



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dış Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

06 DECEMBER 2012

NO: 1504

1. IRAQ.....	3
• UN chief wants Iraq to fulfill all obligations to Kuwait.....	3
• Nijaifi informs Maliki about results of his visit to KR.....	4
• Maliki, Nijaifi discuss mechanism to implement his initiative related to mixed areas	5
• Iraqi speaker suggest deploying "local police" in mixed areas	5
• No fighting wanted, will defend our people- Barzani	6
• Najafi criticizes KR for sending messages to religious authorities on media outlets	6
• Kirkuk Governor: We never accept violating constitution	6
• Senior Politician: Iraq Strongly Willing to Strike Arms Deal with Russia	7
• Iraqi electoral commission launches awareness campaign in Anbar	8
• Iraq appeals sentence awarded to fishermen.....	9
• Kurdistan officials hope Iraq will allow Turkish minister in.....	10
• Report: Fugitive Iraqi VP Meets Mossad Officers in Turkey.....	11
• Iraq makes 'major progress against al-Qaeda' in 2012: official	12
• Dana Gas receives welcome boost with \$50m Iraq payment.....	12
• Iraq to cultivate green belt in western desert.....	13
2. IRAN	14
• Senior Politician: Iraq Strongly Willing to Strike Arms Deal with Russia	14
• US losing power to Iran-inspired resistance: Larijani	15
• Turkey retains level of crude imports from Iran: Minister	16
• Energy cooperation beneficial for Tehran, Baku: Iran envoy.....	17
• Iran's Navy commander says open seas belong to all countries.....	18
• Persian Press Headlines - December 03	18
• Iran starts developing gas field shared with Turkmenistan	19
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	20
• Abbas: E-1 plan crosses 'red line'	20
• Hamas: Egypt unrest may disrupt unity talks.....	22
• EU summons Israeli ambassador over settlement expansion	22
• Newspapers Review: Palestine Seeking Security Council to Halt Settlements Dailies Focus ...	23
• Palestine to Protest Israel's Settlements to UN Security Council	24
• PM says Israel still committed to 2-state solution	25
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	30
• Violence spreads outside of capital.....	30
• Update: Elections commission secretary general won't supervise referendum	32
• ElBaradei appointed general coordinator of opposition group, threatens nationwide protests	33
• Five confirmed dead in palace fighting overnight as morning calm prevails	36
• Tunisian Opposition Calls for Boycott of NCA Plenary Sessions.....	37
• Trade Union Criticizes Interior Ministry for Late Response to Violence	38
• Sidi Bouzid to Go on General Strike Tomorrow.....	40



• Drafting Committee Makes Slow Progress on Executive Chapter	41
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	43
• Sleiman travels to Greece on official visit	43
• Lebanon seen as one of most corrupt countries.....	43
6. SYRIA.....	45
• Syrian Army Seizes Control over Rebels' Bastion City	45
• Democracy only solution to Syrian crisis: Jalili	46
• Syria's war, documented in detail.....	47
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	52
• Opposition Leader Urges Bahrainis to Expand Popular Protests	52
• Bahrain to host UN awards, forum.....	54
• Cassation Court postpones terror trial to January 7	56
• GCC chief slams Gannouchi over remarks.....	56
• Amnesty urges Bahrain to free jailed activists	58
• Court upholds jail terms for six bloggers.....	58
• Kuwaitis demonstrate against new parliament	60
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	61
• British soldiers in Afghanistan accused of killing four Afghan boys	61
• NATO death toll in Afghanistan drops in November.....	62
• Security transition conclude in 6 eastern Afghan provinces: army.....	64
• NATO Foreign Ministers Discuss Afghanistan, Georgia.....	65
• Nearly 83,000 Afghan refugees return home from Pakistan this year	65

1. IRAQ

- **UN chief wants Iraq to fulfill all obligations to Kuwait**

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 5 (KUNA): Following his visit to Kuwait, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is scheduled to visit Iraq today, to “strongly” encourage its leaders to implement the country’s remaining obligations to Kuwait and “expedite this process as soon as possible.” Ban said that he is “encouraged” by the improvement in the relationship between the two countries, “but more needs to be done.” “I am excited to visit Kuwait again. This time, I am going to visit both Kuwait and Iraq,” he said, indicating that he intends to discuss the matter with the leadership of both countries.

In Kuwait, the UN Chief is scheduled to meet with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Sabah Al-Kaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. “I am encouraged that, through high-level

exchange of visits and positive outcome of the second session of the Joint Iraq-Kuwait Ministerial Committee last April, the relationship between Kuwait and Iraq is improving, but more needs to be done,” he stressed.

He disclosed that “recently, I have been speaking to Iraq’s Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki and I have been encouraging him to do all what Iraq is required to do in improving relationship with Kuwait and in also implementing relevant international obligations to Kuwait.” “They (Iraqi leaders) want to be off the Council agenda (Chapter VII), but I would really strongly encourage Prime Minister Al-Maliki to expedite this process as soon as possible,” he insisted.

Kuwait had agreed on Oct 23 to endorse a deal on the settlement of the financial dispute between Kuwait and Iraq. It approved the pact reached by the two sides on July 18, 2012, to settle the financial dispute between (the formerly named) Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) and Iraq Airways and stop litigations in this regard. Kuwait had also agreed to a settlement concerning navigational rights in the Khor Abdallah waterway. This week

the Iraqi Government announced the names for the technical team of the border maintenance Project and will immediately update the list of farmers entitled to compensation. Ban wants both countries to build on these “positive developments.”

He disclosed that when Kuwait took the “positive measure” on Iraqi airways, “I telephoned Prime Minister Maliki to take this opportunity as a way to improve the relationship (with Kuwait). He told me he discussed this with the Prime Minister of Kuwait. I am going to really encourage both leaders” to continue to cooperate. When he visited Kuwait and Iraq last March, he added, “I was very much encouraged. For the first time, there was an exchange of visits between the leaders in both countries. I hope this kind of relationship will continue.”

Ban believes “there needs to be a successor” to Gennady Tarasov, the High-Level Coordinator for the missing Kuwaitis and property, who will relinquish his post by end of the month. “There are discussions going on between the UN Secretariat, the Security Council and also with both countries. Depending upon the

outcome of these consultations, we will appoint a successor,” Ban said. Asked whether the Iraq-Kuwait issues will remain under the Security Council’s care, as Kuwait insists, or be negotiated bilaterally between the two countries, as Iraq prefers, Ban said “it depends on the results of the consultations. One of my subjects to discuss with the leaders in both countries is this issue.”

<http://news.kuwaittimes.net/2012/12/05/un-chief-wants-iraq-to-fulfill-all-obligations-to-kuwait/>

- **Nijaifi informs Maliki about results of his visit to KR**

Baghdad, Dec 05 (AIN) –The parliament Speaker, Osama al-Nijaifi, announced that Kurdistan region has accepted the suggestions of the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, over settling the crisis over the disputed areas.

A statement by Maliki's office received by AIN cited "Maliki received Nijaifi at his office in Baghdad where they discussed the mechanism over implementing Maliki's initiative to settle the crisis with Kurdistan Region."

"Nijaifi stated that KR accepted Maliki's initiative which is either to form joint security forces comprise Peshmerga elements and the security forces the disputed areas or making the citizens of those areas to protect them," the statement added.

AIN

- **Maliki, Nijaifi discuss mechanism to implement his initiative related to mixed areas**

Baghdad, Dec 05 (NINA) – Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki discussed with Speaker of Parliament, Usama al-Nijaifi, the mechanism to implement his initiative concerning mixed areas toward reaching an agreement over this mechanism.

In a statement to the press issued on Wednesday, Dec. 5, by the Prime Minister's Media Bureau said that Maliki received on Wednesday afternoon, Nijaifi.

It added that Nijaifi relayed to Maliki a preliminary acceptance of his views based on joint checkpoints and rehabilitate a force from the mixed areas' residents to manage the areas security.

On Tuesday, Dec. 4, Nijaifi visited Erbil meeting with the Region's President, Massoud Barazani, discussing means to solve the crisis. Earlier, Maliki presented an initiative to solve the crisis through forming a joint force to protect the mixed areas.

NINA

- **Iraqi speaker suggest deploying "local police" in mixed areas**

Al-Iraqiyah TV, Baghdad, in Arabic 5 Dec 12

Speaker Usamah al-Nujayfi has suggested a proposal to settle the dispute between the central government and the Kurdistan Region.

A statement issued by Al-Nujayfi's office said that the proposal, which was presented after the meeting held between Al-Nujayfi and Kurdistan Region President Mas'ud Barzani yesterday evening, stipulated the withdrawal of the Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi Army from the points of tension and the deployment of the local police in order to ease the tensions.

The statement added that Barzani welcomed the proposal, which he

described as positive, and noted that it should be discussed during the meeting of the Technical and Military Committees, which were formed by the two sides of the conflict.

AL-IRAQİYAH TV

- **No fighting wanted, will defend our people- Barzani**

ARBIL, Dec 05/ Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish region president Masoud Barzani said today that "we do not want fighting, but ready to defend our people", pointing that "some call for Kurdish-Arab fight, but we are against bloodshed".

On his Face book page, he added that the Kurds have defensive attitude and against fighting and bloodshed.

He criticized those who are calling for a fight between the Kurds and the Arabs, thus "we call the Kurdish people not to fall in this trap".

ASWAT AL-IRAQ

- **Najafi criticizes KR for sending messages to religious authorities on media outlets**

Najaf , Dec 05(AIN) –The Religious Authority, Bashir al-Najafi, criticized Kurdistan Region over revealing sending message to the religious authorities over the current crisis in the media outlets.

The spokesperson of Najafi's office, Ali al-Najafi, stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "We have received a message from KR and we welcomed it, but we are surprised over revealing it in the media outlets where the messages should not be revealed in the media outlets before discussing them."

"By revealing this issue in the media outlets, KR wants to pressurize the religious authorities over the current crisis," he added, noting that "The religious authorities will do their best to settle the current crisis."

Earlier, the Kurdistan Alliance revealed sending messages to the religious authorities to know their stances over the current crisis between Baghdad and KR.

ALLİRAQNEWS

- **Kirkuk Governor: We never accept violating constitution**

Baghdad (AIN) - Kirkuk Governor, Najmalden Kareem chaired a meeting of the Security Committee attended by the Deputy Governor, Head of the Security Committee in the Provincial Council, the Director of Kirkuk Police Directorate and the representatives of the leaders of the twelfth division, the Peshmerga, the joint security forces and Asayish (security) in Kirkuk.

A statement by Kirkuk province received by AIN cited "The meeting attendants discussed the security situation in the province and the steps taken to protect all the cities of Kirkuk in addition to the means of strengthening the security coordination and intelligence information among all security forces that operate within the joint security committee in the governorate."

"The Governor said that Kirkuk is included by Article 140 which is a constitutional article and that the people of Kirkuk decide fate of their city and they will not accept the violation of the constitution," the statement concluded.

ALLIRAQNEWS

- **Senior Politician: Iraq Strongly Willing to Strike Arms Deal with Russia**

TEHRAN, Dec 05 (FNA)- Baghdad prefers to purchase weapons and military equipment from Russia and China than the western states because arms imports from the latter group of countries requires a complicated and time consuming process, a senior Iraqi politician said Wednesday after Iraq chose to renegotiate arms deal with Russia.

"Given the developments in Syria and the region, we need to equip the army fast, but the western countries act very slowly in selling weapons, and complicated procedures need to be taken (in West) before an arms deal is signed and the weapons are shipped," Political Adviser of the head of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC) Mohsen al-Hakim told FNA on Wednesday.

"But Eastern countries do this process faster, and considering our acute needs, specially in aerial and artillery grounds, we need to hold immediate contracts to provide for our needs and fill the existing vacuum," he said.

"Hence, contracts have been held with different countries (of the former the Eastern bloc), including Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Russia and China," Hakim continued.

Iraqi Defense Minister Sadun al-Dulaymi endorsed a \$4.2 bln arms deal with Russians, as he met the country a few months ago, to buy MiG-21 jets, T92 tanks, S-300 missile shield and Cobra helicopters, Hakim said, but mentioned that Iraq would renegotiate the deal due to some suspicious points in the contract.

If the deal takes place, Iraq will be among the five largest importers of Russian arms, according to Pravda.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107124638>

- **Iraqi electoral commission launches awareness campaign in Anbar**

By Saif Ahmad in Anbar, Dec 05

The Anbar office of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) last week launched an awareness campaign for citizens in the province, encouraging them

to take part in the local council elections scheduled for next April.

As part of the awareness campaign, "the office is organising seminars, conferences and workshops", Khaled Rajab, director of the IHEC's Anbar office, told Mawtani.

These aim to "ensure citizen participation in accordance with the set terms and conditions, and to ensure the participation of young people born before or during 1995, because they will be of legal age by the time of the elections", he added.

He said Anbar tribesmen and civil society organisations play a crucial role in raising election awareness, as they can use tribal councils, diwans, mosque pulpits, colleges, institutes and schools to explain the importance of participating in the elections in an honest, transparent way.

So far, officials have held nine conferences and symposiums in various cities across the province urging voters to participate in the elections, which guarantee their right to choose their representative in the new Anbar Council, said Mohammed al-Dulaimi, an employee at the IHEC's Anbar office.

"Work is on-going to update voter lists across Anbar cities, particularly in villages and rural areas far from city centres," he said.

The office is encouraging farmers and land owners "to update their information in the voting registry, or add their names for the first time if they were not previously registered in the [IHEC's] books, according to their places of residence" so that polling stations can be close to them, he said.

Approximately 994,000 voters are eligible to participate in these elections, al-Dulaimi said, hoping to add to this number the citizens who moved to Anbar from other provinces.

"There is great co-operation between [the IHEC] and the Ministry of Trade, which supplied us with citizens' names from the ration card system," he said.

Campaign supervisor Khamees Abdullah told Mawtani, "The campaign includes identifying the obstacles that election officials have faced in the past to ensure that proper solutions are applied."

The campaign also involves posting billboard signs and large posters in markets, shops, residential areas, colleges and institutes that explain the importance of participating in the elections and clarify the ballot-casting process, he said.

"Efforts will also be intensified to raise awareness among voters through the local media, since the media has become one of the most important modern means to educate citizens in all fields," he said.

http://mawtani.al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/iii/features/2012/12/04/feature-01

- **Iraq appeals sentence awarded to fishermen**

KUWAIT, Dec 05: The Iraqi government contacted a Kuwaiti law firm in order to defend four Iraqi fishermen sentenced recently for killing a Kuwaiti coastguard, a senior Iraqi official said yesterday. "The Iraqi Foreign Ministry coordinated with [Iraq's] Ministry of Justice to hire a well-known law firm in Kuwait in order to defend the Iraqi fishermen," said the First Deputy for Al-Basra Governor Nizar Al-

Jabery, quoting the Iraqi Ambassador to Kuwait.

The Kuwaiti courts had sentenced one fisherman to death, while handing two-year prison terms each to two others and a one-year jail sentence to the fourth for killing Lance Corporal Abdurrahman Al-Enzy when the latter confronted them for entering Kuwait's territorial waters. "The verdicts will be appealed by the law firm," Al-Jabery indicated.

By A. Saleh, Kuwait Times Staff

<http://news.kuwaittimes.net/2012/12/05/iraq-appeals-sentence-awarded-to-fishermen/>

- **Kurdistan officials hope Iraq will allow Turkish minister in**

By Ivan Watson and Mohammed Tawfeeq, CNN

Istanbul, Dec 05 (CNN) -- A Kurdistan Regional Government spokesman expressed hope Wednesday that only a temporary "technical issue" led the Iraqi government to deny permission for Turkey's energy minister to fly to the

autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

Energy Minister Taner Yildiz's plane was forced to turn around in mid-flight Tuesday. He was in a private plane flying to Irbil, the Kurdistan region's capital, to attend a three-day conference on oil and gas.

"We had applied for flight permits. We were issued one, and the plane was on the move," said a Turkish foreign ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity due to government protocol. "But in the meantime we were notified by the Iraqis that they have banned all VIP flights to Northern Iraq."

But Kurdistan Regional Government spokesman Safeen Dizayee told CNN on Wednesday that officials there hope the denial was only temporary.

"There are new regulations by the central government for private planes to enter Iraqi airspace, and apparently energy minister's plane had not complied with the new regulations" Dizayee said.

"Iraqi airspaces are completely controlled by the central government. The cabin crew of the Turkish minister's plane was directly in touch with Baghdad to get permission and Kurdistan Regional Government has no control on it" he added.

"We hope it is only a technical issue and it will be resolved soon," he said.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/12/05/world/meast/turkey-iraq-kurd-tensions/index.html>

- **Report: Fugitive Iraqi VP Meets Mossad Officers in Turkey**

TEHRAN, Dec 05 (FNA)- Iraq's fugitive Vice-President Tareq al-Hashemi has met with Israeli Mossad agents in Turkey during the last few days, a local media revealed on Wednesday.

Turkish-language daily, Melliyat, quoted Ankara officials as saying that Hashemi has had a meeting with three agents of the Israeli spy agency, Mossad, and asked them for a visit to Tel Aviv.

The Turkish official also told Melliyat that Hashemi intends to use Israeli influence

on Washington to persuade US officials to return him to power.

Hashemi, who has been given a death sentence last month by an Iraqi court for betraying his country and orchestrating terrorist operations in Iraq, had a similar meeting with Mossad agents in Turkey last month.

Al Mustakbal Al-Iraqi daily quoted informed sources in the Iraqi Kurdistan region as saying that Hashemi has used the meeting to send a letter to Zionist politicians and the US intelligence bodies.

The report quoted the informed sources as saying that Hashemi is getting closer to Israel after he was disappointed at the US officials' assistance.

The report added that Hashemi is willing to visit to Israel in a bid to reach an agreement with Zionist regime officials in practice.

On Sunday, a Baghdad court sentenced Hashemi to a fourth death sentence in absentia over a foiled car bombing targeting Shiite pilgrims.

"Today, the court issued a death sentence against Hashemi and his son-in-law according to Article Four of the Anti-Terror Law in a case connected to an attempt to use a car bomb to target Shiite pilgrims," Iraqi judicial spokesman Abdelsattar Bayraqdar said.

Bayraqdar said the attempted car bombing dated to December 2011 during Ashura commemoration ceremonies, when Shiite pilgrims walk along Iraq's highways to the shrine city of Karbala.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107124632>

- **Iraq makes 'major progress against al-Qaeda' in 2012: official**

The Iraqi government on Tuesday (December 4th) said it made major progress in the war against al-Qaeda in 2012, as represented in the number of al-Qaeda leaders and members killed and arrested.

"Current statistics on Iraqi armed forces operations this year show significantly greater progress in the war on al-Qaeda as compared to previous years," security advisor Faleh al-Fayyadh told Al-Shorfa.

Iraqi forces "arrested and killed about 120 prominent leaders in the group in armed clashes or pre-emptive operations", he said, adding that they also arrested "about 600 other active members involved in large-scale terrorist operations".

This is evidence that the security forces' abilities and efficiency has increased, al-Fayyadh said.

"The war on terror will continue [stronger] than before to pave the way for holding local elections in a more secure and stable atmosphere," he said.

http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/newsbriefs/2012/12/04/newsbrief-02

- **Dana Gas receives welcome boost with \$50m Iraq payment**

Florian Neuhof

Dec 5, 2012

The finances of Dana Gas were given a shot in the arm this week as the company received payments worth nearly US\$50 million (Dh183.6m) for gas produced in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

The payout comes as political developments in Iraq and Egypt cast doubt over future payments, after outstanding receipts worth hundreds of millions prevented Dana from repaying a maturing bond in October.

Dana, which produces natural gas and condensate in the region, on Sunday received \$48m - 40 per cent of the \$120m paid out to the joint venture it operates under - from the central government.

Baghdad in September agreed to settle some of the outstanding receipts for oil and gas producers in Kurdistan.

"We are pleased to receive this payment, and are working with the Kurdistan regional government [KRG] to further address the outstanding receivables," said Rashid Al Jarwan, the executive director and acting chief executive of Dana Gas.

Baghdad does not recognise contracts that international oil companies have struck with the KRG, which claims the contracts to be legitimate under the Iraqi constitution. Under Iraqi law, only the central government can pay hydrocarbon

producers, and payments have been patchy and far below the sums promised.

Dana fears that the next payout, scheduled for next year as part of the federal budget, will be far below the \$1 billion or so distributed to companies this week.

<http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/industry-insights/energy/dana-gas-receives-welcome-boost-with-50m-iraq-payment>

- **Iraq to cultivate green belt in western desert**

A delegation from the Anbar provincial council on Tuesday (December 4th) signed a memorandum of understanding with a consortium of companies based in the UAE to invest in and cultivate Iraq's western desert.

The move comes five months after the Iraqi forces took control of the area and destroyed al-Qaeda's last armed strongholds there, officials said.

Saadoun al-Shaalan, the council's deputy chairperson, told Al-Shorfa that under the agreement, the companies will cultivate

the area, plant trees and build roads there.

The agreement also involves establishing agricultural facilities such as poultry farms, cattle pastures and fodder plants, as well as cultivating a green belt in desert areas near cities, he said.

The memorandum will come into effect within the next few days, al-Shaalan said.

http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/newsbriefs/2012/12/05/newsbrief-07

2. IRAN

- **Senior Politician: Iraq Strongly Willing to Strike Arms Deal with Russia**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Baghdad prefers to purchase weapons and military equipment from Russia and China than the western states because arms imports from the latter group of countries requires a complicated and time consuming process, a senior Iraqi politician said Wednesday after Iraq chose to renegotiate arms deal with Russia.

"Given the developments in Syria and the region, we need to equip the army fast, but the western countries act very slowly in selling weapons, and complicated procedures need to be taken (in West) before an arms deal is signed and the weapons are shipped," Political Adviser of the head of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC) Mohsen al-Hakim told FNA on Wednesday.



"But Eastern countries do this process faster, and considering our acute needs, specially in aerial and artillery grounds, we need to hold immediate contracts to provide for our needs and fill the existing vacuum," he said.

"Hence, contracts have been held with different countries (of the former the Eastern bloc), including Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Russia and China," Hakim continued.

Iraqi Defense Minister Sadun al-Dulaymi endorsed a \$4.2 bln arms deal with Russians, as he met the country a few months ago, to buy MiG-21 jets, T92 tanks, S-300 missile shield and Cobra helicopters, Hakim said, but mentioned that Iraq would renegotiate the deal due to some suspicious points in the contract.

If the deal takes place, Iraq will be among the five largest importers of Russian arms, according to Pravda.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107124638>

- **US losing power to Iran-inspired resistance: Larijani**

Iran's Majlis (parliament) speaker says the US hegemony has failed in its confrontation with the Islamic Republic's efforts to awaken other nations.

"In the international arena, the United States has experienced ups and downs so that it took utmost power at the fall of the Soviet Union, but the enlightenment of the Iranian nation faced this arrogant power with defeat in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, [and] Palestine and now it is

suffering a decline of power," Ali Larijani told the parliament on Wednesday.

Larijani said the US has lost its power over other countries, noting how Arab revolutions, following Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979, have frustrated the colonialist power.



"The fall of the US hegemony is visible in the comments made by the country's officials," he stated.

The top lawmaker pointed out the Islamic Republic's influential role in the region and the world, noting the West's attempts to hinder the progress of the Iranian nation through "adventurism in the missile and nuclear fields."

Larijani described Iran, Lebanon's Hezbollah, and the Palestinian resistance as the "diamond triangle compassing the Mideast developments," saying the trio

has turned into the axis of Muslims world's resistance against colonialism.

He referred to the defeat of Israel's heavily armed military in its offensives against Hezbollah and the Gaza Strip in recent years as part of the "brilliant" capabilities of the "diamond triangle."

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/06/276426/us-hegemony-losing-to-iran-power/>

- **Turkey retains level of crude imports from Iran: Minister**

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

Turkey says it has retained the level of crude oil imports from Iran and that the United States should exempt Turkey from new sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

"Whatever the current process is for purchasing crude oil from Iran, we are continuing that in the same way," Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said in Ankara on Wednesday.

In June, Washington exempted Turkey and six other countries from its sanctions against Iran's oil sector for six months in return for a 20 percent cut in Ankara's purchases of Iranian crude oil.

Last week, the US Senate approved further bans on trade with Iran's energy and shipping sectors. Under the new package, which has not yet passed into law, exemptions stand for countries that have made significant cuts to their imports of Iranian crude oil.



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

Official figures show Turkey's crude oil imports from Iran dropped by more than 30 percent in October compared with September, pushing Iran to the third place among Turkey's oil suppliers, behind

Russia and Iraq. In natural gas, however, Iran ranks second after Russia.

"Iran is Turkey's second biggest natural gas supplier," Yıldız said, adding, "I think that US sanctions especially those covering natural gas will not bind Turkey."

The minister said Turkey had asked the US not to impose sanctions on its natural gas purchases from Iran, a request to which Washington agreed.

"We said to them, if you tell us not to buy gas from Iran, that would be a sanction on Turkey and not on Iran. They agreed not to include natural gas agreements in the sanctions," he explained.

Iran has been targeted by a ring of sanctions from the US and its European allies, who cite 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/2012/12/05/276413/turkey-no-cut-in-oil-imports-from-iran/>

- **Energy cooperation beneficial for Tehran, Baku: Iran envoy**



Iran's Ambassador to Azerbaijan Mohsen Pakaein has called for more energy cooperation with Baku.

In a meeting with Azerbaijan's Minister of Industry and Energy Natig Aliyev on Wednesday, Pakaein stressed the necessity of expanding energy and

industrial cooperation between Tehran and Baku.

Pointing to the technical capacities, existing experts and advanced technology in the field of oil, gas and electricity, Pakaein said exchanging experiences would benefit both countries.

Iran holds the world's third-largest proven oil reserves and the second-largest natural gas reserves.

Aliyev, for his part, described Iran as Azerbaijan's friend and expressed readiness to expand bilateral relations.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/05/276379/energy-ties-benefit-iran-azerbaijan/>

- **Iran's Navy commander says open seas belong to all countries**

TEHRAN - The commander of the Iranian Navy, Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, has said that open seas belong to all nations in the world and all countries have equal rights to benefit from them.

Sayyari made the remarks during a ceremony held on Sunday, five days after

National Navy Day. A number of foreign military attaches based in Tehran attended the ceremony.

He also said that 36 countries in the region that have strategic interests in the Indian Ocean do not want extra-regional countries, which are seeking to advance their illegitimate interests, to take the security of the ocean in their hands.

Regional countries can maintain the security of the ocean through cooperation with each other, he noted.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Sayyari said that the Iranian Navy has the message of peace and amity for all the countries in the region.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/103792-irans-navy-says-open-seas-belong-to-all-countries>

- **Persian Press Headlines - December 03**

AFARINESH: UAE calls for negotiations with Iran over three Persian Gulf islands

ETELAAT: Only Iran can stand against Zionists, says Ali Akbar Velayati (senior advisor to Supreme Leader)

ETEMAD: People have right to free elections, Ahmadinejad says

RAH-E MARDOM: Iran is wholeheartedly supporting Syrian people and government, Velayati announces

KEYHAN: Majlis ratifies the general outlines of the controversial Presidential Elections Act

JAVAN: National Development Fund reserves exceed 42 billion dollars, official says

ETEMAD: Lawmakers will inspect women's cells in Evin Prison, member of Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee says

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/103789-persian-press-headlines-december-03>

- **Iran starts developing gas field shared with Turkmenistan**

TEHRAN, Dec. 3 (MNA) - Iran has started drilling the first exploratory well at the

Afshar-1 gas field, which is shared with Turkmenistan.

The Iranian section of the gas field measures around 9 square kilometers in area, equaling half the total area, ISNA reported on Sunday.

Seismic studies suggest the field contains considerable amounts of natural gas.

Iran has launched 17 development projects at oilfields which are shared with its neighbors, with the aim of boosting production at the sites to 800,000 barrels per day over the course of two years.

Iran shares 18 oilfields, four gas fields, and 6 associated oil and gas fields with neighboring countries.

The Islamic Republic has attached priority to boosting gas production capacity at its joint oil and gas fields shared with Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Iran's daily gas production is about 600 million cubic meters, and this is projected to increase to 1.2 billion cubic meters in the future. According to the National Iranian Gas Company, the country's oil

and natural gas reserves account for 10 percent and 16 percent of total world reserves, respectively.

Iran ranks fourth worldwide with 155 billion barrels of recoverable oil reserves, after Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Canada.

With 34 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves, Iran has the world's second-largest natural gas reserves after Russia.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1756862>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Abbas: E-1 plan crosses 'red line'**

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) – Israeli settlement activity in the Palestinian territory, especially the newly announced projects in the E-1 area, is a red line which cannot go unanswered because it divides the Palestinian land, President Mahmoud Abbas said Wednesday.

Speaking to reporters at his office in Ramallah, Abbas said the PA contacted international sides to try and stop the

settlement project Israel announced in response to Palestine's upgraded status at the UN.

"If that project is implemented, we will use all legal and legitimate means to stop it, and we have something to say and do about these dangerous decisions," Abbas said.

He added that Israeli procedures should be reversed because international law prohibits an occupying state from carrying out any procedures on the lands of a state under occupation. Now that Palestine is a non-member state in the UN General Assembly, he added, the Fourth Geneva Convention is applicable.

The president said he instructed Palestine's UN envoy to contact the UN Secretary-General and the president of the UN Security Council.

"We will see their reaction to the Israeli settlement decision, then we will study the next step."

The official Palestinian Authority news agency Wafa quoted Abbas as saying that the Palestinian leadership has already

formed a special committee to study "the day after."

The committee encompasses experts in international law and diplomacy, and they will start working on how to address international organizations now Palestine has been accepted in the UN. Abbas said the committee would hold its first meeting Wednesday.

He pointed out that the Arab League's follow-up committee would convene on Dec. 29 to discuss the peace process after Palestine's status upgrade.

EU summons Israeli ambassador



In Brussels, the European Union summoned Israel's ambassador to discuss the bloc's concerns over plans to expand settlements in the occupied West Bank, an EU foreign affairs spokeswoman said.

"The Israeli ambassador has been invited by the Executive Secretary General of the EEAS (European External Action Service) to meet to set out the depth of our concerns," Maja Kocijancic said.

The Executive Secretary General -- the senior diplomat in charge of policy for EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton -- is Pierre Vimont, former French ambassador to Washington.

Several EU countries have already called in Israeli ambassadors for consultations, but EU states have been struggling to agree on a common response to the settlement expansion plans.

The spokeswoman said the EU reaction to Israel's new building plans would depend on the extent to which they threatened the establishment of a viable state of Palestine in the future.

Israel moved forward Wednesday with plans to build some 3,000 settler homes in one of the most sensitive areas of the occupied West Bank, in defiance of international protests.

The European Union has repeatedly spoken out against Israeli settlements on land the Palestinians want for their state. Ashton said on Sunday that she was "extremely concerned" by the plans.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=545325>

- **Hamas: Egypt unrest may disrupt unity talks**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Meetings to discuss Palestinian reconciliation depend on stability in Egypt, a senior Hamas official said Wednesday.

Ahmad Yousef told Ma'an that unrest in Egypt could delay unity talks, mediated by Egyptian officials, as Cairo will be preoccupied with internal issues.

Islamists fought protesters outside the Egyptian President Mohammad Mursi's palace on Wednesday amid a crisis over a draft constitution that has split the country.

Israel's recent eight-day war on the Gaza Strip revitalized efforts for national unity in Palestine, with Hamas and Fatah promising to release those detained due

to the political split. Fatah members who fled Gaza during factional fighting in 2007 have started returning to the enclave.

Yousef, a former adviser to Gaza premier Ismail Haniyeh, said reconciliation talks were informal at this stage and official contacts have not yet been made.

Exiled Hamas chief Khalid Mashaal is expected to make his first ever visit to Gaza to attend celebrations for Hamas' 25th anniversary.

Yousef said Mashaal could arrive on Thursday or Friday.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=545358>

- **EU summons Israeli ambassador over settlement expansion**

BRUSSELS (Reuters) -- The European Union has summoned Israel's ambassador to discuss the bloc's concerns over Israeli plans to expand its settlements in the occupied West Bank, an EU foreign affairs spokeswoman said Wednesday.

"The Israeli ambassador has been invited by the Executive Secretary General of the

EEAS (European External Action Service) to meet to set out the depth of our concerns," Maja Kocijancic said.

The Executive Secretary General -- the senior diplomat in charge of policy for EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton -- is Pierre Vimont, former French ambassador to Washington.

Several EU countries have already called in Israeli ambassadors for consultations, but EU states have been struggling to agree on a common response to the settlement expansion plans.

The spokeswoman said the EU reaction to Israel's new building plans would depend on the extent to which they threatened the establishment of a viable state of Palestine in the future.

Israel moved forward Wednesday with plans to build some 3,000 settler homes in one of the most sensitive areas of the occupied West Bank, in defiance of international protests.

The European Union has repeatedly spoken out against Israeli settlements on land the Palestinians want for their state.

Ashton said on Sunday that she was "extremely concerned" by the plans.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=545303>

- **Newspapers Review: Palestine Seeking Security Council to Halt Settlements Dailies Focus**

RAMALLAH, December 5, 2012 (WAFA) – The three Palestinian Arabic dailies Wednesday highlighted the Palestinian Authority's intention to go to the Security council to issue a binding resolution for Israel to halt settlement activities.

Al-Hayat al-Jadida reported on PA calling on Arab countries to provide a monthly \$100 million safety net to face sanctions against the Palestinian bid to UN including withholding PA's tax revenue.

It printed a photo of President Mahmoud Abbas during the leadership's meeting in Ramallah.

Al-Ayyam front page headline read: "Mass protests set ultimatum to withdraw constitutional declaration, surround Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi's headquarters."

It printed a photo of angry activists opposing Morsi heading toward his headquarters in a massive protest.

Al-Quds reported on the United States government criticizing the Israeli government's plan to keep construction in near the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim in East of Jerusalem.

It featured Hamas Leader Ismail Haniyeh attempts to rerun the Gaza International airport along with Egyptian promises to offer key facilities to develop Rafah crossing.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21260>

- **Palestine to Protest Israel's Settlements to UN Security Council**

RAMALLAH, December 5, 2012 (WAFA) – The Palestinian leadership decided Tuesday to complain about Israel's settlement activities in the occupied Territory to the United Nations Security Council, according to a statement issued following a meeting in Ramallah.

It said it wants the Security Council to issue a binding decision that would force Israel to stop all forms of settlement activities.

“The leadership will work through all political and popular means to stop this belligerent act by the (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu's government on the day after the UN decision,” said the statement.

The statement was referring to an Israeli decision to build 3000 housing units in what is known as E1 project on the outskirts of occupied East Jerusalem that would eventually divide the West Bank in half and kill any chance for the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state.

“The future of peace and security is now facing a grave and unprecedented danger as a result of these Israeli decisions,” said the leadership.

It has decided to ask the Security Council “in the name of the State of Palestine” to issue a decision that will be binding to Israel to stop the “destructive expansionist decisions and all forms of settlement activities.”

Palestine became a non-member state in the United Nations on Thursday following an overwhelming vote that upgraded its status from observer entity to non-member state observer.

The leadership also said that it will fight Israel's punitive measures, including freezing its funds, because they are a violation of international law.

"Israel's war crimes, whether they are stealing land of the State of Palestine, attempting to divide it geographically and surrounding Jerusalem with a belt of settlements, or stealing Palestinian money, should be dealt with and responded to because of their grave dangerous consequences," it said.

The leadership called on the Arab states to implement their decision to provide the Palestinian Authority with a financial safety net no less than \$100 million a month to help it face the ramifications of Israel's collective punishment.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21258>

- **PM says Israel still committed to 2-state solution**

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu went on the offensive in the heart of Europe on Wednesday, saying the EU was rewarding the Palestinians for tearing up the Oslo Accords, the argument that building in E1 breaks up Palestinian territorial contiguity is wrong, and Europeans have a history of first vilifying Jews, then attacking them.

Netanyahu's comments were made in an extensive interview with the German Die Welt newspaper published online just before his meeting in Berlin with Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Germany, which strongly backed Israel during Operation Pillar of Defense last month, disappointed Jerusalem by abstaining in the UN vote last week to upgrade the Palestinians' status to that of non-member observer state.

Berlin, like most of Europe, then slammed Israel for the decision to respond to the UN move by announcing plans to build 3,000 housing units in east Jerusalem and the large settlement blocs, and to push forward planning of the E1 neighborhood linking Jerusalem to Ma'aleh Adumim.

Merkel has been a frequent critic of Israel's settlement policies, and the chancellor was expected to warn Netanyahu of harm to Israel's position in Europe if he continues settlement construction.

Netanyahu and Merkel meeting met for 3 1/2 hours, two hours longer than planned. Netanyahu said after the meeting that: "From the conversation it is clear that Chancellor Merkel is a true friend of Israel whose commitment to Israel's security is genuine and unconditional. This was an open and comprehensive discussion on all the issues in the Middle East."

The two leaders first met privately, and were then joined by their close aides.

"I appreciated the support of Chancellor Merkel and the German government during the operation in Gaza," Netanyahu told Die Welt earlier Wednesday. "At the same time, I would be disingenuous if I didn't tell you that I was disappointed, as were many people in Israel, by the German vote in the UN. I think that people understand that there is a special

relationship between Germany and Israel."

Netanyahu said Merkel believed the UN vote "would somehow advance peace."

But, he said, "in fact the opposite happened because, in the aftermath of the UN resolution, we see that the Palestinian Authority under President [Mahmoud] Abbas is moving to unite with the Hamas terrorists.

"The resolution did not call for recognizing the Jewish state or ending the conflict with us or having security safeguards. It has encouraged the Palestinians, actually, to toughen their position and not to enter negotiations," the prime minister said.

By going to the UN, "the Palestinians tore to shreds their commitments under the Oslo Accord," Netanyahu said. This, he bewailed, was "somehow dismissed," while "our response, which is measured and certainly less than proportional, is blown out sky high.

"That's neither fair nor judicious, because it doesn't bring peace closer," the prime minister said. "It pushes it back. It hardens

the Palestinians' positions and it tells us something very, very disturbing.

It says there's no value to making agreements for peace, because when the other side side violates it, nobody will hold them accountable."

According to Netanyahu, the Palestinians "want a Palestinian state without peace."

He said the European governments who voted for the resolution were telling the Palestinians "you can get international recognition and international legitimacy without making the necessary compromises for peace. For there to be peace, both sides need to compromise. Both sides need to recognize each other, not just Israel."

Netanyahu dismissed the conventional wisdom in Europe that building in E1 will essentially block a possible two-state deal by blocking Palestinian territorial contiguity.

"Look, they're talking about a Palestinian state between Gaza and the West Bank and there's no continuum there.

Here, we're talking about an area that is one mile, two miles wide, that connects Jerusalem to a suburb that in all peace plans will remain part of the State of Israel in any agreement," he said.

Netanyahu said that every prime minister since Yitzhak Rabin has planned on incorporating into Israel the mile-long E1 corridor from Jerusalem to Ma'aleh Adumim as part of a final peace agreement.

"All governments talked about the possibility of putting tunnels, bridges, roads there to facilitate Palestinian movement, so to say that this will jeopardize the possibility of a Palestinian state is neither true nor responsible," he stressed.

The prime minister also made clear that at this point the government has only advanced planning on E1, not actual building.

"We shall act further based on what the Palestinians do. If they don't act unilaterally, then we won't have any purpose to do so either," he said.

On Wednesday, the Higher Planning Council of Judea and Samaria approved deposit of a 3,500-apartment project in E1.

Merkel is expected to press Netanyahu to shelve the plan.

Netanyahu arrived in Berlin following a four-hour visit to Prague, where he warmly thanked Czech Prime Minister Petr Necas for voting against the statehood upgrade for the Palestinians at the UN.

“History has shown us time and again that what is right is not what is popular, and if there is a people in the world who can appreciate that, it’s the people of your country,” Netanyahu said at a press conference with Necas.

In 1938, the leading powers of the world forced Czechoslovakia to sacrifice its vital interests at Munich, Netanyahu said.

“The international community applauded almost uniformly without exception,” he said. “They hailed this as something that would bring peace, peace in our time. But rather than bring peace, those forced

concessions from Czechoslovakia paved the way to the worst war in history.”

Netanyahu also drew on historical precedents in his Die Welt interview.

“In our history, including on the soil of Europe, we had a regular pattern,” he said. “First the Jewish people were maligned, then they were attacked. And the maligning, the vilification, served as the legitimization for the attacks that followed, and in many ways this is what is happening to the State of Israel. It is vilified again and again in public opinion, including in European public opinion, to prepare the attacks. And people don’t know the facts.”

The prime minister said there was a disturbing willingness in “some quarters of Europe” to believe the worst about Israel, adding that this has been part of Jewish history in Europe for many generations.

“People believed outrageous things about the Jewish people, as some now believe about the Jewish state,” he said. “What is our great crime? What is it we’re doing? We’re building in the areas that will remain in a final peace settlement of

Israel. What are we talking about? This is not some foreign land.

This is the land in which the Jewish people have been for close to 4,000 years. What we're talking about are suburbs contiguous to Jerusalem."

Netanyahu is scheduled to hold a second meeting with Merkel on Thursday, and the ministers who accompanied him – Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz, Agriculture Minister Orit Noked, Science and Culture Minister Daniel Herschkowitz and Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon – will meet their counterparts as well.



Among the other issues high on the agenda of Netanyahu's talks are the situation in Syria, Iran, and Israel's opposition to German arms sales to Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

In a related development, the Prime Minister's Office confirmed a Haaretz report that it intervened to keep Tel Aviv University Prof. Rivka Feldhay, the director of the university's Minerva Humanities Center, from participating in a roundtable discussion with Netanyahu, Merkel and nearly a dozen German and Israeli scientists.

Feldhay signed a letter in 2008 by Israeli university faculty members expressing "appreciation and support" for students and lecturers who "refuse to serve as soldiers in the occupied territories."

A source in Netanyahu's entourage said the prime minister was unwilling, in a meeting during which he represents Israel, to allow the participation of someone who blackened the name of "pilots and soldiers who do everything they can to prevent harming civilians, while the other side does everything it can to harm civilians."

Feldhay, the wife of Mordechai Kremnitzer of the Israel Democracy Institute, was already in Berlin when she was informed she would not be allowed to take part. She was originally invited to attend by Israel's embassy in Berlin.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=294790>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

• Violence spreads outside of capital

Dozens of thousands of protesters rally against Constitutional Declaration, Alexandria, 30 November 2012. Political forces called for mass protests all over Egypt to bring down the Constitutional Declaration issued by President Mohamed Morsy on 22 November.

Hazem Gouda

Angry demonstrations took place in governorates outside of Cairo Wednesday, with polarization between supporters and opponents of President Mohamed Morsy escalating into violent clashes in Alexandria, Suez and Mahalla, and attempts to burn Muslim Brotherhood headquarters across the nation.

Dozens stormed the Muslim Brotherhood office in the city of Ismailia, Ismailia Governorate, Wednesday night. After a march in the city, protesters against the

clashes at the presidential palace in Cairo set the office ablaze.

The protest consisted of different revolutionary groups and political parties who chanted slogans calling for “toppling the regime.”

Also in Zagazig, the capital of the Nile Delta governorate of Sharqiya, anonymous attackers threw Molotov cocktails at the group’s office. Only the banner of the office and two cars were burnt before firefighters extinguished the fire.

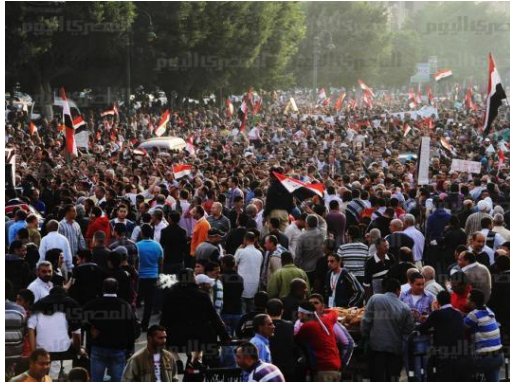
Mohamed Abdel Raouf, a former FJP parliamentarian, said that the attempt to burn the office came after dozens of anti-Morsy protesters marched by the office.

In Alexandria, Muslim Brotherhood protesters clashed with anti-Morsy protesters near the railway station of Sidi Gaber.

Some 3,000 from the Brotherhood started a march at Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque heading to Sidi Gaber area, where 4,000 of Morsy opponents were gathered.

Security forces withdraw completely from the scene, after the Brotherhood protesters chanted slogans against them.

The anti-Morsy activists blocked the road, causing traffic jams. Protesters denounced what they called “Brotherhood militias” for attacking the protesters and removing their tents from outside the presidential palace in Cairo.



Ayman Mahmoud, a protester, told the website of the state-run daily Al-Ahram that the Egyptian people would not accept the Brotherhood militias controlling power in Egypt. “They beat the protesters with bladed weapons and firearms,” he said.

Ahmed Ali, activist participating in the protest, urged the state agencies to protect the protesters from the

Brotherhood militias and save the country from a possible civil war.

Fire gutted the Suez headquarters of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, as a result of clashes between members of the party and the Brotherhood and opponents of Morsy. The building was entirely destroyed by the fire.

The clashes started with both sides throwing stones at each other, injuring eight people.

In Damanshour, capital of Beheira governorate, demonstrations were also held to reject the Constitutional Declaration and protest President Morsy ignoring the crisis outside the presidential palace in Cairo, where the Brotherhood attacked protesters.

The demonstrators demanded Morsy to stop or postpone the referendum on the draft constitution scheduled on 15 December.

Both parties exchanged hurling stones, while anti-Morsy protesters accused members of the Muslim Brotherhood

group of assaulting protesters at the presidential palace.

The police intensified presence in the vicinity of the party headquarters, which were dark and empty, and the protesters refused to move the demonstration elsewhere.

In Mahalla, trains coming from and going to Alexandria were stopped when demonstrators lit rubber tires on the railway tracks in protest against the clashes.

The demonstrators chanted slogans against President Mohamed Morsy, the Muslim Brotherhood and the supreme guide, and demanded the cancellation of Morsy's recent decisions.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/violence-spreads-outside-capital>

- **Update: Elections commission secretary general won't supervise referendum**

Clashes between supporters and opponents of President Mohamed Morsy in front of Presidential Palace in Heliopolis, Cairo, 5 December 2012.

Alaa al-Kamhawi

Advisers to President Mohamed Morsy and the head of the committee overseeing the constitutional referendum resigned Wednesday evening in the wake of violence and controversy surrounding the political standoff over President Mohamed Morsy's constitutional declaration and violence that followed.

Zaghloul al-Balshy, the secretary general of the high elections commission, said he won't participate in observing a referendum considering the bloodshed over it, state-run MENA news service reported.

Balshy called on Morsy to cancel the new constitutional declaration immediately. Youm7 newspaper reported Wednesday that the committee formed earlier Wednesday with a Justice Ministry decision.

Four of Morsy's advisers also resigned Wednesday evening, as a political standoff escalated into clashes between supporters of the president and his opponents.

Presidential adviser Saif Abdel Fattah told Al-Jazeera on the phone that he has resigned in protest of the clashes that took place outside the presidential palace on Wednesday.



“The Muslim Brotherhood is a narrow-minded and mummified group not worthy of Egypt,” he said. “I cannot bear seeing our young die.”

“The young are the ones who made the revolution, and who are still paying the price,” he added. “And the crisis could have been resolved, had the Brotherhood not been only working for its own interests.”

“I am going to unite the young and work with them,” he said.

Presidential adviser Ayman al-Sayyad also resigned on Wednesday. He tweeted that

he and other advisers had resigned a week ago but did not announce it. Amr al-Leithy also tweeted that he had resigned last week to protest the constitutional declaration.

Mohamed Esmat Seif al-Dawla resigned, saying he held Morsy responsible for the clashes and that it could have been avoided with some consensus.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/update-elections-commission-secretary-general-won-t-supervise-referendum>

- **ElBaradei appointed general coordinator of opposition group, threatens nationwide protests**

Nobel Laureate Mohamed ElBaradei, in his new position as general coordinator of the National Salvation Front, threatened nationwide protests until President Mohamed Morsy responds to calls for national dialogue over the draft constitution and retracts his recent constitutional declaration.

The leader of the Popular Current Hamden Sabbahi announced Tuesday night that the front decided to appoint ElBaradei as its general coordinator.

ElBaradei's warning came at a press conference Tuesday night attended by the leaders of the National Salvation Front, including Sabbahi and former presidential candidate Amr Moussa.

The National Salvation Front is a coalition of political powers opposing Morsy's 22 November constitutional declaration, which gave him the ability to override judicial decisions. The front brings together ElBaradei of the Constitution Party, Sabbahi of the Popular Current Party, Moussa of the Conference Party, Al-Sayed al-Badawy of the Wafd Party, and other political figures.

ElBaradei held Morsy and the Muslim Brotherhood responsible for the violent clashes at the presidential palace in Heliopolis between pro- and anti-Morsy protesters.

"Egyptians will protests in every place, and use all legitimate measures, and won't back down from this battle we began for freedom," ElBaradei said.



He described the administration of Morsy as "a repressive regime."

"The demands of the revolution were for social justice, freedom and dignity. Our battle continues, and will be peaceful. Our strength is in our unity and numbers, and we will be victorious because we are in the right," he said.

"I call on Morsy to appear on TV to address the nation to announce that he is open to national dialogue," ElBaradei said.

Amr Moussa said that "Egypt is now in a critical phase, the nation is divided and conflict has started that can only be blamed on the person ruling Egypt."

"We are now one hand, one voice, tonight and tomorrow and every day, we in a democratic republic. We are open for dialogue and it has to start with retraction of the constitutional declaration... the

people must read the constitution and give their opinion,” Moussa added.

One attendee at the conference heckled Moussa, shouting, “You're bringing back the Feloul [remnants of the collapsed regime] to talk about martyrs.” Moussa had once served under former President Hosni Mubarak as foreign minister.

“Innocent blood of Egyptians is running in front of the eyes of the elected president. Who is now driving the nation towards division?” Sabbahi said. “Morsy has lost all legitimacy to rule this country... he is now accused of bearing responsibility for this bloodshed.”

The National Salvation Front met Wednesday evening to discuss the proposals of Vice President Mahmoud Mekky that he raised in a press conference earlier the same day.

The state-owned Nile News channel said that the meeting, which is currently being held, is addressing the clashes at the presidential palace. The channel speculated the meeting would end with a decision about the current situation.

Mekky had earlier said the declaration would not be cancelled, and appealed to all political forces to participate in the referendum and hold a dialogue on the controversial articles of the new constitution.

The front said in a statement last night that it is giving the president until Friday to meet the demands, otherwise the civil forces would declare him illegitimate.

The statement said the mass demonstrations nationwide are proof that the president would not be able to divide Egyptian society.

“The National Salvation Front rejects the constitutional declaration and the illegitimate call for a referendum,” Sabbahi stressed.

“We will continue our struggle with our people, until the tyrannical declaration is annulled, and we will not allow a referendum to take place. Egyptians are with us,” Sabbahi concluded.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/elbaradei-appointed-general->

[coordinator-opposition-group-threatens-nationwide-protests](#)

- **Five confirmed dead in palace fighting overnight as morning calm prevails**

A tentative calm had settled on the Heliopolis streets surrounding the presidential palace by early Thursday after a night of rock throwing and fighting between the president's supporters and opponents.

At least five people have been confirmed dead, according to doctors and state news sources. State-run MENA news agency reported 446 injured.

Several armored personnel carriers and tanks were deployed in the area Thursday morning as about 2,000 Muslim Brotherhood members continued to chant pro-Mohamed Morsy slogans, eyewitnesses told Egypt Independent.

Members of the presidential guard could also be seen in the streets surrounding the palace.

Opposition protesters marched on the palace Tuesday to pressure Morsy to revoke the draft constitution, which is

scheduled for a referendum mid-month, and a controversial decree granting himself increased powers.

Fighting quickly broke out when Morsy's Islamist supporters joined the ongoing demonstration Wednesday and vowed to stage a sit-in until the constitution is approved.

Physician Charles Hanna estimated that the makeshift clinic set up at the evangelical church near the protests had treated more than 40 injured protesters who sustained fractures, injuries from stone throwing and birdshot and deep cuts from knives.

"There were all kinds of arms used in this battle, very scary," he said, adding that the volunteer doctors treated the wounded from both sides.

"We have a precedent [for the church clinic]; a field hospital was also set up in the evangelical church in Qasr al-Dobara during clashes in Tahrir and doctors working there came and gave us tips."

After hours of violence subsided, traffic was moving through streets strewn with

rocks. Some Morsy supporters remained in the area, huddling in blankets and reading the Quran, Reuters reported.

"We came here to support President Morsy and his decisions. He is the elected president of Egypt," Emad Abou Salem, 40, a Morsy supporter told the news agency. "He has legitimacy and nobody else does."

Pro-Morsy protesters are manning checkpoints at the entrances to the streets leading to the palace to prevent opposition protesters who are now based in Roxy neighborhood from approaching, according to MENA.

Among the victims is 22-year-old Mohamed Mohamed al-Senousy, who died of a gun shot to the chest, according to the chief physician at the Mansheyet al-Bakry public hospital, Milad Ismail.

The field hospital also received in the early hours of Thursday the body of Hany Sanad al-Emam, 32, who had been shot in the chest with birdshot pellets, Ismail added.

The head of the ambulance authority, Mohamed Sultan, had earlier announced

that three casualties had died of birdshot wounds: Mahmoud Mohamed Ibrahim, Mohamed Khelif and Mohamed Mamdouh Ahmed.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/five-confirmed-dead-palace-fighting-overnight-morning-calm-prevails>

- **Tunisian Opposition Calls for Boycott of NCA Plenary Sessions**

Opposition members of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) plan to call for a three-day boycott of plenary sessions to express solidarity with the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), which claims that affiliates of the ruling Ennahdha party attacked its members yesterday.

A small group of assailants attacked UGTT members in front of their headquarters yesterday, and union members say the attackers were part of the League for the Protection of the Revolution, an unofficial network that supports Ennahadha. The party has denied that the attackers were members of the League.

"We will do the boycott of the plenary session to affirm our support for the UGTT

and to force the dissolution of the League for the Protection of the Revolution,” said Mohamed El Hamdi, a member of the opposition Republican Party.

The opposition will announce at a press conference tomorrow their plans for the boycott, which will last from this Thursday through Monday, El Hamdi said.

The UGTT called for a general strike tomorrow in the interior city of Sidi Bouzid, the birthplace of the revolution, two days after the assailants attacked its members in the latest instance of violence that the opposition has blamed on the League.

“We hope that our action will ring the alarm,” El Hamdi said. “There are great risks that arise from this violence.”

The UGTT members were attacked in Tunis during the annual commemoration of the assassination of Farhat Hached, the independence activist who founded the union. The union boycotted the official procession for Hached today in protest of the government’s handling of yesterday’s violence.

El Hamdi said that the NCA members will boycott sessions for three days—even as the UGTT has only called for one day of protests—to make a “strong” statement and to allow time to consider additional actions.

“It will be difficult for the [ruling coalition] Troika to pass articles without us,” El Hamdi said. “For the moment, I can’t imagine how they will proceed during this time.”

Ennahdha released a statement today in which it rejected the use of violence and called for an independent investigation to determine the identity of the attackers and bring to justice “those responsible for breaking the law, regardless of their rank or association.”

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/12/05/tunisian-opposition-calls-for-boycott-of-nca-plenary-sessions/>

- **Trade Union Criticizes Interior Ministry for Late Response to Violence**

UGTT Secretary General Houcine Abbassi speaks at today’s press conference (Photo credit: Paul Rosenfeld)

The Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) charged that the government did not cooperate sufficiently to put down acts of violence that occurred yesterday in front of the UGTT's headquarters.



High-ranking officials of the UGTT addressed yesterday's incidents this afternoon in a press conference held at El Hana International Hotel in Tunis.

"Our main objective is in the country's interest, and we welcome any criticism. We are not political competitors. We do not know why whenever we try to do our job, we get attacked harshly with rocks and batons," said Houcine Abbassi, the secretary general of the UGTT. They [the ruling Ennahdha party and government's members] perceive the UGTT as a threat that endangers their political interests. But we are here just to support them and not to threaten them."

Abbassi expressed regret about yesterday's attack, stating that the anniversary of Farhat Hached's assassination was supposed to be a day of national commemoration. Hached was the UGTT's founder and killed on December 5, 1952 by La Main Rouge - a French armed group that favored French occupation of Tunisia and targeted other independence leaders.

The UGTT boycotted today's official commemoration of Hached's assassination out of indignation with the government's response to yesterday's violence and instead paid a visit to Hached's widow at her residence.

Protesters denounce yesterday's violence in front of El Hana International Hotel in downtown Tunis (Photo credit: Paul Rosenfeld)

Abbassi denounced the statements of Najib Gharbi, an Ennahdha spokesperson, who accused the unionists of starting the violence. The secretary general insisted that the unionists were attacked by paid militias, which he claims were members of the League for the Protection of the

Revolution. Abbassi added that such members were promised that any violent acts would go unpunished.

“The minister of interior did not cooperate with the UGTT. He did not send any police reinforcement to prevent the aggressors from attacking the unionists and the headquarters,” Abbassi said. “He sent them late, only after the militias finished their attack.”

In a live broadcast interview with Tunisian TV channel TNN last night, Mohamed Daada, a member in the executive bureau of the League for the Protection of the Revolution, denied all allegations that its members instigated yesterday’s scenes of violence in front of the UGTT headquarters.

“They [the protesters] came out of the headquarters bearing batons and gas bombs and threw rocks from the UGTT’s windows,” Daada said.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/12/05/trade-union-criticizes-interior-ministry-for-late-response-to-violence/>

● **Sidi Bouzid to Go on General Strike Tomorrow**

A general strike is to be held tomorrow in Sidi Bouzid, a governorate in the country’s interior, to protest against yesterday’s attack on the headquarters of the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT).

“The main demands of trade unionists in Sidi Bouzid are the following: invite the authorities to put an end to these violations against the UGTT, follow-up and hold accountable the criminals, who attacked the unionists yesterday, and dissolve the League for the Protection of the Revolution because it has committed a crime against the unionists,” claimed Sliman Rouisi, an active unionist in the regional branch of the UGTT of Sidi Bouzid.

The League is an unofficial network that supports the ruling Ennahdha party and aims to root out members of the former regime.

He added that the strike is supposed to last only one day with a possibility for a prolongation if the authorities do not respond to their demands. “We are waiting for a decision to be taken by the

governing body of the UGTT to know how long the general strike would last,” stated Rouisi.

According to TAP, the UGTT planned to boycott the official procession to commemorate Farhat Hached’s assassination, which took place this morning at the burial site of the UGTT founder leader in the Kasbah square.

A protester waves a UGTT flag yesterday alongside the Tunisian national flag (Photo credit: Paul Rosenfeld)

Hfaeidh Hfaeidh, assistant secretary general of the UGTT in charge of the civil service, said to TAP, “We will not visit the tomb of Hached, and we will not participate with the government in the commemoration of Hached’s assassination.”

The abstention from today’s ceremony was undertaken to protest the violence that took place yesterday in front of the UGTT headquarters. Protesters yesterday expressed their belief that Ennahdha was responsible for such acts of violence and that it encouraged certain groups to attack them.

Ennahdha officials have already countered accusations that the League for the Protection of the Revolution partook in the attacks against unionists yesterday.

Najib Gharbi, a press officer in Ennahdha, told Mosaïque FM that protesters affiliated with the League have been assaulted by militias of the UGTT and not the opposite.

“Some international observers noticed that the unionists were responsible as they started to attack the members of the League,” added Zoubair Choudi, a spokesman of Ennahdha.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/12/05/sidi-bouزيد-will-go-on-a-general-strike-tomorrow/>

- **Drafting Committee Makes Slow Progress on Executive Chapter**

The National Constituent Assembly (NCA) committee charged with defining the roles of the executive branch under Tunisia’s new constitution could not reach a consensus during its latest round of voting today. The committee discussed point by

point today the draft articles of the chapter on the executive branch.

The Committee of Legislative and Executive Powers and the Relationship Between Them was split along party lines during its voting on Article 50 of the chapter, which delineates the president's authority over the military and over the state security apparatus.

The head of the committee, Amor Chetoui, chose to pass the draft law to the Committee of Coordination and Drafting, a separate drafting committee, rather than exercise his right to break a tie vote and approve the law for the final draft of the constitution.

"It makes the process longer," said Ikbal Mesadaa, a member of the Legislative and Executive Powers Committee and representative of the Congress for the Republic (CPR) that is part of the leading coalition. "It's been close."

The Committee voted in support of presidential qualifications that require the candidate to be under 75 and relinquish non-Tunisian citizenship.

But it was deadlocked on Article 50, which addresses, among other authorities, whether the president should hold the title of commander in chief, have the power to appoint military chairmen, and dictate security policy without an endorsement from the parliament, according to Mesadaa.

Chetoui, also a member of CPR, said the Committee is aiming to craft a mixed government system that combines aspects of a parliamentary system, in which the powers of the presidency are reduced, with that of a presidential system.

"In the old constitution, the president used to be the center and source of all power," Chetoui said. "But this constitution the president only has an arbitrating role."

The Committee aims to discuss tomorrow the appointment of ambassadors, the president's power to propose legislation, and the impeachment process, Chetoui said.

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/12/04/drafting-committee-makes-slow-progress-on-exec-chapter/>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Sleiman travels to Greece on official visit**

BEIRUT: President Michel Sleiman headed to Greece Thursday on an official visit for talks with senior officials.

Accompanying him on the three-day visit are Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour, Finance Minister Mohammad Safadi, Defense Minister Fayez Ghosn and Economy Minister Nicolas Nahhas.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Dec-06/197463-sleiman-travels-to-greece-on-official-visit.ashx#ixzz2EGlYV211>

- **Lebanon seen as one of most corrupt countries**

BEIRUT: Lebanon ranks as one of the 50 most corrupt nations worldwide, coming 128th out of 174 countries surveyed for perceptions of transparency, a report released Wednesday by an international watchdog showed.

Falling behind a global average of 43 points, Lebanon performed poorly with a

score of 30 points, according to the 2012 Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International.

CPI ranks countries based on how corrupt its public sector is perceived to be by experts and businesses. The index uses the data to award scores ranging from 0, perceived to be highly corrupt, to 100, perceived to be very transparent.

It is one of the most globally cited ways of measuring corruption.

TI updated the methodology it uses for the index scores in 2012, making comparisons with previous findings unworkable. In 2011 and 2010, Lebanon occupied 134th and 127th ranks respectively.

Nada Abdul Sater, head of the Lebanese Transparency Association – the local chapter of Transparency International – said Lebanon has fallen behind other countries in the region.

“Our ambitions are now merely to catch up with some of the worst regimes, instead of competing with developed

countries,” Abdul Sater told a news conference at UNESCO Palace.

She added that an array of corruption scandals in medicine and food safety, as well as the government’s failure to prosecute those involved, have played a role in worsening the public’s view of corruption.

Widespread allegations of public sector squandering and corruption scandals – including allegations of mass customs-evasion at Beirut’s port – have also played a role in widening Lebanese perception of corruption, she added.

“Silence and lack of accountability reinforce corruption. We call for [improving] the independence of the judiciary and empowering it to be able to face corruption,” she said.

Lebanon rated 14th out of 21 Arab countries measured, only ahead of Comoros, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Sudan and Somalia.

“Following the Arab Spring, many Arab countries became free of regimes built on corruption and the plundering of public

funds ... Today we started hearing about ministers resigning for merely being suspected of being involved in corruption,” Abdul Sater said.

Internationally, Denmark, Finland and New Zealand tied in the first position with a score of 90, “helped by strong access to information systems and rules governing the behavior of those in public positions,” a statement by the organization said.

Afghanistan, North Korea and Somalia came at the bottom of the index due to the lack of political leadership accountability and ineffective public institutions.

“Governments need to integrate anti-corruption actions into all public decision-making. Priorities include better rules on lobbying and political financing, making public spending and contracting more transparent and making public bodies more accountable,” said Huguette Labelle, chair of Transparency International.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Lebanon/2012/Dec-06/197391-lebanon-seen-as-one-of-most-corrupt-countries.ashx#ixzz2EGiIMJc>

6. SYRIA

• Syrian Army Seizes Control over Rebels' Bastion City

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Syrian army could regain control over a major part of the rebels' main bastion, Homs, and established security in three-fourth of the city after a fierce battle with terrorist groups.

FNA dispatches said army forces made a remarkable advancement towards the Central district of al-Qasour in Homs this afternoon and purged terrorists from a major part of the district.

Dispatches said army troops are now in control of 5 out of a total eight residential blocs in al-Qasour district.

Deir Balba district in Eastern Homs was also a scene of heavy clashes between the Syrian army and armed rebels.

The Syrian army also fought a bloody war with terrorists in Reef (outskirts of) Homs, killing at least five armed rebels.

Today, the Syrian army killed a number of terrorist commanders in heavy clashes

with al-Qaeda armed rebels in Reef (outskirts of) Homs and Reef Damascus.



In Reef Homs, commander of Separ-e Eslam battalion Abdolkarim Zakaria and commander of al-Hoda battalion, Hesam Sabouh were among the terrorists killed in al-Holeh district on Wednesday.

Three other notorious terrorists, namely Mohamed al-Mohamed nicknamed Abu Saad, Ons al-Hourani, and Helal al-Afsh were also killed in the Syrian army attack on al-Holeh district of Reef Homs. They were members of Farouq battalion.

The army also killed tens of terrorists in Telbiseh and Rastan towns in Reef Homs today.

In Reef Damascus, the Syrian army killed a terrorist commander, Ghasan Samir Khamis, and his armed men in Saqba district.

The army also killed more than 14 armed rebels in Aqraba district of Reef Damascus today.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011 with organized attacks by well-armed gangs against Syrian police forces and border guards being reported across the country.

Hundreds of people, including members of the security forces, have been killed, when some protest rallies turned into armed clashes.

The government blames outlaws, saboteurs, and armed terrorist groups for the deaths, stressing that the unrest is being orchestrated from abroad.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107124648>

- **Democracy only solution to Syrian crisis: Jalili**

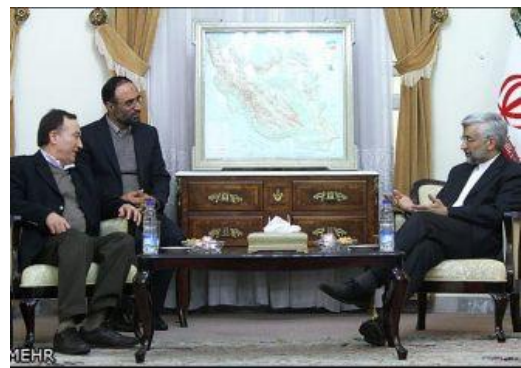
TEHRAN – The secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, Saeed Jalili, has said that the Syrian crisis can only be resolved through the promotion of democracy.

Jalili made the remarks during a meeting with Haitham Manna, the vice chairman of Syria’s National Coordination Committee, in Tehran on Sunday.

He stated that the countries that are creating obstacles in the way of the realization of democracy in Syria have ill intentions and have become part of the problem.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Jalili said that today Syria is in need of transparent talks so that the “logic of power” would be replaced by the “power of logic”.

Jalili also said that Iran is ready to help Syria hold a free and fair election.



For his part, Manna hailed Iran’s efforts to restore peace in Syria and stated that the National Coordination Committee is considering a national solution to the

Syrian problem, without any foreign interference.

In a separate meeting with Manna on Sunday, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that a second round of talks between the Syrian groups would be held soon.

He also said that Tehran has no intention to make decisions on behalf of the Syrian people, rather it wants to pave the way for consultations between the Syrian government and opposition groups in order to help hold free and fair elections in the country.

Manna also met with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi on Monday

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/103791-democracy-only-solution-syrian-crisis-jalili>

- **Syria's war, documented in detail**

BEIRUT: "It was the worst day of my life ..."
" This is what a Syrian army officer, posted in the country's embattled northwest, told another officer by telephone as they commiserated over their disappearing

comrades-in-arms and the situation they had found themselves in.

It appears in an audio recording posted on YouTube during the last week of November – one that has attracted more than 40,000 hits.

Is it genuine? And if so, was it secured by the rebels during a recent victory, or was it in fact manufactured by the regime in a bid to mislead enemies by portraying an army on the brink of collapse?

Hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of videos, written documents and audio recordings that portray aspects of the war in Syria emerge every day, circulating on specialized websites, Facebook pages and other social media. An activist group might produce dozen of videos on a given day, from only one province of the country. Compared to the total volume, a relatively small number are relayed via traditional mass media, where they are seen, heard or read by millions of people. There are the "hits," with wide viewership, and the many lesser-known items of fact and propaganda out there.

Due to the sheer number of visual items produced – footage of battles, fighters on duty, defections of soldiers, confessions of prisoners, formation of rebel units, field hospitals, rescues of wounded people, funerals, demonstrations, activist campaigns, general destruction, damning evidence of either side committing atrocities, etc. – the majority appear to reflect some aspect of what is taking place.

The phone conversation described is around 11 minutes long. An army operator makes a brief appearance at the beginning, to put the call through to a Lt. Mohammad.

The two officers then engage in a back-and-forth conversation whose staccato pace signals that they know each other well. Their accents indicate they are Alawites, although that sect is not mentioned, and neither are the civilian casualties, or any political aspects of the war.

The caller passes on holiday greetings for the Eid al-Adha, indicating that the conversation took place at the end of October. He immediately senses that the

officer, possibly a relative, is either upset or in pain.

“What’s the matter, you’re not doing well?” the caller asks, generating the weary response: “It was the worst day of my life.”

At first the two avoid discussing the details of battles and other military operations; they complain about the lack of opportunities to make telephone calls using either land lines or cellphones due to poor network coverage.

They move to the news that a friend or acquaintance has been killed in battle; the word “martyred” is used, which is common in Arab armies.

They debate when exactly, and from whom, they heard the news. The two men spend time discussing several such cases of friends lost, and the caller notes sadly how their graduating class is becoming depleted. He goes on to mention how he has now lost two commanding officers, and laughs nervously.

They talk about where mutual acquaintances are posted, and what they

know of conditions in these places. In answer to a question, the caller says he is stationed in Maaret al-Numan, probably meaning in or near the largely rebel-held town, while the other man is in Saraqeb, a town in Idlib 30 kilometers to the north.

The caller describes the constant rebel attacks on army checkpoints in the Idlib area and the many regime troops who have been killed.

In response to a question about his duties in Maaret al-Numan, the caller says he commands a unit responsible for guarding a nearby depot in Wadi Daif, the airbase that has been under siege by rebels since October.

“What’s in the depot?” the officer in Saraqeb asks.

“There’s fuel – 5,000 liters of gasoline. Enough to blow Maaret al-Numan and Kafranbel to smithereens,” he says.

“So blow it up, and get out of there,” the officer responds.

The caller is amused by the idea and quickly dismisses it. This doesn’t prevent

his friend from repeating the suggestion over the next few minutes, in a tone that manages to be both playful, and serious.

They both complain about the lack of support from other units, the inability to use many roads – “you just get blown up if you do” – and the isolation.

Throughout the rest of the conversation they make several brief references to the state of the war and the regime’s prospects for victory.

The caller talks about being a “strike force” in the area while the second man, who is markedly demoralized, rejects the idea, based on the steady, bloody attrition.

“No ... no ... we’re not a strike force,” he insists, before asking: “What’s the point of being out here?”

The caller tries repeatedly to boost his friend’s morale but at one point blurts out: “There’s no solution.”

When the caller asks about defections, the demoralized officer’s response is: “No,

there haven't been any defections ...
there's just ... disgust."

Neither man presumes to predict how or
when the war will end.

Since it is the Eid, the caller asks his friend
if sweets, baklava, were offered at the
base to mark the holiday.

"No, they didn't bring me anything," the
demoralized officer responds
immediately, before adding: "They
brought me worries."

While the authenticity of the conversation
cannot be claimed with 100 percent
certainty, it is extremely difficult to stage a
rapid back-and-forth discussion in a "one-
take" acting job lasting more than 10
minutes. The background noise sounds
like a telephone exchange, and a few low
conversations are also audible.

The individual who posted it previously
submitted two dozen videos, detailing
military and civilian rebel activities in the
village of Talmenes, which is near Maaret
al-Numan.

The likeliest explanation is that the
conversation was recorded, possibly as a
part of the regime's surveillance of its
officers, and then seized when Base 46
near Maaret al-Numan was taken by the
rebels, several weeks after the Eid.

Regime positions at Saraqeb were overrun
right after the purported conversation
took place.

A Syrian Alawite familiar with military
culture described the men's dialect as
impeccable and their conversation as
natural.

"If they're actors, they're geniuses," he
said.

The post is one of many items that some
say fall within the realm of the "media
war," or psy-ops, the attempt to influence
the other side in a conflict through
planted, or false information.

It comes as Syrian websites and websites
about Syria are full of daily doses of
"scoops" and rumors, especially as the
second battle for Damascus rages and
rebel advances continue apace in the

north and east of the country, in places such as Idlib.

Several articles or snippets of information circulating on social networks claim that the regime's army and other forces are retreating. The Iranians, or someone else, depending on the story, have convinced Assad and his team to pull their troops back to the capital for a possible last stand, because they are wasting resources by trying to hold the rest of the country.

Other tales maintain that the regime is retreating proactively and feigning weakness to lure the rebels into a trap.

The surfacing of an audio recording of two officers complaining about human losses and poor military capabilities fits perfectly – into either one of these narratives.

Rami Abdel-Rahman, the director of the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, declined to answer directly about the authenticity of the recording.

“There's always a chance it could be faked,” he said. “There are earlier examples, where, for example, there was a video about an Alawite who defected

from the army, and it turned out he was a prisoner of the rebels.”

Col. Malek al-Kurdi, the deputy head of the rebel Free Syrian Army, based in Turkey, acknowledged that both the regime and the rebels are engaged in psy-ops, but at a relatively unsophisticated level, adding that he doubted the former would fabricate such a conversation.

“The regime doesn't engage in this kind of propaganda. It has always used the method of showing that it is strong, not weak,” Kurdi said.

While there is the possibility that the conversation is somehow a fake, the daily stream of material has rendered the war in Syria one of the world's most minutely documented violent conflicts.

The accuracy and objectivity of much of the material can be questioned but clear forgeries are a small minority, and when suspicious material emerges, there are legions of people who might try to expose the fraud, and succeed.

In the comments section, over 100 posts fail to seriously raise the possibility that

the recording is a fabrication. Several people express their surprise that the officers do not use blasphemous expressions at any point in the conversation, as Alawites are seen as one of the communities most prone to using such language, and there is the usual racist, sectarian language against Alawites.

The speakers appear to be “traditional,” in that they regularly use phrases that refer to God, such as “with God’s protection,” without this necessarily being religious in any meaningful way.

Whatever the material’s origin, it mirrors recent media and other reports about the morale of the Syrian military.

In many cases, units are overstretched, undersupplied and cut off from the outside world. Most ominously for the officers and soldiers, the casualty rate has become markedly high. A notorious pro-regime pundit, Sharif Shehadeh, recently caused a furor among Assad supporters when he ranted during a talk show appearance that the army had suffered 100,000 fatalities in the war. While this is an exaggeration, the earlier figure this year of approximately 8,000 military

casualties appears to have grown substantially.

As the caller laments a few times during the conversation, “There’s no one left from our graduating class.”

Link to the audio conversation:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=GnWaCkgGNgs

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Dec-06/197404-syrias-war-documented-in-detail.ashx#ixzz2EGJEaEqh>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Opposition Leader Urges Bahrainis to Expand Popular Protests**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The imprisoned President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, Nabeel Rajab, on Wednesday called on the Bahraini people to rely on their own and expand and increase popular protests against the Al Khalifa regime, reiterating that pinning hope on the international community would be wrong.

"Sitting at homes and pinning hope on international organizations to rescue us is a mistake, do not pin your hope on a mirage and rely on the presence of yourselves on the scene and in the squares," Rajab said.



He further described as "worthless", the Bahraini regime's decision to ban protests, reiterating that all the political spectrums should challenge the decision and take to the streets.

Hundreds of Bahrainis staged large demonstrations across the country on Sunday, calling for the ouster of the al-Khalifa regime and the establishment of a democratic ruling system in their tiny Persian Gulf island.

The protesters asked for the downfall of the Bahraini regime, establishment of a democratic system, and voiced support for people in Mahza village, southern capital City of Manama, which has been under

siege by the Bahraini security forces since two weeks ago.

According to the Bahraini media, the security forces have launched several night raids on the village residents.

The Bahraini government, facing protracted unrest by an overwhelming majority of the people, has resorted to any harsh measure to suppress popular protests and arrest political activists. It also revoked the nationality of 31 men on charges of harming national security earlier this month.

The men include London-based dissidents Saeed al-Shehabi and Ali Mushaima, the son of jailed opposition leader Hassan Mushaima, as well as clerics, human rights lawyers and activists.

Also on the list published by Bahraini News Agency (BNA) were two former parliamentarians from the leading Shiite party Wefaq, Jawad and Jalal Fairouz.

Anti-government protesters have been holding peaceful demonstrations across Bahrain since mid-February 2011, calling for an end to the Al Khalifa dynasty's over-

40-year rule, end of discrimination, establishment of justice and a democratically-elected government as well as freedom of detained protesters.

Violence against the defenseless people escalated after a Saudi-led conglomerate of police, security and military forces from the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) member states - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar - were dispatched to the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom on March 13, 2011, to help Manama crack down on peaceful protesters.

So far, tens of people have been killed, hundreds have gone missing and thousands of others have been injured.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107124646>

- **Bahrain to host UN awards, forum**

Event to celebrate value, virtue of public services

Manama: Bahrain will be the first country in the Middle East to host the United Nations Public Service Awards and Forum.

“Bahrain is the fourth country in the world and the first in the Middle East to host and organise such a forum outside the UN premises in New York since its launch ten years ago,” Mohammad Ali Al Qaed, eGovernment Authority (eGA) CEO, said after signing the agreement with United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOG) Director Haiyan Qian in New York City.

Set to take place in Manama on June 24-27, the forum is expected to attract more than 700 leaders, policymakers, high-level official delegations, practitioners and innovators in governance, representatives on behalf of international and regional organisations, the academia, non-profit organisations and the private sector from more than 80 countries.

“The event is designed to celebrate the value and virtue of public services delivery in the community and the rewards of such services,” eGA said. “Its core focus is to shed light on the contributions of public services in the development process, assess the duties of public servants and encourage youth to pursue careers in the public sector.”

The celebration event grants the recognition of projects which assist beneficiaries to gain easy-access to services worldwide.

“It is the most prestigious international recognition of excellence in the area of eServices as it rewards public service institutions, fosters participation and utilises eGovernment in the delivery of services as well as institutions who utilise unique and innovative approaches,” eGA said.

The awarding ceremony was launched in 2003 to reward public service institutions that are distinguished in categories of Preventing and Combating Corruption in the Public Service, Improving the Delivery of Services, Fostering Participation in Policymaking Decisions through Innovative Mechanisms, Advancing Knowledge Management in Government, and Promoting Gender Responsive Delivery of Public Services.

“Holding one of the key global events of the UN agenda would enable Bahrain to occupy a leadership position in the public service and eGovernment field at a global

level and contribute in achieving the eGovernment strategic goals,” Al Qaed said.

“Bahrain will play a significant leading role in discussing and proposing projects as well as public service standards, in particular the eGovernment’s role. The kingdom has a key role to play in mobilising support, cooperation and coordination between various countries, stakeholders, private sector, governmental bodies, and a significant number of other concerned parties,” he said.

According to eGA, hosting the United Nations Public Service Awards and Forum 2013 reflects Bahrain’s keenness and ability to attract regional and worldwide elite decision-makers as well as specialists.

“Additionally, this event will support business tourism and enhance Bahrain’s position in organising international events and conferences; as it will occupy more than 3,000 accommodation nights in hotels, revive transportation services, shopping malls, as well as highlight the cultural side of Bahrain — for being the capital of Arab culture and showcasing its

heritage and history to the participants and visitors of the forum,” eGA said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-to-host-un-awards-forum-1.1114794>

- **Cassation Court postpones terror trial to January 7**

Defendants convicted on charges of establishing and managing terror groups

Manama: Bahrain’s Cassation Court on Monday postponed to January 7 the re-trial of 13 people charged with plotting to topple the regime.

Initially, 21 suspects were put on trial, including seven in absentia, for their alleged role in the plot.

The National Safety Court of First Instance ruled sentences that ranged between two years and life in prison.

The verdict was challenged by the 14 defendants present at the court and the case was later transferred to the National Safety Court of Appeal that confirmed the convictions and upheld the sentences.

The defendants were convicted on charges of establishing and managing terror groups to change the state royal regime by force and to change the constitution, communicating intelligence with an overseas terrorist organisation to commit hostile acts against Bahrain as well as a number of other charges.

However, the Court of Cassation later ordered the re-trial of the defendants.

Al Horr Al Sameekh was allowed to go home after his prison term decided by the courts of national safety was reduced from two years to six months.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/cassation-court-postpones-terror-trial-to-january-7-1.1113674>

- **GCC chief slams Gannouchi over remarks**

Statements by Tunisia party chief is seen as interference in domestic affairs

Manama: Gulf Cooperation Council secretary-general Abdul Lateef Al Zayani has slammed remarks attributed to Rashid Gannouchi, the leader of Tunisia’s Al

Nahda party, about the situation in the GCC countries.

Al Zayani reportedly said the statements are an unacceptable interference in the domestic affairs of the GCC.

The GCC chief expressed his dismay over the hints made by Gannouchi about the internal matters of some of the GCC countries and hoped that they did not reflect the official position of the Tunisian government, Al Zayani said in a press statement.

The GCC also hopes that the statements will not have an effect on the relations between the GCC and Tunisia, the statement said.

Gannouchi, who does not have an official position in the government led by his party, reportedly said in an interview that he expected “the victory of the Syrian revolution and reforms in more than one Arab country, particularly in the Gulf region.”

The Tunisian religious scholar has often waded into controversy both at home and abroad for his remarks.

His party, the clear winner of the October 2011 elections, the first free multi-party polls in Tunisia, has also come under fire for not being sufficiently decisive in its positions and for not doing enough to reach out to the various segments making up the Tunisian society, especially the poor and the needy.

Internationally, Al Nahda’s leader has been seen as promoting an Islamist agenda for the Arab countries.

In the interview in London, Gannouchi said that that Islamist movements would eventually become the reference point throughout the Arab world after a difficult transition period.

Analysts in the GCC countries have often said that the uprisings in some Arab countries were caused by the high levels of corruption and unemployment and by the difficult living conditions of their citizens.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/gcc-chief-slams-gannouchi-over-remarks-1.1113326>

- **Amnesty urges Bahrain to free jailed activists**

Court due to decide on Monday whether to grant men's request to be released on bail

Manama: Amnesty International has urged Bahrain to release 13 jailed opposition activists, saying doing so would prove the country is "genuinely committed" to reform and respecting human rights.

Amnesty said the men, who were involved in anti-government protests last year and convicted by a military tribunal on charges that included "setting up terror groups to topple the regime," were prisoners of conscience who should be freed immediately.

All of them maintain their innocence.

The Court of Cassation in Manama is due to decide on Monday whether to grant the men's request to be released on bail, with a "small possibility" that their sentences will be quashed, Amnesty said.

"Monday's decision will be a real test for the Bahraini authorities and their allies, if

they want to prove once and for all that they are genuinely committed to respecting and protecting human rights," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty's deputy director for the region.

"These men must be immediately and unconditionally released. Their sentences and convictions must be quashed," she added.

Sahraoui urged Bahrain's allies to put pressure on the authorities "to drop the pretence of reform and immediately back up their words with real actions."

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/amnesty-urges-bahrain-to-free-jailed-activists-1.1113272>

- **Court upholds jail terms for six bloggers**

Bloggers to serve one-year prison term from Saturday for insulting the sultan and violating cyber laws

Muscat: A three-judge bench at the Muscat Appeal Court on Wednesday sent six bloggers to jail for one year for insulting the sultan and violating cyber

laws, upholding an earlier judgment by the Muscat Primary Court.

Bassam Abu Qasida, Essa Masoudi, Hilal Al Bu Saidi, Abdullah Al Abdali, Maymouna Al Badi Mohammad Al Kiyumi and Mohammad Al Badi had appealed against the Primary Court judgment given last August.

The three-judge bench comprising of Badar Al Rashid, Mohammad Al Akhzami and Mukhtar Al Harthi, upheld the Primary Court verdict after four hearings. However, following a plea from medical student Abdullah Al Abdali's parents his sentence was suspended until the end of his current semester.

The rest of the bloggers will go to prison on Saturday. "They will appeal to the Supreme Court but their prison term stays even after the appeal," Sami Al Sa'adi, a lawyer for the activists and bloggers told Gulf News.

Since the accused, who are on bail, were not present in the court their prison term will start from Saturday. "Otherwise they would have been taken to high-security central prison in Sumayil straight after the

court ruling," another lawyer said. Now they will go to prison on Saturday.

The six were among 42 activists and bloggers put on trial. Some of the activists are facing two different cases simultaneously, one for wrongful gathering and the other one for insulting the country's ruler Sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed, as well as violating the country's cyber laws.

The crackdown against the activists started at the end of May when former volleyball player Habiba Al Hinai, Sohar-based activist Esmail Al Muqbali and Yaqoub Al Kharusi were detained in Fahoud when they went to express solidarity with the striking oil field workers on May 31 this year.

Subsequently, the authorities arrested several bloggers and activists who had gathered to show support against the arrest of the trio.

Meanwhile, the Muscat Appeals Court has adjourned hearing in the trial for Esmail Al Muqbali, Awadh Sawafi, Osama Al Thuwaiya, Ahmad Al Maamari, Mohammad Al Jamoudi to December 19.

The Muscat Primary Court has also put off lèse majesté trial against bloggers Sultan Al Sa'adi, Hatem Al Maliki and Khalid Al Nofli, Khalid Al Badawi and, Mohammad Fazari to December 26 to hear testimony of technical expert as the defendants have claimed that their Facebook accounts were hacked to post the alleged malicious material.

The experts will determine if the objectionable writing on their Facebook account, which also violated Oman's cyber laws, was posted by hackers or not.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/court-upholds-jail-terms-for-six-bloggers-1.1114661>

- **Kuwaitis demonstrate against new parliament**

Police use tear gas and stun grenades to disperse protesters, witnesses say

Kuwait City: Hundreds of opposition supporters demonstrated in various areas of Kuwait on Monday to demand scrapping the newly elected parliament, witnesses said.

They said that night demonstrations were staged in at least four areas of the oil-rich Gulf state and that riot police used teargas and stun grenades to disperse the protesters. There were no reports of injury.

The demonstrations were not previously announced and began at the same time in a coordinated way to press demands for abolishing the new parliament and scrapping a disputed amendment to the electoral law.

"It was decided by opposition youth activists to stage night protests from tonight until next Saturday when the opposition plans a major procession," a youth activist told AFP requesting anonymity.

Saturday's snap polls were boycotted by the opposition and all the 50 seats were won by pro-government candidates, including a record 17 seats by the Shiite minority.

The Islamist, nationalist and liberal opposition boycotted the polls in protest against the amendment of the electoral law which the opposition says it enables

the government to control the outcome of polls.

Head of the National Election Commission Ahmad Al Ajeel said on Monday that voter turnout was 39.7 per cent while the opposition claimed it was only 26.7 per cent.

Kuwait Emir Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah earlier on Monday accepted the resignation of the cabinet in a routine step required after the election.

He also invited the new parliament to hold its inaugural session on December 16.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwaitis-demonstrate-against-new-parliament-1.1114062>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

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

Press TV
December 5, 2012

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.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **NATO death toll in Afghanistan drops in November**

by Farid Behbud

KABUL, Dec. 5 (Xinhua) -- The death toll of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan dropped considerably for the third

successive month in November as the fighting season has ended in the insurgency-hit country.

In November, a total of 17 ISAF or coalition soldiers, with 16 of them Americans, have lost their lives against 52 in August when the military alliance suffered the highest casualties since January this year, according to the iCasualties, a website tracking the casualties of foreign troops in the war-torn country.

The spring and summer is known as fighting season in the central Asian state.

The Taliban insurgent group, which has been waging an insurgency of more than one decade, launched an annual offensive in early May this year.

In the fighting season or from April to September, the military alliance had respectively lost 39, 45, 39, 46, 52, and 27 soldiers each month, according to figures compiled in the independent iCasualties website.

Twenty-four ISAF soldiers have been killed in Taliban-initiated attacks in October.

Out of the total fatalities last month, three service members died in non-battle related injuries and one British soldier with the coalition was killed in the so-called "green-on-blue" insider attack when Afghan army, police or gunmen in their uniform open fire against their international partners.

A British soldier was shot dead on Nov. 11 by a member of Afghan army following an argument in Nad Ali district of Helmand province, 555 km south of Kabul, where majority of the coalition soldier are from Britain.

Another British soldier was wounded and the attacker, who was also injured in the exchange of fire, was detained. No details about the incident were released.

The casualty brings the number of foreign soldiers killed in the green-on-blue attacks to 58 in about 38 insider attacks so far this year.

Taliban insurgents have often claimed responsibility for the insider attacks but the coalition military officials have recently said that about 25 percent of the

insider attacks are in some manner related to the Taliban-led insurgency.

They said the factors that contribute to the so-called green on blue shootings are wide-ranging from infiltration and impersonation to personal grievances.

Eight out of 17 service members were killed in Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) explosions last month.

The simple but difficult to be detected Taliban weapon, the IEDs used in making suicide vests and roadside bombs, has proved a challenge for Afghan and NATO-led forces in the insurgency-hit country.

Up to 830 Afghan army personnel have also been killed in Taliban-led attacks from April to October and about 85 percent of Afghan army casualties were caused by the IEDs, said General Zahir Azimi, spokesman for the Afghan Defense Ministry last month.

Currently about 100,000 NATO-led forces, with 68,000 of them Americans, are stationed in the country to stop the Taliban from returning to power.

So far this year as of Wednesday Dec. 5, a total of 389 foreign soldiers, including 298 Americans have been killed in the war-torn country.

In 2010 and 2011, the NATO-led ISAF had respectively lost 711 service members including 499 Americans, and 566 service members, including 418 Americans.

According to iCasualties, a total of 3,236 service members with the ISAF forces have lost their lives since the war began in late 2001 in Afghanistan. Out of the total fatalities, 2,162 were Americans, 438 Britons and 636 from other troops-contributing countries.

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

- **Security transition conclude in 6 eastern Afghan provinces: army**

JALALABAD, Afghanistan, Dec. 5 (Xinhua) - Afghan forces took over the full security charges of six eastern provinces from the NATO-led forces, an Afghan army commander said Wednesday.

"Afghan army and police officially took full control of security duties in Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, Kapisa, Parwan and

Panjshir provinces from NATO-led coalition forces and the security transition process in those provinces is entirely completed," commander of army regional Corps 201 Selab, General Zaman Waziri, told a ceremony to mark the event held in Jalalabad, the capital town of Nangarhar province.

"The government's goal to assume leading security duties across the country by the end of 2014 has been proceeding smoothly and is on track," he added.

The transition of security control from foreign troops to Afghan forces which begun in summer 2011 is due to be completed by the end of 2014.

However, some high-ranking military officials with the country's defense ministry recently said that the Afghan government forces will be in charge of security of the entire country by the end of 2013, ahead of the schedule.

In a couple of weeks, when the third phase of the transition process ends, the Afghan forces will take full control of areas with about 75 percent of the country's population.

A total of 50 countries are contributing 100,000-strong forces in Afghanistan with more than 68,000 of them Americans.

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

- **NATO Foreign Ministers Discuss Afghanistan, Georgia**

December 5, 2012

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen says the alliance's foreign ministers have had a "productive" session with Afghanistan's foreign minister in Brussels.

The December 5 meeting focused on the handover of security responsibilities to Afghan forces by the end of 2014 and a new NATO mission to train more soldiers and police officers.

Rasmussen told journalists that NATO will contribute to the funding of Afghan security forces after 2014.

NATO foreign ministers also held a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission

with Georgian Foreign Minister Maia Panjikidze.

Rasmussen described NATO's commitment to Georgia as "solid."

On December 4, the ministers also met and approved NATO member Turkey's request to have Patriot surface-to-air defense missiles deployed on its territory to protect the country from possible attacks from neighboring Syria.

Based on reporting by dpa and AFP

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

- **Nearly 83,000 Afghan refugees return home from Pakistan this year**

ISLAMABAD, Dec. 5 (Xinhua) -- The UN refugee agency said Wednesday that nearly 83,000 Afghan refugees have returned home this year through its assisted voluntary repatriation program, a 24 percent increase from 2011.

In November this year, more than 8,200 refugees returned from Pakistan, compared with some 3,000 a year earlier. However, Pakistan is still hosting some 1.65 million Afghan refugees and another

1 million undocumented Afghans, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said.

Voluntary repatriation remains the UNHCR's preferred solution globally for most refugees. Since 2002, around 5.7 million Afghan refugees have returned to their home country, constituting nearly a quarter of the country's population. Nevertheless, Pakistan and Iran are still generously hosting some 2.7 million Afghan refugees after three decades, a UNHCR statement said.

The Pakistani government is holding informal consultations to formulate the policy beyond Dec. 31, 2012, a date set for the Afghan refugees to return homes.

Pakistan has issued Proof of Registration Cards (PoRs) to Afghan refugees that will expire on Dec. 31 and the government has not yet decided to extend its period. Pakistan said that it will treat all Afghan refugees as illegal immigrants after the expiry of PoRs.

Pakistani Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Engineer Shaukatullah Khan, whose ministry also deals with the

refugees affairs, concluded a three-day visit to Afghanistan on Tuesday and has assured the Afghan leaders that Pakistan will not forcibly expel Afghans.

The minister also called on Afghan President Hamid Karzai and expressed his commitment to the voluntary return of Afghan refugees to their homeland, while also hoping that the Pakistani government will soon agree to a mechanism in this respect for voluntary and dignified return. During this meeting, emphasis was made on the voluntary nature of return by the president, the UNHCR said.

The minister also saw first-hand the implementation of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Returnees (SSAR) in Afghanistan, and the conditions in which refugee returns are taking place.

Together with Dr. Jamaher Anwary, minister for Refugees and Repatriation, he visited two high-return areas where they met returnees from Pakistan. They were also accompanied by representatives of the UNHCR in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including Neill Wright, UNHCR representative in Pakistan.

The delegations met with recently returned refugees from Pakistan and witnessed the many needs still faced by the returnees as winter approaches, despite several already completed projects, including a new school that was under construction at the time.

Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration are at the center of the SSAR that was endorsed at an international conference in Geneva in May 2012. "However, we need development funding and development actors to urgently become more engaged in supporting sustainable reintegration for refugees, through the implementation of this strategy," said Dr. Anwary.

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

Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.

Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcısı Nebahat Tanrıverdi O tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*

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*