break of almost 18 months. The last meeting took place in May last year.

Although the dialogue at the ministerial level remains suspended since the challenging events of last year, some of its segments related to law enforcement, economy and defence have resumed following a recent improvement in ties.

Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, after their talks in Brussels on Monday, welcomed these meetings and said they looked forward to meetings of the working groups on energy and strategic stability.

Foreign Minister Khar had said in an interview earlier that ties with the US, including military and intelligence contacts, had fully recovered from the setbacks of 2011.

During the meeting of the defence consultative group, the two sides discussed issues related to Coalition Support Fund reimbursement and security assistance programmes. It was agreed to continue the discussions on both issues for finding the way forward. The situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan's counter-terrorism and extremism operations in tribal areas also came up.

The joint statement noted that the group remained an invaluable forum to discuss strategic defence policy issues and exchange views on shared security concerns.

It noted the commitment of both sides to continue working together to implement a framework for defence cooperation based on areas of convergence between the US and Pakistani interests to promote peace and stability in the region.

<http://dawn.com/2012/12/05/strategic-dialogue-resumes-after-18-month-break-us-to-fulfil-pakistans-urgent-defence-needs/>



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