



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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1. IRAQ

- **Sihail, Kobler discuss political developments in Iraq (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 9 (AIN) -The First Deputy Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, Qusai al-Sihail, discussed with the head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Martin Kobler, the latest updates on the political arena and the UN efforts to relief Iraq from the UN sanctions stated in the UN Charter's 7th Chapter.

A statement by Sihail's media office cited that "Sihail discussed with Kobler the developments of the political process in Iraq and the role of the UN in releasing Iraq from the UN sanctions."

The 1st Deputy Speaker emphasized, during the meeting, the necessity to resolve all the problems through dialogue and abandoning the tensed statements," calling all the political sides to search for realistic and practical solutions in settling their disputes."

"For his part, Kobler announced conducting a series of meetings with the Iraqi political blocs so as to find solutions for what is going on in the country and

how to rescue the political process from risks," the statement concluded.

- **Force from Baghdad deployed east of Falluja, Anbar Council requests Arab League, UN to interfere (NINA)**

Ramadi, Jan 9 (NINA) – Organizer at Anbar protest, Khamees al-Mohana, affirmed that a military force coming from Baghdad has camped east of Falluja.

In a statement to NINA on Wednesday, Jan. 9, Mohana said that most members of the force are Kurds; until now, the force has not moved to dislodge protestors.

He accused the government of being responsible of any action against unarmed protestors in Falluja or Ramadi.

Meanwhile, Anbar Councilman, Khamees al-Abtan, said, "We call on the Arab League and the United Nations to intervene to safeguard protestors in Anbar and monitor security forces, who are trying to draw their weapons against unarmed civilians and use force to put an end to peaceful protests in Anbar."

He pointed out that military forces in Anbar are provoking the protestors to

create a problem, but protestors insist on keeping the protest peaceful.

- **Iraqi PM urges security forces to show flexibility in dealing with Sunni protestors (Xinhua)**

BAGHDAD, Jan. 9 (Xinhua) -- Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki urged Thursday the country's security forces to deal in flexibility in dealing with the Sunni demonstrations to thwart plots of sparking clashes with the protestors.

"I call on the police to show flexibility, accuracy and wisdom in dealing with all the demonstrators to avoid turmoil and to foil the plots of those who want to spark a clash between police and demonstrators," Maliki said in his speech at a ceremony in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad marking the 91st anniversary of the foundation of the Iraqi police.

Maliki also urged security forces to stress on the principles of human rights and to pursue legal mechanisms in dealing with citizens.

"I stress that you have to monitor human rights (during your performance) and not to arrest any Iraqi without a warrant, or

holding any man or a woman by the crime of another person," Maliki said in his speech at the ceremony attended by dozens of Iraqi military officers and leading politicians.

He also urged security forces to carry out their interrogations according to legal mechanisms without coercion and to preserve the dignity of the detainees.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-01/09/c_132091734.htm

- **Iraq PM says protestors causing 'chaos' (RFE/RL)**

BAGHDAD, Jan 9, 2013 (AFP) - Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki accused anti-government protestors who have blocked off a key trade route for two weeks of abusing their freedoms and causing "chaos", in a speech on Wednesday.

Maliki said security forces could intervene to end the protests, which have swept Sunni-majority provinces in western and northern Iraq since December 23, but also renewed an offer to consider some of the demonstrators' demands.

The protests were sparked by the December 20 arrest of at least nine guards of Sunni Finance Minister Rafa al-Essawi. One has cut the main highway between Baghdad and the Jordanian and Syrian borders.

Demonstrators have accused the Shiite-led authorities of persecuting Iraq's Sunni Arab minority community and have called for the release of prisoners from jails and reform of anti-terror laws.

"Freedom for those who do not understand its meaning is chaos and the law of the jungle," Maliki said in a speech in central Baghdad marking the 91st anniversary of the founding of Iraq's police force.

"There is a difference between a peaceful rally and an act of disobedience, and blocking off a highway.

Based on reporting by AFP, dpa, and Reuters

<http://www.rferl.org/content/iraq-maliki-says-protesters-causing-chaos/24819481.html>

- **Maliki speaks out about demonstrations in the country [claiming that each protestor has been given \$ 100] (Shafaq News)**

Shafaq News, Jan 9 / The Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki announced on Wednesday, that there demonstrations that come out from areas that he didn't name in the country after giving each protester \$ 100, accusing some parties of trying to inflame the internal situation and drag the police to clash with protesters.

Maliki said in a speech on the occasion of police day ceremony attended by "Shafaq News", that "Not everyone who goes out and collects thousand or two thousand demonstrators and give each one of them \$ 100 represents the demands of the street."

Maliki did not refer to the place and time of this demonstration, but he pointed out that this "money is dirty and came from abroad."

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4673-maliki-speaks-out-about-demonstrations-in-the-country-for--100-per-protester.html>

- **Hakeem calls for dealing in a serious way [with] realizing the Iraqis' legitimate demands (NINA)**

Baghdad, Jan 9 (NINA) – Leader of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), Ammar al-Hakeem, called for dealing in a serious way toward realizing the just demands of the Iraqi people, through dialogue and the Constitution.

Hakeem stressed his meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 9, with leader of the National Iraqi Congress, Ahmed al-Chalabi, the importance to consolidate understanding and national unity, as well as his rejection to division plans, calling for not involving the Army against protestors in Anbar or any other Iraqi city.

For his part, Chalabi stressed, in the meeting, his support to Hakeem's initiative to quickly reaching a solution to the country's dangerous crisis; pointing out that Hakeem is being trusted by all parts of Iraq's political scene.

He pointed out that there is an understanding and conformity in their views over the current crisis, being different that the previous ones, because of the size of demonstrations and

demands, pointing out that some of the demands are legitimate, while others contradict the laws and Constitution.

- **Hakeem calls for calmness, rejects sectarian slogans (NINA)**

Baghdad, Jan 9 (NINA) – Leader of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), Ammar al-Hakeem, called on political sides for calmness, adopt religious authorities views that call for calmness and reject of sectarian slogans, rather to adopt dialogue and the Constitution a mean to solve the crisis.

In his meeting with Sheikh Khalid al-Mulla, President of Moslem Scholars Group and member of Wise men Committee, formed to deal with current crisis, Hakeem stressed that all have to bear their responsibilities in preventing the country from slipping into situations that would harm the country's unity and security.

For his part, al-Mulla k acquainted Hakeem with the efforts being exerted to overcome current crisis, praising Hakeem's repeated calls to political adversaries to sit and talk together, through adopting the Constitution a mean toward reaching a solution.

- **Iqbal: Demonstrations to expand to involve southern provinces too (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 9 (AIN) –Mohamed Iqbal, of the Iraqiya Slate expressed his view that the demonstrations will expand to involve the southern provinces too.

He stated to AIN "The southern provinces have several demands as the case in the northren and central provinces," noting that "The parliament is partly responsible for these demands since it the legislative side."

He hoped that forming 11 judicial committees to speed up settling the detainees' cases by the government is not for the sake of gaining time as usual

- **Nineveh Governor accuses security forces of seeking to create strife among Mosul's components (NINA)**

Mosul, Jan 9/ NINA /--Nineveh governor Ethel Nujaifi said: "Security services are seeking to create conflict, to break out conflict among Mosul components, especially in the latest days by preventing peaceful demonstrations.

He added in a statement to NINA reporter: "The security services will not be able to create such a situation by closing a number of roads in the city," describing attempt to impose curfew in a number of areas as offence on the civilian's life.

He explained that "the people of the province of Nineveh and the city of Mosul in particular, continue to demonstrate for the thirteen day in a row in Ahrar yard and will never give up until the implement their legitimate requests.

Forces of Nineveh Operation closed several times Ahrar Square and fired in air to disperse the demonstrators, and satellite showed images of an military armored Hummer as trying to run over protesters. Which resulted in the injury of 4 person of the demonstrators.

- **Warning against new dangerous political turn in Iraq (Aswat al-Iraq)**

MISSAN, Jan 9/ Aswat al-Iraq: Missan provincial security and defence commission member Maitham al-Fartousi warned here today against a new political turn due to current instability and the fever to get seats in coming provincial elections.

Fartousi told Aswat al-Iraq added that "the coming stage shall be difficult that will threaten the newly-born political process in Iraq".

"We are in the same boat, so we will drown altogether", he warned.

Iraq is witnessing "one of the most dangerous crises" in its history after 2003, through massive protests that extended to Anbar, Salahal-Din, Ninewa, Kirkuk, DIALA and Baghdad, as well as other areas in the country.

The protestors demanded the release of male and female prisoners and detainees and cancellation of terrorism and de-Baathification laws and to rectify the political process in the country.

- **Tahrer Square protestors raise their demands to overthrow the government (Shafaq News)**

Shafaq News, Jan 9 / A local official in Nineveh province said on Wednesday, that the demonstrators in Tahrer square raised the ceiling of their demands to include the call to overthrow the government, while demanded to remove

the army troops and federal police from the city.

The official, who asked not to be named, said in an interview for "Shafaq News", that "the demonstrators raised the ceiling of their demands by calling to overthrow the government because of the lack of its responsiveness."

For his part, "Shafaq News" reporter said that those demands have emerged, "especially after the expansion of the powers of the third division of the federal police in the right side of Mosul."

The federal police confirmed earlier, that it will receive the security file of the right side of Mosul city , including the demonstrations area, while pointed out that this procedure was taken on the background of the incident that occurred between the army and demonstrators; pointing that four battalions of emergency forces have been included to its troops.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4675-tahrer-square-protestors-raise-their-demands-to-overthrow-the-government.html>

- **Demonstrations product of extremist politicians, MP (Aswat al-Iraq)**

NAJAF, Jan 9/ Aswat al-Iraq: A State of Law Bloc leader charged that "extremists politicians are responsible for igniting the demonstrations in Anbar province", pointing that "they were used by the enemies of the political process".

Sheikh Amer al-Kufaishi told Aswat al-Iraq that some demonstrators put denominational slogans, while others had legitimate problems and demands.

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- **Anbar demonstrators' demands against constitution unlike Basra demonstrators' (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 9 (AIN) –MP, Mansour al-Timimi, Member of the State of Law Coalition emphasized that Anbar demonstrators' demands are against the constitution unlike Basra demonstrators' demands that are constitutional because they are related to the services.

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "Conducting demonstrations is a right ensured by the Iraqi constitution for all people without exception," noting that "People are the decision makers through the elections in which they nominate their representatives in the government and the parliament."

"The demonstrators in Anbar called upon demands that contradict the political process that is based on the constitution," he mentioned, assuring that

"Basra as other southern provinces suffered a lot so they have demands at the current stage," he concluded.

- **Opponents of Iraq's Maliki seek to question him in parliament (Reuters)**

BAGHDAD, Jan 9 (Reuters) - Opponents of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said on Wednesday they would call him to

parliament for questioning in a second attempt to force a vote of no confidence as the Shi'ite leader faces Sunni Muslim protests.

The parliamentary measure and popular unrest are turning into a major test for Maliki, a Shi'ite nationalist whom many Sunni leaders accuse of marginalising their sect and amassing power just a year after the last U.S. troops left.

Maliki's rivals among Sunni, Shi'ite and Kurdish blocs remain sharply divided, and failed last year to win required approval from the president or support in the 325-member Council of Representatives for a vote of no confidence.

Lawmakers collected more than the 25 signatures required to call Maliki to appear in parliament to be questioned on alleged violations of the constitution and of a power-sharing agreement.

"The first step is questioning him and we presented a request today," said Sunni-backed Iraqiya party lawmaker Jaber al-Jaberi. "The next stage will be a vote of no confidence if we can get enough votes."

A spokesman for Maliki did not immediately return calls seeking comment on the motion.

Thousands of protesters have taken to the streets in Sunni strongholds across Iraq for more than two weeks, increasing fear that turmoil in neighbouring Syria may help tip Iraq back into the broad sectarian violence it suffered in 2006-2007.

<http://news.yahoo.com/opponents-iraqs-maliki-see-him-parliament-141802096.html>

- **Iraqi opposition parties join forces "away from sectarianism" (KUNA)**

IRBIL, North Iraq, Jan 9 (KUNA) -- President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Masoud Barzani and chairman of the Iraqi List alliance and ex-prime minister of Iraq Iyad Allawi agreed Wednesday to work together "in the framework of a national program" and "away from sectarian slogans." "The agreement, reached by both men at Salaheddin resort here, aims to break the political deadlock in Iraq in consistency with the provisions of the Iraqi constitution and the previously-signed

accords," according to a press release by the KRG presidency.

"The planned national program aims to unify the ranks of the different political parties away from sectarianism," the statement said.

Today's meeting took place against the backdrop of mass protests and sit-ins in several parts of Iraq including the governorates of Al-Anbar, Ninawa, Salaheddin and Kirkuk since December 25.

The protests, joined by several senior officials such as Minister of Finance Raf'e Al-Issawi and Governor of Ninawa, press for the release of detainees particularly the female ones, a halt to prisoner maltreatment and to the arbitrary arrests, and cancellation of the controversial law on justice and accountability as well as the fourth article of the anti-terrorism law.

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2285854&language=en>

- **Jafari discusses political situation with delegations from SIIC, PUK (NINA)**

Baghdad, Jan 9 (NINA) – Leader of the National Alliance (NA), Ibrahim Jafari,

discussed with delegations representing the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) latest political developments.

A statement issued on Wednesday, Jan. 9, by the NA Media Bureau said that Jafari received SIIC delegation, headed by Mohammed al-Hashimi and included Sheikh Hameed Mo'alla, and Mohammed al-Asadi.

It added that in the meeting, discussion covered the ongoing developments in the political process, stressing the necessity to continue efforts aiming to solve problems and push the political process forward.

The statement added that Jafari received on Tuesday a delegation from the PUK, consisted of lawmakers Firyad Rawanduzi and Khalid Shuwani.

National Alliance ends the ['crisis of punches'] and declares no normalization with Baath (Shafaq News)

Shafaq News, Jan 9 / National Alliance announced on Wednesday, the end of the crisis that occurred between its members affiliated to it and led to conflict by hands,

while decided by all its components to refuse to normalize relations with members of the outlawed Baath party.

The leader in the National Alliance, Khalid al-Attayah said in a news conference attended by "Shafaq News", that "The National Alliance held a meeting in the parliament with its full members and components to discuss the conditions of the current stage as it was stressed to deal with it in solidarity and unified way."

Attayah who is the head of the state of law bloc added that "SLC was informed by the apology for some of its members who were insulted yesterday."

"The National Alliance is firmly against any legislation of laws that will open the door of terrorism to launch attacks on the political process in the country."

For his part, the head of Ahrar parliamentary bloc , Bahaa al-Araji said at a press conference that "the National Alliance is still strong and coherent, and there are differences in the views and this is a healthy thing, as we agreed to stand as one toward all the challenges facing

Iraq, and that media did not address the event on yesterday objectively. "

A parliamentary source revealed, on Tuesday that an MP from SLC, Ali al-Shalah was punched by two MPs from Ahrar bloc that represents the Sadrist movement after a fist fight inside the parliament yesterday.

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/4674-national-alliance-ends-the-punches-crisis-and-declares-no-normalization-with-baath.html>

- **Peshmerga prepare a worksheet of nine points for submission to Baghdad next Sunday (NINA)**

Arbil, Jan 9 / NINA /-- Peshmerga Ministry of the Kurdistan Regional Government announced that its delegation to negotiation with the Federal Defense Ministry prepare a worksheet of nine points before leaving to negotiation in Baghdad next Sunday.

Jabbar Yawar the Peshmarga general-secretary said in a press conference today : "The province believes in dialogue and peaceful solutions to the problems and differences between Baghdad and Arbil

regarding the disputed areas until the implementation of the Constitutional Article No 140./

Sinead: Parliament to vote on sending the report on arms deal with Russia to the Integrity Commission (NINA)

Baghdad, Jan 9/ NINA /-- Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on security and defense affairs MP, Hassan Sinead announced that the parliament voted today on favor to send the report on arms deal with Russia to the Integrity Commission .

He said in a press conference today, "The parliament voted on the report, although it contains untrue information and others inaccurate.

He ended: "The report did not refer to the existence of people involved in the corruption of the arms deal, stressing that the Commission on Public Integrity will have the decisive word to resolve the matter."

- **Economist calls to release CBI Deputy Governor (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 9 (AIN) -The economist, Laith Mohamed Ridha described the Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Iraq, Mudhir Mohamed Salih, as genius economic expert, demanding the Iraqi Judiciary to urgently release him from detention.

Ridha clarified that "Mudhir is not charged with corruption involvement or theft but the charges against him are related to administrative mistakes."

He expressed his concern towards the continuity of detaining Mudhir who suffers diabetes and blood pressure disorder.

The member of the Parliamentary Integrity Committee, Aliya Nusaiyf announced on 5th , October, 2012 the issuance of arrest warrant against the CBI Deputy Governor on charges related to corruption.

- **Speaker of KR Parliament, IHEC delegation discuss elections of KR provinces (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 9 (AIN) –The Speaker of Kurdistan Region Parliament, Arsalan Bayiz, and the delegation of the

Independent High Electoral Commission conducting the elections of KR provinces.

A statement by the IHEC received by AIN cited "Bayiz received the IHEC delegation that involved the head of the IHEC Commissioners council, his deputy and the members of the council," noting that "Both sides discussed the mechanisms of conducting the elections in KR provinces according to the legal and constitutional merits in the region."

"The meeting was attended by the deputy Speaker of KR, Hasan Sora," the statement mentioned.

"At the end of the meeting, Bayiz congratulated the delegation on assuming their new posts after the approval of the Iraqi parliament," the statement concluded.

2. IRAN

- **Spokesman: Iran-G5+1 Talks Likely to Cover Regional Issues**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The talks between Iran and the group 5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) are not limited to Iran's nuclear issue and

may cover other topics, including regional issues, as well, an Iranian spokesman said on Wednesday.



"The negotiations between Iran and G5+1 are comprehensive and are not just about the nuclear issue," Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast said today.

He added that Iranian representatives have already told the representatives of the six world powers that different issues can be discussed including campaign against narcotics, and stated that the western countries have proposed dealing with the regional crises.

"The (Iran-powers) meeting presents an opportunity for another view to be raised alongside the viewpoint of the western countries," Mehman-Parast underscored.

Last week, Iran's top negotiator in talks with the world powers Saeed Jalili said

Tehran and the Group 5+1 would resume talks later this month, although the place and date for the negotiations have not been finalized.

Jalili told reporters in New Delhi that Tehran has agreed to a new round of talks this month.

"We have accepted that these talks should be held in January ... but till now the details have not been finalized," he said.

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

Despite the rules enshrined in the NPT entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment,

Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

Tehran has dismissed West's demands as politically tainted and illogical, stressing that sanctions and pressures merely consolidate Iranians' national resolve to continue the path.

Tehran has repeatedly said that it considers its nuclear case closed as it has come clean of IAEA's questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107134395>

- **Official: Iran to Commercialize 10 New Biomedicines in 3 Years**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian Deputy Health Minister for Research and Technology Mostafa Qaneyee announced on Wednesday that Iran will start mass-production of 10 new home-made biomedicines in the next few years.

"These 10 drugs include medicines to treat cancer, infertility, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis, MS, Crohn's disease, gout,

hemophilia and diabetic ulcers and have applications in healing wounds and burns and blood production," Qaneyee said.

"A number of the mentioned medicines have applications as multipurpose drugs for treating diseases like cancer, as well as (diseases caused during) chemotherapy stages and hepatitis C," he added.



"The industrial and semi-industrial stages of producing the mentioned drugs will be gradually completed between the next 2 to 3 years," Qaneyee underlined.

Iran has taken wide strides in science and technology, particularly in medical and medicinal fields, in recent years.

In relevant remarks in August, Iranian Health Minister Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi boasted the country's astonishing progress in producing medical tools, equipment and drugs, and said Iran stands

12 in the world ranking of biomedicine production.

"Iran ranks 1st in the region, 4th in Asia and 12th in the world in producing biological drugs," Vahid Dastjerdi said in a ceremony in Tehran at the time to unveil 8 new types of hi-tech medicines used for treating various kinds of diseases.

She also announced that the global exports value of biomedicine industry stands at \$1,000bln, and Iran can have a large share of this figure.

Also, Iran announced in August that it would unveil 8 new radiomedicines by early February 2013.

"The production and quality control of 8 other radiomedicines have ended and they will be unveiled at most by the Ten-Day Dawn (marking the anniversary of the Iranian revolution's victory over the former Pahlavi regime in early February)," Executive Director of Iran's National Large-Scale Plan for Radiomedicine Production Technology Amir Reza Jalilian told FNA at the time.

He said that Iran has already produced 15 radiomedicines and it plans to synthesize 6 other new types of radiomedicines in the near future.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107134469>

- **AEOI Head Urges IAEA to Enter Talks with Iran with No Prejudgment**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Fereidoon Abbasi called on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to enter talks with Iran without any prejudgment, underlining that adoption of a cooperative approach by the UN nuclear agency would lead to the settlement of all problems.

"If the representatives of the Agency enter the talks with no prejudgment and aim to clarify the reality and give a consideration to our country's rights, they will certainly reach results in their next meeting with us, but if they want to enter talks with prejudgment, I don't think that they can attain any result," Abbasi told reporters in Tehran on Wednesday.

Asked about the level of the IAEA envoys to the talks with Iran, he said most

probably IAEA's deputy director-general and his team will participate in the upcoming meeting which is due to be held on January 16.



Meantime, Abbasi underlined that Iran will not accept any undertakings outside the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and added that Tehran will continue enriching uranium to the levels of 5% and 20% at its facilities based on the country's needs.

The latest round of talks between Iran and the IAEA was held in Tehran mid December and the two sides discussed a modality plan for their cooperation.

After the talks, Deputy Director-General of the IAEA Herman Nackaerts, who headed the Agency's delegation, voiced optimism about a deal with Iran in the upcoming talks between Tehran and the UN nuclear watchdog on January 16 on the remaining

issues of difference over Tehran's nuclear program.

Speaking to reporters in Vienna airport after returning from Tehran, Nackaerts said progress was made in Thursday's talks between the agency and Iran in the capital Tehran.

"We were able to make progress," he said.

He added that more talks are due with Iran on January 16. He also said that he expects to reach a deal with Iran in January on the remaining issues related to the country's nuclear energy program.

Washington and its Western allies accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, while they have never presented any corroborative evidence to substantiate their allegations. Iran denies the charges and insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Tehran stresses that the country has always pursued a civilian path to provide power to the growing number of Iranian population, whose fossil fuel would eventually run dry.

Despite the rules enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entitling every member state, including Iran, to the right of uranium enrichment, Tehran is now under four rounds of UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions for turning down West's calls to give up its right of uranium enrichment.

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Tehran has repeatedly said that it considers its nuclear case closed as it has come clean of IAEA's questions and suspicions about its past nuclear activities.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107134387>

- **Europe wants to buy Iran oil; Iran not to sell**

TEHRAN, Jan. 10 (MNA) – Oil Ministry Spokesman says that Iran would not sell oil to European countries and the priority was set for countries that helped Iran in the sanctions," adding that some

European countries are willing to buy Iranian oil after oil sanctions on Iran went ineffective.

Aliraza Nikzad provided comments on the state of the extension of oil contracts with different countries such as Turkey and Japan and said “Currently, sales, production, and export of Iranian oil enjoys good conditions.”

Oil Ministry Spokesman emphasized the point that the energy international ground has been changing atmosphere gradually and said that in the current situations a large part of the world’s hydrocarbon reservoir lies in the Middle East and especially in the Persian Gulf.

He also added that this energy zone would gradually move to the countries bordering the Caspian Sea. Indicating that Iran is placed geographically on the axis of this energy zone from Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea, he said that despite all Western efforts Iran had done well in managing the oil market.

“Currently the priority is given to the countries that cooperated with us during the crisis,” he said, pointing to the

requests of some European countries to buy Iran crude. General Manager of the Ministerial Zone of Oil Ministry said that Iran has rejected European countries’ demands to buy Iranian oil and asserted “currently, Iran implements a wise policy in the oil market.”

Nikzad provided updates on the extension of oil sales contracts with some Turkish and Japanese refineries, “currently, the economic growth rate for the EU countries is zero, but 7 to 10 for east and south-eastern Asian countries.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1787984>

- **Iran Ambassador to Damascus receives kidnapped pilgrims**

TEHRAN, Jan. 9 (MNA) – Deputy Foreign Minister says that Iran ambassador to Damascus has received 48 Iranian kidnapped pilgrims in Syria.

Hassan Qashqavi told Mehr News that “the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will issue a statement on the release of the kidnapped pilgrims.”

Foreign Ministry Deputy of Consular and Iranian Affairs pointed out that plans were being made for the return of the released, and that all 48 were in full health.

These people were kidnapped by armed forces in August 2012 en route to the holy shrine of Hazrat Zeinab (Imam Ali's daughter) in the Reef area of Damascus.

Following the arrest, Western media had spewed stories on the military origins of the pilgrims, which Iran Foreign Ministry denied.

Foreign Ministry had also added that using such strategy in detaining the vehicle carrying God-seeking pilgrims of Prophet Muhammad's Household had no legitimacy and indicated the media irresponsibility and lack of commitment.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1787773>

- **Pause in Iran-P5+1 talks sends wrong signal: Russian deputy FM**

A senior Russian diplomat says the pause in the talks between Iran and the six major world powers (P5+1) about Tehran's

nuclear energy program has sent a "wrong signal."



Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on Wednesday that months after the negotiations between Tehran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - Russia, China, Britain, France and the United States - plus Germany in Moscow, the sides have so far failed to reach an agreement on the venue or the date of the next round of talks.

"This becomes unclear and sends a wrong signal," the diplomat added and emphasized that the issue should be made clear soon.

Ryabkov stated that during the Christmas holidays, Moscow proceeded with efforts to organize a schedule for Iran-P5+1 talks and expected a clear result as soon as possible.

Iran and the P5+1 have held several rounds of talks with the main focus being on Iran's nuclear energy program.

On January 4, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili said that Tehran welcomes the readiness of the six major world powers to hold constructive talks with Iran.

"Just as Iran feels obligated to act within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regulations and in line with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it is adamant on asserting its rights within the same framework," Jalili stated.

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

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

Russia, a veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council, has repeatedly reaffirmed Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy.

"Iran has the right to have peaceful nuclear activity under the complete supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on December 27, 2012.

He noted that the international community should respond to Iran's positive steps and gradually remove the sanctions.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/10/282760/iran-talks-pause-sends-wrong-signal/>

- **Syrian people must decide own fate: Iran foreign minister**

The Syrians should determine their destiny on their own, and a prescription should not be offered from outside this country."



Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi says the people in Syria must be allowed

to determine their own fate, rejecting any foreign interference in the Arab country's affairs.

"The Syrians should determine their destiny on their own, and a prescription should not be offered from outside this country," Salehi told reporters upon arrival at Cairo International Airport on Wednesday night.

He said that Iran did not seek to interfere in Syria and reiterated that, under international conventions, no country is allowed to meddle in the affairs of other countries. The Iranian foreign minister, however, added that the friends of Syria could act in such a way as to keep the region safe from disastrous consequences and help restore peace and stability in the region.

The top Iranian diplomat said that different peace plans have been offered to resolve the unrest in Syria, including the ones proposed by Iran and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and added that the common points of the plans need to be found and the viewpoints of influential countries should be brought together with

the aim of finding a domestic solution to the crisis in Syria.

Salehi said that the aim of his visit to Egypt is to hold talks with Egyptian officials, including President Mohamed Morsi and Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr, on matters of mutual interest as well as regional issues, including Syria.

"This is an official visit that I am paying to Egypt. We will be discussing bilateral issues of course and also important regional issues; the issue of Syria and other issues of mutual interest," he said.

He said that Egypt, as a significant and influential country, can play a major role in the settlement of the unrest in Syria, which he stressed must be resolved in a peaceful way and without foreign interference.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/10/282746/syrians-must-decide-own-fate-iran/>

- **Iran's FM in Cairo for talks with Egyptian, Arab figures**

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi is in Cairo for talks with Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi to discuss ways to enhance bilateral ties between the two Muslim nations.



Salehi arrived in the Egyptian capital on Wednesday night and is expected to convey a message from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Morsi.

The Iranian official is also scheduled to meet with UN-Arab League special envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi and Arab League Secretary General Nabil al-Arabi.

The talks will mainly focus on the latest developments in the region, including the Syrian crisis.

Salehi's visit to Egypt comes on the fourth leg of his African tour which has already

taken him to Burkina Faso, Ghana and Benin.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/10/282730/irans-salehi-arrives-in-cairo-for-talks/>

- **'Iran hopeful talks with IAEA will yield positive results'**

Iran Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast has expressed hope that Tehran's upcoming talks with the UN nuclear agency will yield positive results.

"The last round of talks between Iran and the [International Atomic Energy] Agency [IAEA] was good and both sides described it as positive and constructive," Mehmanparast said on Wednesday.

"We hope to reach good agreements in the next round of negotiations," the Iranian official said, adding that recognizing Iran's nuclear rights, however, is necessary for negotiations to yield positive results.

Top officials from Iran and the IAEA held talks over the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy program on December 13, 2012.

Following the meeting, IAEA Deputy Director General Herman Nackaerts said progress had been made during the talks, adding that more negotiations are due with Iran on January 16.

The Iranian official said, however, if IAEA representatives ignore the Islamic Republic's nuclear rights, talks will not reach a positive result.

Mehmanparast stated that Iran is ready to allay any concern the IAEA might have and clear ambiguities.

Commenting on talks between Tehran and the P5+1 (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the US plus Germany), Mehmanparast said, "We are always ready for logical, effective and constructive talks which recognize the rights of independent nations including Iran."

The Iranian official said some members of the P5+1, however, mistakenly think that if they mount pressures on Tehran they can force the country to forgo its rights.

The United States, Israel and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of

pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/09/282660/iran-hopeful-about-talks-with-iaea/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Rights groups concerned by Gaza death in custody**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The death of a Palestinian man while in the custody of the Gaza government in recent weeks must be thoroughly and transparently investigated, human rights groups say.

Atef Khamis Derbas, 52, was being held in the central Ansar prison in Gaza City for unpaid debts, before he died on Dec. 27.

His family told the Al-Haq human rights group they had informed prison authorities of his pre-existing medical problems, and that he was suffering in jail

due to cold conditions and not taking his medication regularly.

A representative of Al-Haq told Ma'an an official investigation was opened by Gaza authorities on Monday.

Derbas' family strongly believe Atef died due to medical negligence and poor conditions in jail, al-Haq said. The autopsy report received by the family says the main cause of death was heart failure.



Al-Haq said it had "grave concern at the number of deaths occurring inside Palestinian prisons." On Oct. 16, 27-year-old Mohammad Said Al-Zaqzouq man died in police custody in Khan Younis, south Gaza.

Police said he had committed suicide, and a police source told the Palestinian Center for Human Rights that officers gave him

the blanket with which he later strangled himself.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights called for a "serious and thorough investigation" into Derbas' death, urging the government to publish the findings publicly.

"The Palestinian Authority is responsible for the life of all the prisoners and detainees being held in its prisons; thus, it is responsible for protecting their dignity, as well as providing adequate medical care for them, in accordance with Reform and Rehabilitation Centers Law of 1998," the group said.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=553911>

- **Opinion: EU should re-think its border assistance role**

The European Union must abandon the idea of redeploying its border monitoring mission on Gaza's border with Egypt, raised again by EU officials last month.

The European Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah crossing (EU-BAM) will not aid the Palestinians or contribute to the

attainment of peace. In fact, it defeats the EU's own declared goals in the region.

Instead, the EU should seek to play a more meaningful role that supports peace as well as justice, without playing into Israel's phony security game.

By insisting on the redeployment of the mission at Gaza's Rafah crossing, it appears that the EU cherishes the idea of having a role on the ground, more than realizing its strategic interests and goals in the region.

To be consistent, the EU must press for a genuine role that supports its vision of the two-state solution by facilitating Palestinians' movement between the two Palestinian regions of Gaza and the West Bank.

Helping or hurting?

The EU-BAM is no longer needed. The Rafah crossing is open and it is working to the maximum capacity that the situation allows for. On average, 800 Palestinians cross into Egypt daily; and while this is far from ideal, it at least meets the most

urgent needs of a significant number of Gaza residents who need to travel abroad.

In operating the crossing, Egypt has been honoring the commitments emanating from the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The EU observers stationed at Rafah between November 2005 and June 2007 were required to ensure that only Palestinian holders of ID cards indicating residency in Gaza were allowed to pass through the crossing; this is the task that Egypt is fulfilling today, but without being compelled to close the crossing on each and every Israeli whim.

When the mission was operational, Israel would routinely declare the border area a closed military zone, thereby denying the observers access to Rafah and causing the crossing's periodic closure.

A return to this situation would be catastrophic for the Gazan population and cause yet further damage to the reputations of the EU-BAM mission and their masters in Brussels.

Given the shaky security situation in both Gaza and the Sinai, it is not expected that the EU observers will live in either Gaza or Egypt. If they live in Israel or in the West Bank, Israel will retain the final say on whether or not they can access Rafah. Israel's record of restricting the movement of Gaza's population is well known to the EU.

Rafah will be closed again and again; and the Palestinians in Gaza will again be prevented from accessing healthcare, work, education and other basic human needs.

Enabling the separation policy

Equally important, the focus on Rafah feeds into Israel's strategy of pushing Gaza further south; and away from the West Bank in order to prevent a Palestinian state from materializing in the occupied Palestinian territory. This strategy is no longer covert.

As recently as Sept. 24, 2012 the Israeli government informed the Israeli High Court of its "separation policy, which is based on political and security grounds", a policy which it invoked to justify the

blanket ban on Gaza students' access to Palestinian universities in the West Bank.



The EU has strongly criticized Israel's expansion of settlements in the Palestinian territory on the grounds that this is destructive to its goals in the region; namely, a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.

However, in dealing with Israel's closure of Gaza, the EU continues to lay emphasis on improving socio-economic conditions and preventing a deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

The EU seems to have failed to grasp the powerful linkages between the settlement-colonization of the West Bank and its separation from the Gaza Strip. Together, these two policies make up the formula that Israel has devised to kill Palestinian statehood.

By placing the focus on movement between Gaza and Egypt, the EU will inevitably be playing Israel's separation game which defeats the EU's goals in the region.

The alternative

If the EU-BAM is no longer welcome at the Rafah crossing, then how can the EU make use of it? More importantly, how can it be used in a way that is supportive of and consistent with EU goals in the region?

Three potential scenarios arise. First, the mission might see a role for itself at the only commercial crossing between Gaza and Israel. A second choice could be envisioned in the form of a naval force situated off the Gaza coast to facilitate trade.

But playing either of these roles will drag the EU into participation in an illegal regime of closure and blockade. Neither will feed into a strategic role in the region that will contribute to the EU's declared goals.

The third possible scenario could, however, strengthen peace, secure

respect for international law and support EU policy in the region. The EU-BAM should seek to help Palestinians move between Gaza and the West Bank.

Such a role would create vital links between these two Palestinian regions and help bridge the divide enforced by Israel on the Palestinian people. It would improve socioeconomic conditions, especially if Gaza and the West Bank can exchange trade and other goods. Moreover, it would move Palestinian statehood, identified as the cornerstone of EU goals in the region, a big step forward.

This idea does not come out of the blue. The assertion that the Palestinian territory is one geographic unit is affirmed in the Oslo Accords. A safe passage was briefly opened between Gaza and the West Bank in the course of these accords.

Moreover, the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, which was forged under the auspices of the Quartet of which the EU is a member, includes an article stipulating that convoys of vehicles would be allowed to move between Gaza and the West Bank.

This arrangement was never implemented due to Israel's breach of the agreement. If the EU wants to pick one part of the AMA to support, why should it be overseeing the working of the well-functioning Rafah crossing? Why should it be the movement of trade under an unlawful closure? Why not select the role that will support EU goals in the region? This is the sole scenario that is consistent with EU strategy.

Following the EU-Israel relations in the past few years, it is clear that this option does not seem easy. But when were the best options the easy ones? It takes courage on the part of the EU to insist on carrying out this mission, which would constitute a meaningful role in the region and not just a role for the sake of it.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=549594>

- **Abbas, Mashaal meet Mursi, hold side-talks**

CAIRO (Reuters) -- Egyptian President Muhammad Mursi held separate meetings with the leaders of Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah in Cairo on Wednesday,

before the political chiefs sat together later in the evening.



Palestinian and Egyptian officials said Mursi met President Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah and Khalid Mashaal of Hamas to discuss how to implement a reconciliation deal that they agreed in Cairo in 2011.

Egyptian mediators had hoped to coax all three into the same room, but Abbas and Mashaal held another meeting of their political factions later in the evening at a Cairo venue.

Speaking after Mursi's meeting with Abbas, Egyptian presidential spokesman Yasser Ali gave no indication of any major progress but said Cairo would spare no effort to bring about reconciliation.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri played down the talks in Cairo, describing them as "exploratory".

"Egyptian officials aim to explore where things stand and look into the best ways to activate reconciliation efforts," he told Reuters.

Abbas is reluctant to accept any format that would imply giving the Hamas leader a status equivalent to his own.

Both sides brought senior officials to the talks, with Fatah leader Azzam al-Ahmad, presidential spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina, intelligence chief Majed Farraj, and Palestinian ambassador Barakat al-Farra joining Abbas' delegation.

From Hamas, senior figures Moussa Abu Marzouk, Izzat al-Rishq, and Khalil al-Hayya were among the delegates.

Mursi, mired in political and economic difficulties at home, helped broker a ceasefire deal that ended a war in November between Israel and Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip.

Leaders of the two groups have been deadlocked over the how to implement the agreement and have traded blame over continued arrests among members in

the West Bank, where Abbas holds sway, and in Gaza, which Hamas wrested from Abbas's control in 2007.

On Tuesday, a Hamas court sentenced a senior Fatah armed activist, Zaki al-Sakani, to 15 years in prison for possession of weapons, according to Hamas security sources. A Fatah official described the verdict as a blow to reconciliation.

Hani Habib, a political analyst in Gaza, said the Cairo talks, like previous meetings, had little chance of success.

"The talks today were meant to show something regarding reconciliation is happening but there will be nothing new," he said. "Each side has been unable to twist the other's arm and therefore each is happy with the status quo."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=554861>

- **Ashrawi Urges Europeans to End Israeli Occupation**

RAMALLAH, January 9, 2013 (WAFA) – Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee member, Hanan Ashrawi, urged the European Union to put

a quick end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, according to a statement issued Tuesday.

Ashrawi stressed in a meeting in Ramallah with EU representative to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and UNRWA, John Gatt-Rutter, “the importance of the European role in supporting the two-state solution and in bringing about an end to the illegal occupation of Palestine and Israel’s stepped-up illegal settlement campaign before it is too late.”

The two officials discussed ideas to that effect and steps relevant to Palestine in its accession to UN charters and conventions and Palestine joining UN agencies and organizations.

In addition, Ashrawi told a Canadian delegation representing the National Democratic Party that “despite Canada’s official position in support of Israel and a negative vote in the UN, we will not give up on Canada.”

She said, “We believe what is required is an even-handed approach in support of a just peace consistent with international and humanitarian law.”

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21474>

- **Peres blasts Netanyahu: Terror attacks will resume**

In interview with New York Times, president says 'silence that Israel has been enjoying over the last few years will not continue' if diplomatic stalemate persists.

"The world's Jews want an Israel they can be proud of and not an Israel that has no borders and that is considered an occupying state," according to President Shimon Peres, whose comments were published in the New York Times Wednesday.

In a series of interviews he gave Yedioth Ahronoth journalist Ronen Bergman over the past six months, the Israeli president leveled harsh criticism at Benjamin Netanyahu over the diplomatic stalemate, without explicitly mentioning the prime minister's name. "If the people of Israel heard from the leadership that there is a chance for peace, they would take up the gauntlet and believe it.

"He (Netanyahu) may do nothing, but that doesn't mean that things won't be done. This idea, that history is a horse that can be held by the tail, is a foolish idea. After all, the fire can be lit in an instant: another word, another shot, and in the end everyone will lose control. If there is no diplomatic decision, the Palestinians will go back to terror," Peres told Bergman.

"Knives, mines, suicide attacks. The silence that Israel has been enjoying over the last few years will not continue, because even if the local inhabitants do not want to resume the violence, they will be under the pressure of the Arab world. Money will be transferred to them, and weapons will be smuggled to them, and there will be no one who will stop this flow," he said.

According to Peres, "most of the world will support the Palestinians, justify their actions, level the sharpest criticism at us, falsely label us a racist state. Our economy will suffer gravely if a boycott is declared against us. The world's Jews want an Israel they can be proud of and not an Israel that has no borders and that is considered an occupying state."

Asked what happened during the long period that he tried to mediate between Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas, Peres said he had met the Palestinian president "for long talks, with Netanyahu's knowledge, and even reached more than a few agreements. To my regret, in the end there was always some rupture, and I do not want to go into the reasons for that now. This is not a simple negotiation - but I thought the conditions exist to set out on the path. Like the Oslo process, it has to be secret.

And when you say this to Netanyahu?



"He doesn't argue with me on this. It's not an issue of absolute agreement or absolute disagreement. After all, he accepted my proposal for economic peace to improve the standard of living of the

Palestinians in a number of areas. He also made the Bar-Ilan speech (in which Netanyahu accepted the idea of a Palestinian state). We do not agree in our evaluations of (Abbas). I do not accept the assertion that (Abbas) is not a good negotiating partner. To my mind, he is an excellent partner. Our military people describe to me the extent to which the Palestinian forces are cooperating with us to combat terror."

According to Peres, the Palestinian problem "isn't the main problem in the Middle East. But there are a billion and a half Muslims. The Palestinian problem affects our entire relationship with them. If the Palestinian problem were to be solved, the Islamist extremists would be robbed of their pretext for their actions against us. Of course, this requires concessions. The problem in this case is not only the prime minister but also his coalition.

"I am not claiming that peace with the Palestinians will solve all the problems. People who think in sweeping terms are being superficial. There are two things that cannot be made without closing your eyes - love and peace. If you try to make

them with open eyes, you won't get anywhere. Peace is not an exciting thing, and it entails accepting many compromises and tedious details. A woman, too, can sometimes be exciting and sometimes less so. There's no perfection. Making peace is complicated," he told Bergman.

But what kind of peace are we talking about? Look how President Morsi of Egypt sent you a personal letter in July and then denied writing it.

"Why does that matter? President Morsi has to answer a great many questions inside his own party. I was surprised not by his denial but rather by the fact that he sent me the letter. The whole matter shows me that Morsi, like any leader taking office, faces tough dilemmas. It is very easy to play the role of the abiding Muslim when you are not in power, but things get complicated when you are. Take, for example, the Egyptian economy, which relies heavily on tourism. If they don't allow tourists to come and spend their vacations the way they like, they won't come. No bikini, no tourism."

The Israeli president warned that Syrian President Bashar Assad would be "crossing a red line" if he transfers chemical weapons to Hezbollah. "Assad knows that using chemical weapons will immediately invite an attack by outside elements. The whole world would mobilize against him. It would be a suicidal act. On the other hand, it's obvious that his days are numbered. A situation in which, let's say, his palace comes under fire, could put him in an irrational state and lead him to act out of despair.

"If the Syrians dare to touch their chemical weapons and aim them at us or at innocent civilians, I have no doubt that the world as well as Israel will take decisive and immediate action," Peres said.

"No less important, Assad is liable to transfer the chemical weapons to Hezbollah, which from our point of view will constitute crossing a red line. It is incumbent upon Israel to prevent such a thing from happening, and it will take firm military action to do so."

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4330704,00.html>

● **Back to the Road Map?**

Op-ed: Creation of Palestinian state with provisional borders may prevent looming disaster

The Israeli-Palestinian horizon is getting so dark there is almost no hope left. The complete diplomatic stalemate, the deteriorating economic situation, the weakening of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas' growing power (to some extent as a result of intentional Israeli activity) – all of these have brought the Palestinians back to the streets and intensified the rioting and acts of violence.

In describing the impending crisis, former Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin said in a recent interview that "the air is filled with gas fumes." The Palestinian security forces are battling the rioters, but seemingly with less resolve. Perhaps the fact that Israel has frozen the tax revenues that are used to pay their salaries contributed to this. Meanwhile, Hamas is mocking the PA over its failures on the road to peace and is calling for a third intifada.

Op-ed: Rome's surprising support for Palestinians based on domestic political considerations

Israel must resume negotiations immediately in an effort to try and prevent the expected rioting, but due to the fact that the chances of achieving a permanent agreement are slim (at best) in light of the positions of the current Israeli government and the PA's weakness, perhaps we should revisit the principles of the "Road Map" for peace and try to implement them.

Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon understood a long time ago that a Palestinian state would eventually be established - whether we like it or not – and that the Road Map is the best formula to minimize the risks such a state would pose to Israel.

Indeed, the Road Map conditions the diplomatic progress on changing the Palestinian reality in stages, which are examined regularly, until the time comes for a discussion on permanent arrangements – during which painful issues such as evacuating settlements, dividing Jerusalem and the refugee issue

will be addressed. In the interim, the Palestinians will have to maintain a stable regime, display terror-prevention capabilities and uphold the rule of law. Should they succeed, the fears will disappear, trust will increase and the overall mood will allow the two nations to reach decisions on "existential" issues.

International promise

The Road Map was approved by the Israeli government in May 2003. The plan was also approved by the UN Security Council. The entire world has adopted the Road Map as the best plan to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and the current Israeli government never annulled or revised the decision that approves the plan – it simply ignores it. And this is a shame.

Phase II of the Road Map calls for the launching of a process that will lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the current borders. In light of the recent UN decision to grant the PA non-member observer status, such a state nearly exists already. The continued negotiations leading up to the to the third phase – the discussion on

a permanent agreement – will be conditioned on the Palestinian Authority's performance with regards to all aspects of government.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4330164,00.html>

The goals set for the Palestinians by the Road Map are not simple, and it will take time to achieve them; until then, the discussion on a permanent agreement will be delayed. But in the interim, the Palestinian Authority will win a major diplomatic victory - a Palestinian state with provisional borders. The establishment of such a state may prevent the looming disaster.

The PA may agree to resume negotiations with Israel based on the second phase of the Road Map. The leadership in Ramallah is desperate; it does not want extremists to gain more power and does not want the terror and violence to resume; it also wants to avoid the complete collapse of the economy and seeks to maintain the stability of the past six years.

An international promise that the second phase will eventually lead to discussions on a permanent agreement may bring the PA back to the negotiation table. We may never get another chance to try.

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Ex-NDP members on opposition coalition lists for parliamentary elections**

Many former members of the now-disbanded National Democratic Party who are not deprived of their rights to practice politics appear on the National Salvation Front candidate lists for the next parliamentary elections, Essam Shiha, a member of the front told Egypt Independent Wednesday.

Article 232 of the newly approved Constitution stipulates that NDP leaders shall be banned from political work and prohibited from running in presidential or legislative elections for 10 years from the date the Constitution was adopted.

The article included everyone who was a member of the party secretariat, policies committee or political bureau, or was a member of the People's Assembly or Shura Council during the two legislative

elections that preceded the 25 January revolution.

“This article pertains to a few hundred NDP members,” Shiha, who is also a member of the liberal Wafd Party, said. “There are more than 1,000 NDP members banned, but currently there are more than 2 million eligible to run in the elections who used to be local council members or members of governorates’ NDP offices. Why would we exclude them?”

Justifying the opposition coalition’s approach, Shiha said, “Those [former members] are not corrupt, and we can draw on them for our fight against the extreme right, especially the Muslim Brotherhood.”

Media reports said young members of the front, led by figures such as Mohamed ElBaradei and Hamdeen Sabbahi, are against fielding former regime “remnants” on the group’s lists, considering it not “revolutionary.”

Shiha referred to a consensus among the front’s leaders to field former NDP members as nominees on the lists, and

asked the objecting youth to put into consideration the political “battle,” and that the rules of the “game” legitimize using all the means to earn the largest number of votes.

The front comprises more than 10 liberal and leftist parties, including the Wafd Party, the Free Egyptians Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Popular Alliance Party.

Experts question the harmony between the National Salvation Front parties over the upcoming elections and its ability to run them on one list. They believe that the front is not united, and that it would run in the elections with two lists, which Shiha has denied.

“Ninety percent of the constituencies will have one list, 10 percent two,” he said.

He explained that some constituencies will witness fierce competition, as some of the parties in the front would prefer to run in the election on a separate list, because they enjoy wide popularity in those constituencies. Applications for candidacy will be opened on 25 February.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/ex-ndp-members-opposition-coalition-lists-parliamentary-elections>

- **FJP welcomes international supervision of elections**



The Freedom and Justice Party on Wednesday welcomed international supervision of the upcoming parliamentary elections, dismissing allegations that the party and the Muslim Brotherhood rigged the last elections.

“The last parliamentary and presidential elections were not rigged,” said Arab Mostafa of the FJP. “The results reflected the will of the people.”

The Brotherhood held several conferences and rallies Wednesday to prepare for the coming elections, fielding new faces this time, said Mostafa.

The group has also organized medical convoys in villages to treat citizens free of charge.

Meanwhile, Essam al-Erian, FJP vice president and Shura Council majority leader, agreed to approve the draft law on the parliamentary elections that the government is presenting to the council.

“We will face any opposition trying to stop it,” Erian said. “We agree to everything the presidency and the National Dialogue Committee send us.”

Erian explained that Parliament would later devise another law regulating all future elections.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/fjp-welcomes-international-supervision-elections>

- **Nour Party: No alliance with Brotherhood or Abu Ismail**



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STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION



The Salafi Nour Party will not ally with either the Muslim Brotherhood's political party or the one being formed by controversial preacher Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, Nour Party officials said Wednesday.

But they said their party welcomes an alliance with its dissident members who founded the Watan Party.

Nour Party leader Mohamed Mansour said it rejects joining the Free Homeland Alliance, but that Watan and Nour are in an open dialogue over unresolved issues after Emad Abdel Ghafour resigned as Nour Party chief and formed Watan.

Ahmed Shoury, Nour Party secretary general in Giza, said an alliance with the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party is totally ruled out due, to conflict of interest.

Nour Party is seeking to run as many candidates as possible in the elections, which wouldn't suit the Brotherhood, he added.

Abdel Ghafour and other key leaders resigned to form Watan and join Abu Ismail to form the Free Homeland Alliance. The Nour Party is the nation's second-largest Islamist political party, after the Brotherhood.

Nour Party chose Younis Makhyoun as its new president Wednesday.

After announcing the party election results, Makhyoun said it would work to gain power, and described the next parliament as "the most critical and important" in the nation's history. He said the party would work to eradicate any existing laws that violate Sharia.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/nour-party-no-alliance-brotherhood-or-abu-ismail>

- **Morocco reduces jail terms for 5 pro-reform activists**

Five members of the "February 20" protest movement saw their sentences reduced on Wednesday to six months on appeal, after they were jailed for taking part in a non-authorized demonstration.

The five young men had variously been given prison terms of between eight and 10 months in September on charges that also included attacking public officials in the course of duty.

While cutting their sentences, the appeals court in Casablanca also ordered them to pay 7,500 dirhams (around 700 euros) each in civil damages and fines.

A sixth female defendant, Laila Nassimi, had her suspended sentence reduced from six to three months.

The activists were arrested in July 2012 after taking part in a demonstration in a poor neighborhood of Casablanca, Morocco's economic capital, in which protesters chanted anti-monarchy slogans.

Clashes broke out when police tried to disperse the protesters.

Human Rights Watch had condemned the original trial process, citing claims by the defendants that they were tortured into signing false confessions, while the UN special rapporteur on torture last year criticized Morocco's harsh treatment of protesters.

On Tuesday, members of the February 20 movement, which was formed in 2011 by youths demanding democratic reform and action on a range of social grievances, accused the police of adopting new repression tactics against fellow activists.

More than 50 of its members were jailed last year, according to local rights groups.

"The attitude of the police has changed from the direct repression of activists to threats of putting people out of work or arresting them for assaulting and insulting public employees," said spokesperson Mustafa al-Goumri.

He also claimed that the police were fabricating charges of drug dealing to imprison activists, referring in particular to the case of Driss Bouterrada, who was jailed for a year at the end of last month for possession and trafficking of drugs.

In October last year, a Moroccan court jailed another February 20 activist, Bashir Benshaib, for 12 years on charges that included blocking a road, theft, aggression, drug dealing and taking part in an unauthorized demonstration.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/international/morocco_reduces_jail_terms_for_5_piro-reform_activists

- **Tribal clashes in Libya's Kufra kill four**

Four people were killed in clashes pitting Toubou tribesmen against a brigade linked to the Libyan army in the southern town of Kufra, a military official told AFP on Wednesday.

"Four Toubou tribesmen were killed on Tuesday in clashes against Shield Libya," an army force made up of former rebels, the official said.

Shield Libya, he said, intervened "to prevent student casualties" after a skirmish between Toubou and Zwai tribesmen escalated into an armed confrontation inside Kufra University.

He said Kufra was now calm but tense.

Local authorities ordered that the university, which is in a Toubou area, shut for two days until order is restored, the same source added.

A tribal chief told AFP that Toubou elders were trying to "control their sons so there will be no acts of revenge after the incident."

"We want the army to secure Kufra, and not a group of civilian revolutionaries who have no military principles," he said.

Shield Libya, a force under the command of the chief of staff, is made up of rebels who learned to fight during the 2011 conflict that toppled dictator Moammar Qaddafi.

Tribal violence has taken a large toll on Kufra in the past year. Last June, 47 people were killed and more than 100 wounded in such clashes. Fighting in February had claimed more than 130 lives and displaced half the population.

Kufra, a town of about 40,000 people, is located in a triangle where the borders of Egypt, Chad and Sudan meet.

The Toubou, who are dark-skinned and present in southeastern Libya as well as in Chad, Sudan and Niger, faced discrimination under the former regime. They also question the neutrality of forces deployed by the new authorities.

Libya's national assembly in December ordered the closure of land borders with Chad, Niger, Sudan and Algeria, in a bid to boost security in the volatile oil-rich region.

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

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Jumblatt will not withdraw from Lebanese cabinet over electoral law**

The leader of the Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party said that he will not withdraw his ministers from government if an electoral law proposal based on sectarian principles was agreed upon.

“I never threatened to withdraw from cabinet if the Orthodox Gathering law proposal was adopted,” MP Walid Jumblatt said in remarks published on Thursday by Al-Akhbar newspaper.

“The differentiated stance taken by President Michel Suleiman is enough for me,” the PSP leader – a critic of the Orthodox Gathering law proposal – added.

In a statement published on Tuesday, Suleiman weighed in on the debate over the electoral law for the parliamentary elections later in the year, saying the proposed Orthodox Gathering law proposal was “unconstitutional.”

Jumblatt also lashed out at Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea and Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun, saying that their old rivalry was leading to the adoption of the Orthodox Gathering law proposal, “which deepens the sectarian schisms in the country.”

Members of a parliamentary sub-committee met on Tuesday to discuss the different draft laws in order to choose a proposal to replace the 1960 electoral law, with the country’s political circles

divided over which law to adopt despite the cabinet's approval in September of a draft law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts.

On Sunday, media reports said that a consensus regarding the Orthodox Gathering proposal was reached during a meeting of representatives of Christian parties at the seat of the Maronite patriarchate in Bkirki. The proposal calls for citizens to vote for candidates by religious sect.

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

- **Lebanese minister: Discussing electoral law not in national interest**

Public Works and Transportation Minister Ghazi Aridi said that the different political sides in Lebanon were approaching the electoral law issue from a self-interested perspective.

“Every political side is working on an electoral law that satisfies its interests,” Aridi said in an interview with Future television on Wednesday evening.

“We should refrain from bickering and think about the interest of the nation.”

He also implicitly criticized the Change and Reform bloc leader MP Michel Aoun – who had been an advocate of proportionality - for accepting to back the Orthodox Gathering law based on sectarian principles.

“Those who want to be true reformists could not suddenly switch from backing proportionality to backing the Orthodox Gathering law proposal.”

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for citizens to vote for candidates by religious sect.

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

- **Berri satisfied with parliamentary electoral talks**

Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri expressed his satisfaction on Wednesday with the discussions held by the parliamentary sub-committee studying electoral law proposals for the elections to be held later in the year.

"I am satisfied with the atmosphere of the talks in the sub-committee. Issues should be discussed away from the controversies that were happening before," the National News Agency quoted Berri as telling MPs during a gathering at the parliament.

Berri reiterated the importance of the sub-committee's task of choosing an electoral law, adding that it "should be supported in order for it to reach an agreement on a new law."

Members of the parliamentary sub-committee met on Tuesday and

Wednesday to discuss the different draft laws in order to choose a proposal to replace the 1960 electoral law, with the country's political circles divided over which law to adopt despite the cabinet's approval in September of a draft law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/lebanon_speaker_expresses_satisfaction_with_sub-committee_discussions

6. SYRIA

- **Syrian refugees in Jordan battle winter storms**

Thousands of Syrian refugees in northern Jordan have appealed for help after three days of winter storms left them battling mud, water and plummeting temperatures.

"The situation has become absolutely miserable after three days of heavy rain," Yusef Hariri, 38, told AFP at the Zaatari refugee camp near the country's border with Syria.

The father of four stood with his family in the mud and the freezing cold near their

tent, which was ripped apart by wind and water.

"My sister's tent was also damaged. She and her five children have joined us in looking for a new tent. Not even animals live this way," he said in frustration, his clothes soaked by the rain.

The seven-square-kilometer [2.8-square-mile] Zaatari camp, home to more than 62,000 Syrian refugees, was almost entirely swamped.

Some refugees dug shallow trenches around their tents in a vain attempt to keep the water out.

Mohammad Hamed, 30, and his wife worked to move some of their belongings to his brother's tent.

"My tent has been destroyed. I tried to fix it but it did not work. We don't know what to do," said Hamed who fled the conflict in Syria a month ago.

"We need help. Urgent help. If this situation continues, our children will die."



Torrential downpours swept through desert Jordan for a third straight day on Wednesday, sparking widespread flooding and chaos as a wave of abnormal storms blasted the Middle East.

"We are told to be patient. How can children be patient? They need blankets to feel warm. Nobody feels for us. We should have stayed in Syria," said Hariri, who fled the flashpoint Daraa area in the south four months ago.

The UN refugee agency said on Tuesday that two days of bad weather and heavy rain had destroyed 500 out of Zaatari's 4,500 tents.

It added that it was working with the government to move the refugees into some of the 4,000 caravans already at Zaatari.

"Each one of us is given two light blankets. What should we do with them? The strong wind nearly tore down our tent," said Sabha angrily of wind speeds of 100 kilometers per hour recorded during the storms.

"Any official we complain to says 'it's none of my business.' This is too much to take. Where should we go?" asked the 60-year-old woman.

Jordan says it is hosting more than 290,000 Syrians, and hundreds more cross the border daily into the kingdom, fleeing the fighting between President Bashar al-Assad's forces and rebels.

More than 21 months of violence in Syria have killed at least 60,000 people, according to the United Nations.

The UN has predicted the number of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries will double to 1.1 million by June if the civil war does not end by then.

Zaatari residents have staged several protests against poor living conditions since the camp opened in July.

Hussein Hurani, 42, laid stones under his tent to raise it above water level.

"We are sinking. We cannot sleep or eat and we cannot do anything. I'm afraid the situation will get worse," he said.

His wife was more forceful.

"We've been let down. All the Arabs have let us down and thrown us in this desert. We are shocked and sad," she said.

Nearby, Abdelmajid Mohammad, 35, trudged through the mud, his head covered with a blanket.

"I'm afraid one of my sons will die from this cold weather. I feel guilty all the time for leaving Syria and coming here, where we face humiliation 24 hours a day," said the father of four.

"At least in Syria we die at home and quickly. Here death is very slow. Look around you... as if tents are floating in the sea."

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala/testnews/syrian_refugees_in_jordan_battle_winter_storms

- **Syria ministers assigned tasks for Assad plan**

Syrian ministers have taken on specific tasks for implementing President Bashar al-Assad's plan to end the country's raging civil war, state news agency SANA said on Wednesday.

The plan, announced by Assad on Sunday, is being rolled out by the government despite it being rejected by opposition groups within and without the violence-wracked country.

The Foreign Ministry "is responsible for making the regional and international contacts to clarify the [Assad] initiative and to garner support for it... especially monitoring the borders," SANA said.

Assad in his rare public speech on Sunday singled out the issue of border control as key to "a political solution" to Syria's conflict.

Assad's regime has long accused foreign powers of financing, arming and training rebels, and large stretches of Syria's border with Turkey and Iraq have fallen out of regime control and into rebel hands.

The government on Wednesday urged "states in the region and [members of] the international community" that have ties to rebel groups "to stop financing and arming them [and to] work towards stopping violence in all its forms."

Echoing Assad's speech, the government also said the international community should help "protect Syria, its unity, sovereignty and independence," SANA said.

The statements came a day after Information Minister Omran al-Zohbi renewed Assad's calls for opposition figures to enter into a dialogue for peace.

The main, internationally recognized opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition based out of Cairo, immediately dismissed Assad's offer, sticking to its pre-condition that the president step down before any talks could be considered.

The tolerated domestic opposition group, the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria, has also snubbed the proposal.

Western nations called Assad's speech outlining a plan to restore peace to Syria while defiantly making no compromises as detached from reality and essentially empty.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala/testnews/syria_ministers_assigned_tasks_for_assad_plan

- **Peace envoy says Assad Syria plan "sectarian, one-sided"**

President Bashar al-Assad's plan for Syria is "perhaps even more sectarian, more one-sided" than previous such initiatives by the embattled regime, international peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi told the BBC Wednesday.

The UN and Arab League envoy was giving his first public reaction to a three-step plan to end the crisis, announced in a rare speech on Sunday by Assad.

"What has been said this time is not really different and it is perhaps even more sectarian, more one-sided," Brahimi said.

"What you need is reaching out and recognizing that there is a problem, a very, very serious problems between Syrians,

and that Syrians have got to talk to one another to solve it," he said.

Assad's plan for a "political solution" in Syria was swiftly rejected by the opposition and snubbed by Western nations as being detached from reality and essentially empty.

Brahimi last visited Damascus in December, and met both Assad and opposition groups tolerated by the regime.

"I told [Assad] to be certain that an initiative should be different from what has been done in the past and has not worked," said Brahimi.

"I'm afraid that what has come out is very much a repeat of previous initiatives that obviously did not work."

Referring to the so-called Arab Spring that has swept the region since late 2010, Brahimi said: "Now people want to have a say in how they are governed. They want to take hold of their own future."

He added: "In Syria in particular, what people are saying is that one family ruling

for 40 years is a little bit too long. So the change has to be real.

"I think President Assad could take the lead in responding to the aspirations of his people, rather than resisting it."

Assad's father Hafez ruled Syria with an iron fist for three decades. He was succeeded by Bashar in 2000.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala_testnews/peace_envoy_says_assad_syria_plan_sectarian_one-sided

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Amnesty International demands release of Saudi Arabian women**

TEHRAN, Jan. 9 (MNA) – Amnesty International has demanded from Saudi Arabia government the release of a number of women incarcerated.

Amnesty International (AI) has asked Saudi Arabian officials to quickly release 18 women who are in jail without accusations.

The announcement by AI reads that Saudi Arabian security forces arrested about 18 women and 10 children who had demonstrated before the Justice Council in al-Buraydah for the detention of their relatives.

According to Al Alam, AI's demand comes at a time when demonstrations against the arrests continue across Saudi Arabia. Human rights organizations report that 30,000 are in prison in Saudi Arabia with political charges.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1787428>

- **UN expresses concern over Qatar human rights conditions**

TEHRAN, Jan. 9 (MNA) – The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed her concerns over Qatari court sentence verdict on a poet.

Al Quds Alarabi has quoted UN high commissioner for human rights spokesman Cécile Pouilly as saying that Qatari court sentence verdict for Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Ajami, also known as 'Al-Deeb' was disturbing.

Pouilly also added that High Commissioner had expressed her concerns over cruel trial of the Qatari poet and the court disorders and the secrecy of the trial. High Commissioner also has condemned Al Ajami's months of solitary confinement.

In November, 29th, Qatari court gave a verdict of guilty and a life sentence for Al Ajami for what the court called 'inciting the public against the regime.'

Amnesty International has attributed Al Ajami's arrest to his ode where he criticized Qatari Emir in 2010-, but human rights activists in Persian Gulf countries attribute the arrest to Al Ajami's other ode 'Al Yasmin' where he had eulogized Tunisian revolution and hoped that revolution come to other Arab countries.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1787415>

- **Kuwait court keeps pro-opposition television off the air**

Kuwait's lower court rejected a petition by pro-opposition private television channel Al-Youm on Wednesday against its closure by the government last month, the channel's lawyer said.

"We have not seen the reasons for the court's ruling. We plan to file an appeal against the verdict in the coming few days," Nawaf Sari told AFP.

The Information Ministry ordered the station taken off the air on December 20 citing administrative irregularities. It also withdrew the station's license.

The ministry later explained that the station had failed to meet a two-month deadline to appoint a full-time Kuwaiti manager.

Sari described the ministry's decision as "politically motivated" and the pretext as baseless.

"Al-Youm is the only television station that promotes opinions opposed to the government ... and the ministry found the opportunity to shut down the station by citing untrue administrative violations," he said.

The station has broadcast program sympathetic to the opposition and interviewed many of its leaders in the run-

up to a December 1 parliamentary election it boycotted.

Islamist, nationalist and liberal opposition groups, angry over an amended electoral law they said was designed to produce a rubber-stamp assembly, have since been holding almost nightly protests demanding the dissolution of the new parliament.

Riot police have repeatedly used tear gas and stun grenades to disperse the demonstrators.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/kuwait-court-keeps-pro-opposition-television-off-the-air>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Over 200 Afghan policemen poisoned in Balkh province**

Press TV
January 9, 2013

A total of 250 Afghan policemen have been poisoned in Afghanistan's northern province of Balkh, Press TV reports.

Local officials said the incident took place in a police station in Marmul district on Tuesday night.

Nobody has yet claimed responsibility for the poisoning whose cause is still unclear.

The incident is considered the latest in similar poisoning incidents in the war-torn country.

On June 25, 2012, some 76 Afghan policemen were poisoned in a police academy in Lashkargah city in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand.

Apparently, the police officers felt headaches nauseous after eating breakfast.

Meanwhile earlier in the same month, at least 116 students, mostly girls, were poisoned at the Hazrat Imam Zada Yahya high school in the northern province of Sar-e-Pol.

The school girls showed symptoms of exposure to toxic gas, including headache and nausea.

Also on September 26, a total of 16 schoolgirls were poisoned in Um-ul-Benin high school in the capital Kabul.

President Hamid Karzai has blamed the enemies of Afghanistan for the poisoning incidents.

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

- **Afghan President Begins U.S. Visit**

January 9, 2013

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has begun a four-day visit to the United States.

Karzai is expected to meet with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, and U.S. senators.

After arriving on January 8, Karzai met with Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security Asadullah Khalid, who is being treated in Washington for wounds he received in a suicide bombing last month.

On January 11, Karzai and U.S. President Barack Obama will negotiate a bilateral security agreement.

The White House says that during the visit, Obama will not announce a decision on how many troops will stay in Afghanistan after 2014.

U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser For Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes told reporters the two leaders will "consult about those issues" before Obama makes a decision "in the coming months."

Rhodes also said the White House does not rule out the possibility that no troops will remain post-2014, when Afghanistan is scheduled to take full responsibility for its security.

Negotiations on a bilateral security agreement are set to feature in talks between Karzai and Obama Friday.

Based on reporting by AFP and Reuters

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

- **Karzai visits wounded Afghan spy chief in US hospital**

By Sadaf Shinwari - January 9 2013, 11:27 am

Khaama Press

Afghan president Hamid Karzai met with the Afghan intelligence — national directorate of security (NDS) chief Asadullah Khalid upon his arrival to United States of America.

According to a statement released by Afghan presidential palace, president Hamid Karzai was briefed regarding the health condition of wounded Afghan spy chief Asadullah Khalid by US doctors.

The source further added president Hamid Karzai praised US doctors for providing medical care to wounded Afghan spy chief and said the health condition of Asadullah Khalid was satisfactory.

Afghan president Hamid Karzai also met with the US soldiers who were wounded in Afghanistan.

Asadullah Khalid was wounded when the bomber struck at a guesthouse used by the National Directorate of Security (NDS) in a heavily guarded area of the capital. The intelligence agency said he had survived a “terrorist attack”.

Khalid was rushed into surgery at an NDS hospital after the attack. He was visited by President Hamid Karzai, signalling his importance in the fight against the Taliban as Nato forces prepare to withdraw in 2014.

He was later admitted to a US hospital for further treatment. The attacker was purportedly carrying a peace message on behalf of the Taliban when he detonated himself.

On Friday Karzai holds his first face-to-face talks with President Obama since last year’s Nato summit in Chicago, shortly after the pair had signed a long-term strategic partnership.

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

- **White House: No US Troops an Option For Afghanistan**

Dan Robinson

VOA News

January 8, 2013

WHITE HOUSE — Three days before Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai,

meets with President Barack Obama in Washington, White House officials said Tuesday that the United States is considering all options, including potentially leaving no troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014 when foreign combat forces are to leave.

The United States and Afghanistan are negotiating details of a bilateral security agreement, including the scope of a potential U.S. troop presence, after 2014.

Recent media reports have quoted unnamed U.S. officials as saying President Obama received a recommendation from military commanders to maintain between 6,000 and 20,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan after 2014.

But the reports say the White House is considering a smaller contingent, with as few as 3,000 troops, to train Afghan forces and help prevent al-Qaida from using the country again as a haven.

Senior Obama administration officials say the question of specific U.S. troop levels is less important than achieving key goals.

Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes said, "The way the president approaches this is not aiming to keep a certain number of troops within Afghanistan. The objective of the bilateral security agreement negotiations is not to accomplish a number of U.S. troops in a country. It is to accomplish the two goals of denying a safe haven to al-Qaida, and training and equipping Afghan national security forces."

Rhodes was asked by reporters whether President Obama would not rule out a force level of no U.S. troops in Afghanistan in favor of conducting counterterrorism operations through other means. Rhodes replied, "Yes, we wouldn't rule out any option." He added that Friday's talks between the U.S. and Afghan presidents would not finalize any troop number decision. Rhodes said Mr. Obama will consider all aspects of the situation, including recommendations from U.S. and NATO commander Marine Corps General John Allen.

White House press secretary Jay Carney said, "As we have said in the past, the president is in the process of reviewing

proposals and when he is ready to announce a decision, he will do that."

After the withdrawal of a 30,000-member surge force last year, 68,000 U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan. Plans call for continuing gradual reductions toward a milestone when Afghan forces assume the full security lead this year.

Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for South Asia Doug Lute avoided discussion of any potential U.S. troop numbers mentioned in recent media reports.

"If you assume that we make more progress against al-Qaida, then potentially the C.T. [i.e., counterterrorism] mission two years from now is less than it might otherwise be. If you assume that the Afghan capacity continues on a positive glide path and we reach our goals in terms of the development of the army and the police, then you can imagine that they require less support," he said.

Lute said U.S., coalition and Afghan forces have made a lot of progress against al-Qaida. But he added, "the job is not

done," and said the training of Afghan forces is incomplete.

Recently, the Taliban issued a statement threatening to continue fighting the Afghan government if U.S. forces remain in the country after 2014.

President Karzai arrived in Washington on Tuesday and will participate in several activities, including talks with U.S. officials and a visit to wounded U.S. soldiers.

Friday's talks between President Obama and President Karzai will include U.S. and Afghan delegations, and will be followed by a working lunch and a joint news conference

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

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanriverdi O. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not*

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