



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

**Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset**

**The Restructuring Procces of Iraq**

**Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci**

**Energy Security**

**Enerji Güvenliđi**

**Economy News**

**Ekonomi Haberleri**

**Peace Process**

**Barış Süreci**

**Ethnic and Secterian Groups**

**Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar**

**Non State Actors**

**Devlet-dış Aktörler**

**Relations with the West**

**Batı'yla İlişkiler**



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

24 JANUARY 2013

NO: 1538

<b>1. IRAQ.....</b>	<b>3</b>
• Talabani's doctor: He starts moving and speaking, but his treatment would last longer.....	3
• Mahmoud Othman: UN mission will mediate to solve political problems. ....	3
• Dulaim's Emir : Qaeda's support for the demonstrations is an Iranian- government card to demolish Anbar's revolution. ....	4
• Barzani meets with Exxon Chairman in Switzerland. ....	5
• Russia assures continuity of negotiations with Iraq over debated armament contract.....	6
• Maliki: Who said that demonstrations in the western provinces are just a bubble? .....	6
• KDP Political Bureau Spokesman: Erbil-Baghdad Stand-Off 'On the Verge of Explosion' .....	7
<b>2. IRAN .....</b>	<b>12</b>
• Iranian Lawmaker Urges IAEA Not to Follow West in Talks with Iran.....	12
• Iranian Provincial Official Calls for Expansion of Economic Ties with Iraq.....	14
• IRGC keeps balance of power in Persian Gulf .....	15
• Iran, Pakistan make progress on IP gas project: Rabbani Khar .....	16
• Iran raps Canada's claims about nuclear energy, human rights .....	17
• Iran's Foreign Ministry condemns deadly bomb attack in northern Iraq .....	19
• Iran president to visit Cairo on Feb 6-7 for OIC summit.....	19
<b>3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE .....</b>	<b>20</b>
• Hamas: Voter registration to start in Gaza 'soon' .....	20
• Palestine says may have no choice but to take Israel to ICC.....	22
• US renews call for resumption of Israeli-Palestinian talks .....	24
• Palestinians Skeptical about Israeli election results.....	24
• Presidency: Israel Should Accept Palestinian State.....	25
• Liberman adopts Lapid's talking points; Shas recalcitrant .....	26
• In 12 settlements: More Likud members than votes .....	28
<b>4. AFRICA and EGYPT .....</b>	<b>31</b>
• INTERVIEW: Brotherhood sec-general says Egypt's 'undemocratic' opposition losing street..	31
• African forces move towards central Mali .....	39
• Morocco takes a step on path to gender equality .....	42
• Salafists blamed after Sufi shrine torched in Tunisia .....	45
<b>5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....</b>	<b>45</b>
• Miqati: Cabinet's resignation would lead to political crisis.....	45
• Future MP denies conflict between March 14 forces .....	46
<b>6. SYRIA.....</b>	<b>47</b>
• UN says 650,000 have fled Syria, situation worsening.....	47
• Fighting rages in Syria, Russia lashes out at opposition .....	48
• No peace for Syria unless opposition talks to Assad-Russia .....	50
<b>7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....</b>	<b>51</b>



ORSAM

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

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ  
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT  
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION

---

• Kuwaiti parliament backs law to privatise airline.....	51
• Abu Dhabi explores wheat cultivation in the emirate.....	52
• Manama keen on reinforcing ties with Nato .....	54
• Contacts initiated with political societies.....	55
<b>8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN .....</b>	<b>56</b>
• US-led drone crashes in southeast Afghanistan.....	56
• US-led soldier killed in Taliban attack in eastern Afghanistan .....	57
• 1 Afghan policeman killed in blast in western province.....	58
• 23 newly graduate women join Afghan army in western province .....	59

## 1. IRAQ

- **Talabani's doctor: He starts moving and speaking, but his treatment would last longer.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Najimalddin Karim, the especial doctor for, President Jalal Talabani confirmed that "The president's health is continuing to improve and he started to move and speak."

Karim said in a newspaper's remarks that "The Talabani's status is progressing better than we were expecting, he was moved out of the intensive care unit, two weeks ago, and he is doing exercises to improve his walking."

He added: "The talk about the president's return to Iraq is still early, and his treatment would last longer, and according to the German doctors' opinions and reports, at the hospital, he will recover, God willing."

The President, Jalal Talabani suffered a stroke on Dec. 17, enter to the Hospital in Baghdad, and then transferred to Germany to complete his treatment there.

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

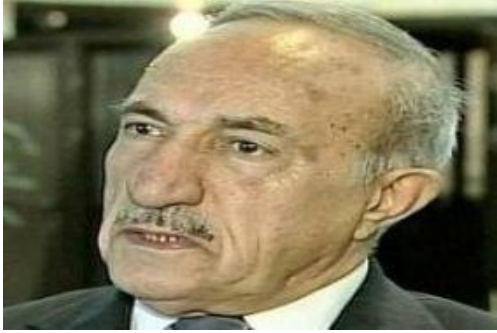
- **Mahmoud Othman: UN mission will mediate to solve political problems.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The MP, of the Kurdistan Alliance, Mahmoud Othman said that "The UN mission in Iraq will play a role of mediator between the central government and the provincial government on the one hand and between the demonstrators and the central government on the other."

Othman told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "The UN mission met with the religious authority in Najaf, getting the green light to move as a mediator to resolve differences between the central government and the region," adding: "The UN Mission met the region's president, Massoud Barzani in Arbil, House Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi, Vice President, Khudair Khuzaie and also met with the demonstrators in Anbar and Kirkuk. "

He added: "The country is still under Chapter VII and under the domination of the Security Council and the United Nations, thus this intervention will be

legitimate according to the UN resolutions issued against Iraq," pointing out that "the UN Mission did not see an Iraqi political figure able to fill the vacuum left by President, Jalal Talabani after his illness, in the convergence of views between the political blocs. "



He continued that "The withdrawal of Iraqiya's ministers from the Council of Ministers and the withdrawal of their representative in the Committee of Five, have affected their work, the partnership and negotiators to resolve the problems, because it is a large coalition and have wide masses," calling all the political blocs to show flexibility in dealing with each other to get satisfactory results to all parties .

The representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Iraq, Martin Kobler announced, during his visit to the province of Kirkuk, that he will hold

a series of meetings with a number of political leaders in Baghdad to urge them to use wisdom to solve the country's problems.

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

- **Dulaim's Emir : Qaeda's support for the demonstrations is an Iranian-government card to demolish Anbar's revolution.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Ali Hatem al-Suleiman described al-Qaeda's statement to support the demonstrations is an Iranian-government card to demolish the revolution of Anbar.

Al-Sulaiman told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "The government is using various methods to hit and divide the unity of the protesters. The government played one of its cards when it showed Izzat al-Duri to support demonstrations. Today it plays another card by Al-Qaeda's statement to support the demonstrations.



He added: "Iran, now is operating to dismantle the revolution of Anbar as it worked, previously to tarnish the image of the resistance in Fallujah when it named it al-Qaeda organization, indicating that it was an Iranian-US game to destroy the Iraqi resistance, and today is an Iranian-government a game to demolish the revolution of Anbar."

He continued: "The protestors have legitimate rights; they do not need sympathy from the former regime and al-Qaeda, we do not care or responsible for others' statements."

The organization of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq, had announced its support for the demonstrations and sit-ins in the western regions of Iraq. "

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

- **Barzani meets with Exxon Chairman in Switzerland.**

Arbil / NINA / The President of Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani and his entourage met with the Chairman of the Executive Board of Exxon Mobil in Switzerland.

A statement, posted on the website of the presidency of the province today 23, Jan said that "Barzani, in the context of his visit to Switzerland to participate in the World Economic Conference, which is held in Davos, met with Exxon Chairman Rex Tillerson.

The statement continued that "The Chairman of the Executive Board of Exxon Mobil talked, at the beginning of the meeting, about the activities of the company that has been working in the Kurdistan region in the field of oil exploration."

The delegation, accompanying Barzani, included Imad Ahmed, Deputy Prime Minister, Fuad Hussein, head of the Presidium of the Kurdistan region, Ashti Hawrami, Minister of wealth nature of the Kurdistan Government, Ali al-Sindi, Minister of Planning and Falah Mustafa,

the official of Foreign Relations Department of the Government.



Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki received, two days ago, Rex Tillerson , Chairman and Chief Executive Officer for U.S. oil / Exxon Mobil /.

A familiar source said that during the meeting, they reviewed the company's activity and its working conditions in Iraq.

Maliki stressed the need that the company's activity should be consistent with the Iraqi constitution, because the oil belongs to all Iraqis.

He said: "The Iraqis are partners in the oil extracted in any place in Iraq and they cannot be partners in Basra and no partners in other regions.

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

- **Russia assures continuity of negotiations with Iraq over debated armament contract**

Baghdad (AIN) –Russia assured the continuity of its negotiations with Iraq concerning the debated armament contract that is suspected of corruption.

Iranian News Agency quoted the Russian Ambassador to Iraq as saying "The negotiations are going on between the two sides to approve this contract," noting that "The negotiations are still in the first stage."

He stressed "The Russian Government has not problem in cooperating the Iraqi side in the military side," mentioned "This contract will serve the two countries."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=27223:russia-assures-continuity-of-negotiations-with-iraq-over-debated-armament-contract&catid=40:2011-11-19-15-20-50](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27223:russia-assures-continuity-of-negotiations-with-iraq-over-debated-armament-contract&catid=40:2011-11-19-15-20-50)

- **Maliki: Who said that demonstrations in the western provinces are just a bubble?**



Shafaq News / Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki accused the parliament of delaying the work of the government, while stressing that he did not describe the demonstrations of Anbar as a bubble.

Maliki said in an interview with al-Baghdadiya TV channel that "the parliament is delaying the work of the government by issuing decisions outside the framework of the budget and its size, as well as the lack of knowledge of what can be provided by the government according to that budget."

Maliki called "the political parties to sit at the dialogue table either in front of the public or the parliament, to find out who violated the constitution and caused crises in the country."

He pointed out that "the constitution gave the right to the Prime Minister to take appropriate decisions for the country and

will not allow the political blocs to limit his powers".

On the other hand, al-Maliki denied describing the demonstrations in the western regions as bubbles is stressing that he meant those who are taking advantage of it.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4894-maliki-who-said-that-demonstrations-in-the-western-provinces-are-just-a-bubble.html>

- **KDP Political Bureau Spokesman: Erbil-Baghdad Stand-Off 'On the Verge of Explosion'**

By HEVIDAR AHMED

Font size: Decrease font Enlarge font

image Jaafar Ibrahim, spokesman and member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) political bureau. Photo: Rudaw

In an interview with Rudaw, Jaafar Ibrahim, spokesman and member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) political bureau, says that his party will continue to stand by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). He adds that his party still backs direct elections for the

Kurdistan Region presidency, and that it expects to win the highest number of seats in parliamentary elections scheduled for this year. Ibrahim expresses worries over the Erbil-Baghdad stand-off, saying it is “on the verge of explosion.”

Rudaw: There are a number of complicated problems between Kurdistan and Iraq. What is the KDP doing about them?

Jaafar Ibrahim: For the KDP the current internal affair is very important. How do we deal with this situation and move it forward? That is very important to us.

Rudaw: What do you mean by internal affairs?

Jaafar Ibrahim: The upcoming provincial elections and the issues between ruling parties and the opposition parties. The upcoming provincial election will be a basis for parliamentary elections and the Kurdistan presidency elections. Also, the issues between the ruling and opposition parties, if they continue, will leave a negative impact on Kurdistan. Therefore, these two issues are the most important issues to us right now.

Rudaw: After Talabani’s hospitalization, the KDP’s president and leadership visited Talabani’s Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party several times. Does Talabani’s absence in Iraq pose any danger to Kurdistan?

Jaafar Ibrahim: Talabani has his own importance in the Kurdistan region, Iraq and the whole region. Talabani’s role is necessary for Kurdistan and Baghdad. Besides that, PUK is an important ally to KDP. We value our alliance with PUK. However, KDP believes that there are capable men in the PUK who can replace Talabani. PUK can play its role even when Talabani is away. They can preserve the alliance between KDP and PUK. We were waiting for Talabani to solve the issues between Baghdad and Kurdistan. If the problems deepen, they will leave negative impacts on the Kurdistan Region. Currently, the relation between Arab Sunnis and Shiites is moving towards civil war. The situation between the Kurdistan Region and Iraq is on the verge of explosion. It’s true that there have been meetings, but no concrete results have been gained. Until now, the Iraqi government’s military threat against the

disputed areas still exists. There are many worries if the disagreements between the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Region lead to a very unpleasant situation.

Rudaw: After Talabani's hospitalization what did PUK expect from the KDP?

Jaafar Ibrahim: Both of us have had our difficult times. Whenever PUK has faced a crisis, the KDP has lent a hand and supported it. When the Gorran Movement broke away from PUK, PUK saw that KDP was there and was supporting PUK. And when KDP faces a problem, we will look to our ally, which is PUK, for help. Therefore, whatever PUK was expecting, the KDP has done it. The recent constant visits of KDP to PUK were to assure PUK's leadership that KDP is there to support PUK and will do whatever it can to support it.

"Therefore, KDP is serious about the time of the elections. The parties have to accept that. If they do not, they only have themselves to blame."

Rudaw: The opposition asks for the return of the Kurdistan constitution draft to the

parliament. What is the KDP's clear stance on this matter?

Jaafar Ibrahim: KDP believes the constitution has been voted for by the parliament. Any decision or project that is voted for by the parliament will not return to it. That is a parliamentary rule, and it is not up to KDP.

The constitution was not passed in hurry. A number of sessions were held, and the opinions of the people, organizations and experts were taken into consideration. Therefore, we do not think it is right to neglect all of these works. The opposition brothers (Gorran in particular) have only one criticism of the constitution and that is about the Kurdistan political system.

They think the current political system in Kurdistan is a presidential system. But the doors are open to discuss any political system for Kurdistan, as long as national consensus can be reached on that particular system.

We do not want to take the constitution to a referendum and end up dividing the Kurds. The Gorran movement has to be patient. They have to be patient enough

to allow political agreements to take place and amend the constitution.

Rudaw: Will the KDP agree that the Kurdistan president should be elected by parliament?

Jaafar Ibrahim: We support direct election of the Kurdistan president by the people. This is very necessary for the Kurdistan region. This does not change the system. In the Kurdistan Region, the prime minister is the head of the executive branch of the government. It is not the president, but the prime minister who holds executive powers. Therefore, direct election of the president does not change the system to a presidential system. In parliamentary systems, the president does not report to the parliament. This is the problem and this is where the misunderstanding comes in.

The president of Kurdistan, whoever it might be, will be more legitimate if elected directly by the people.

Rudaw: So KDP has already made its mind that the president has to be directly elected by the people?

Jaafar Ibrahim: Our view in this regard is that the president should be elected directly by the people. However, KDP does not impose its views. But in the meantime, we will not allow any party to impose its views, either. If a view is in the interest of the people, we will try to accept, even if it is contrary to ours.

Rudaw: Does the KDP think this demand is only made by the Gorran movement?

Jaafar Ibrahim: We say this is what Gorran asks for. The whole idea was created and marketed by Gorran. Sadly, some other people have been convinced. The whole issue revolves around one point, and that is that the Kurdistan president should be elected by the parliament, not directly by the people. They know KDP is the only party who has the chance to win presidential elections if voted for directly by the people. But if the president is to be elected by the parliament, then parliament factions will have their candidates too. We believe Gorran will change their views on this matter, too.

Rudaw: Will Massoud Barzani run for another presidential term?

Jaafar Ibrahim: This is something that is up to Mr. Barzani himself. According to the Kurdistan presidency law, Mr. Barzani can be the president for another term. But this matter has not been discussed in the KDP, yet. In 2005, my opinion together with some of our colleagues in the KDP politburo, was that Mr. Barzani should not run for the presidency. I believe if Mustafa Barzani were alive, he would not accept any posts. This is not to say the posts are not valuable enough, but if he had not run for the posts he could have had more influence and power to untangle knots.

Rudaw: Do you want to all three elections (provincial elections, parliament elections, and Kurdistan presidency election) in 2013?

Jaafar Ibrahim: We support having the provincial elections in the first six months of the current year, and then have the parliamentary and presidential elections done according to their schedules. We know the election was carried out on July 25, 2005 last time, but the parliament session was held at the end of August. Therefore, the time will be counted since then. We think the parliamentary and presidential elections should be carried

out in the first week of August. The Kurdistan president has the authority to set the date and he will. Therefore, KDP is serious about the time of the elections. The parties have to accept that. If they do not, they only have themselves to blame.

Rudaw: Has KDP prepared for the elections?

Jaafar Ibrahim: Yes, we have prepared for the elections. We are currently focusing on the provincial elections. We have formed committees and are training our cadres.

Rudaw: Will KDP keep its alliance with PUK for the next election?

Jaafar Ibrahim: That subject has not been determined yet. We will meet with our PUK colleagues and discuss that subject one more time.

Rudaw: How many seats will KDP win in the Kurdistan parliamentary elections?

Jaafar Ibrahim: KDP will win 40 seats if we participate in the elections alone.

Rudaw: Is this the only prediction?

Jaafar Ibrahim: No, but KDP will easily win 40 seats. According to our statistics and surveys we will win 40 seats out of every 100 seats in the Kurdistan parliament.

Rudaw: What are relations between KDP and Gorran like?

Jaafar Ibrahim: We do not have stable relations. There are a lot of fluctuations in our relations. We have tried to stabilize it, but have not been successful. Gorran exercises a policy of pressure and psychological warfare against KDP. It accuses KDP of baseless accusations. We think all these are wrong. They negatively influence the relations between KDP and Gorran. We had bigger expectations from Gorran.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/interview/5684.html>

## 2. IRAN

- **Iranian Lawmaker Urges IAEA Not to Follow West in Talks with Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Chairman of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi

once again reiterated that the West should not politicize Iran's nuclear energy program, and urged the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) not to follow the western countries in its upcoming talks with Iran.

Boroujerdi's remarks came as Iran-IAEA talks are slated in Tehran for February 13.

"If the agency (IAEA) gives up the game and puzzle of the western countries, it can act successfully in its negotiations with Iran," Boroujerdi said on Wednesday.

He noted that the IAEA should consider and care for legal grounds and avoid issuing politicized reports in order to succeed in its talks with Iran.

Earlier this week, Iran's Residing Representative to the IAEA Ali Asqar Soltaniyeh described the recent talks between Iran and the IAEA as "progressive".

Speaking to FNA about two days of talks between Iran and the IAEA in Tehran this week, Soltaniyeh said the two sides had "intense and technical" discussions, and

added that "the negotiations focused on technical and legal aspects".

The Iranian diplomat said that 8 representatives from the UN agency were present in the talks, and mentioned that "some points of disputes were resolved during the negotiations, although some others still remain to be solved" in the next round of talks in Tehran on February 12.

Soltaniyeh stated that Iran was ready to continue the talks for one more day since the talks had a progressive trend but the two sides decided to continue their negotiations on February 12 since two IAEA envoys were slated to carry out a different mission in another country.

The talks in Tehran were led by Soltaniyeh and the IAEA Deputy Director-General, Herman Nackaerts.

The last 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.

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.

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=9107138441>

- **Iranian Provincial Official Calls for Expansion of Economic Ties with Iraq**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran is ready to expand its bilateral economic ties with neighboring Iraq, an Iranian provincial official said.

Iran's Western Ilam province Governor-General Mahmoud Abbaszadeh made the remarks in a meeting with Iraqi Babel province Deputy Governor General in the provincial capital city of Ilam on Wednesday.

"Iran is ready to broaden bilateral economic ties with friendly and neighboring Iraq," Ilam governor-general said.

Abbaszadeh noted that the economic, social and cultural transactions between Iran and Iraq should take place at a broader level.

Earlier this month, an Iranian trade official said that "a high-ranking Iraqi trade and

economic delegation is slated to pay a visit to Iran in the near future in a bid to expand mutual cooperation and boost trade transactions between the two countries".

"A high-ranking trade and economic delegation comprising 200 active businessmen of (Iraq's) private and government sectors will soon travel to Iran," Secretary-General of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce Jahanbakhsh Sanjabi said.

Sanjabi noted that Iraq was Iran's top trade partner last year (ended March 20, 2012), adding that the value of trade transactions between the two countries hit \$10.7bln in the said period.

Last month, Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Hassan Danayeefer announced that the value of the trade ties between Iran and Iraq will exceed \$12bln this year thanks to the two countries' growing cooperation.

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

and Iraqi entrepreneurs in Tehran at the time.

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

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

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

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107138443>

- **IRGC keeps balance of power in Persian Gulf**

TEHRAN, Jan. 23 (MNA) – IRGC Commander-in-chief says IRGC has kept a balance of power against foreign forces present in the Persian Gulf.

IRGC Public Relations Office reported that Brigadier General Mohammad Ali Ja'fari, IRGC Commander-in-chief visited Marine Missile Units of IRGC Naval Force in the Strait of Hormuz of Persian Gulf to see units' battle and mental readiness before his speech for them.

General Ja'fari, stressed the geopolitical importance of Persian Gulf in politics, energy, world economics, and defense capabilities of IRGC. "These enormous defense capabilities for protecting national security and our defense strategies have helped expand its operational scope far beyond open waters," he asserted.

Brigadier General Jafari said that IRGC Naval Forces is central to Iran's strategic defense in the Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf. "IRGC, as a naval power is the leverage for the balance of power in Persian Gulf, and it is following its duties

on safeguarding Islamic Revolution,” he said.

“Our defensive structures in the sea are reliable and they are for dettrence. This authority and confidence is assured by strengthening spirituality among the Guard members,” he asserted.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1798923>

- **Iran, Pakistan make progress on IP gas project: Rabbani Khar**

TEHRAN, Jan. 23 (MNA) – Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar says Iran and Pakistan have made progress in building a multi-billion-dollar gas pipeline, despite illegal U.S.-engineered sanctions.

Addressing a National Assembly session on Monday, the Pakistani minister added that Islamabad faced a “huge challenge” to fund the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline.

She emphasized that Pakistan required USD1.5 billion to build the 781-kilometer pipeline needed for the implementation of the project on its soil.

The foreign minister stated that her country is holding talks with Tehran to find ways to “solve the financial constraints.”

The pipeline, projected to cost about USD 1.2-1.5 billion, would enable the export of 21.5 million cubic meters of Iran’s natural gas to Pakistan on a daily basis.

Iran has already built more than 900 kilometers of the pipeline on its soil.

The Express Tribune reported on January 10 that Iran and Pakistan have devised a plan to finance the gas pipeline on Pakistan’s side without the need for Islamabad to transfer funds to Tehran.

The report came a day after the board of directors of the Pakistani Inter State Gas Systems (ISGS) announced that Tehran will grant a USD500-million loan to Tehran-based Tadbir Energy Development Group.

In the first phase, Iran will lend USD250 million and extend the assistance later to USD500 million.

The proposal will be submitted to the Economic Coordination Committee of Pakistan’s Cabinet for approval.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1798362>

- **Iran raps Canada’s claims about nuclear energy, human rights**

A member of Iran’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations has dismissed Canada’s “irrelevant accusations” against Iran, emphasizing that the Iranian nuclear energy program is essentially aimed at producing electricity and energy.

Canada’s representative forgot to say that only Israel in the Middle East region has not joined the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) and possesses nuclear weapons, Mohammad Ali Mottaqi-Nejad said during a UN Security Council session on Wednesday.

He added that the Canadian government fully supports the Israeli regime and its crimes while Tel Aviv has been repeatedly condemned at international circles for its expansionist policies and crimes against the Palestinian people.

Earlier on Wednesday, Canadian Ambassador to the UN Guillermo Rishchynski made unfounded allegations

against Iran, saying Tehran “poses the greatest threat to international peace and security in the world today.”

He claimed that evidence was mounting that Iran’s nuclear program was not exclusively for peaceful purposes and that the country had little genuine interest in allaying the concerns of the international community.

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 committed signatory to the NPT and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Mottaqi-Nejad also rejected the Canadian ambassador’s claims about Iran’s “systematic repression of human rights” and said that, unfortunately, the Ottawa government is using the Security Council as a tribune to express its hostility towards the Iranian people.

Those countries that claim to be the pioneers of advocating democracy and human rights and are manipulating human rights issues for their politicized and biased goals are suffering from political paranoia.

The Iranian official said that contrary to the self-perceptions of those countries and as fully documented by human rights bodies, their own records in human rights are seriously tainted. “Canada is undoubtedly a prime example of such governments.”

He said that the human rights of large parts of the Canadian population were systematically denied, regardless of the different ideologies of successive Canadian governments.



“It was well known that Canada was failing in its international obligations, failing in its constitutional and legislative framework, failing in the areas of equality and non-discrimination and the right to life and

liberty of persons, and failing in the context of minorities and indigenous persons,” Mottaqi-Nejad said.

In fact, there seemed to be no area in which Canada had not disgraced itself when it came to upholding human rights, he pointed out.

In a report released on December 19, 2012, Amnesty International called on Canada to address human rights abuses in the country, particularly with respect to the rights of indigenous peoples.

The London-based rights group said that three mandatory United Nations reviews conducted in 2012 all found “a range” of “ongoing and serious human rights challenges,” especially for indigenous peoples.

The indigenous communities in Canada, also known as the First Nations, have been protesting against poor living conditions and high unemployment rate.

Protests have been staged across the North American country after Canadian rights activist Theresa Spence went on a hunger strike on December 11, 2012.

Spence later refused to attend a meeting with Prime Minister Harper to talk about the First Nations rights, saying his move was because Governor General David Johnston, who is a representative of Queen Elizabeth II, would not be taking part in it.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/24/285269/iran-raps-canada-irrelevant-accusations/>

- **Iran's Foreign Ministry condemns deadly bomb attack in northern Iraq**



Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast has condemned the Wednesday terrorist attack that left dozens of people dead in the northern Iraqi province of Salahuddin.

Mehmanparast offered condolences to the Iraqi people and government and

expressed hope that Iraqi leaders will foil plots aimed at destabilizing the country.

The Iranian official warned about attempts made by the enemies of the Iraqi people to fuel sectarian and tribal conflicts in the country.

At least 42 people were killed and more than 70 others injured when an explosion hit a funeral ceremony at a mosque in the town of Tuz Khormato, some 175 kilometers (110 miles) north of Baghdad.

A series of bombings in and around the Iraqi capital on Tuesday killed at least 18 people.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285227/iran-condemns-deadly-bombing-in-iraq/>

- **Iran president to visit Cairo on Feb 6-7 for OIC summit**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will pay a two-day state visit to Egypt early next month to attend the summit meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Cairo on February 2-7.



Ahmadinejad is scheduled to travel to Cairo on February 6 at the invitation of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, Director for International Affairs at the Presidential Office Mohammad-Reza Forqani said on Wednesday.

He added that the Iranian president would take part in the summit in his capacity as the rotating chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which comprises nearly two-thirds of the member states of the UN General Assembly.

Forqani said Ahmadinejad's participation in the Cairo summit would be of "special significance."

The OIC, which was established in 1969, is the second-largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations and has 57 member states spread over four continents.

During the summit, Egypt will take over the OIC presidency for the next three years.

Morsi extended his invitation to Ahmadinejad during a recent visit to Egypt of Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi.

Iran severed ties with Egypt after Cairo signed the 1978 Camp David Accord with Israel and offered asylum to Iran's deposed monarch Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

However, the Egyptian revolution in February 2011 which led to the ouster of Egypt's former dictator, Hosni Mubarak, led to relative thaw in relations between Tehran and Cairo.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/23/285150/iran-president-to-visit-cairo-feb-67/>

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Hamas: Voter registration to start in Gaza 'soon'**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The government in Gaza will invite the Central Elections

Commission to resume work in the enclave "soon", a Hamas official said Wednesday.

Salah al-Bardawil said Gaza premier Ismail Haniyeh will invite CEC chief Hanna Nasser to Gaza to start updating the electoral roll in preparation for a vote.

Al-Bardawil told Ma'an that Hamas was determined to implement the reconciliation agreements signed with Fatah in Cairo and Doha.

In May 2011, the parties signed an Egypt-brokered reconciliation deal, agreeing to form a unity government of technocrats and independents to prepare for national elections and end the division between the Hamas-run Gaza Strip and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Hamas chief Khalid Mashaal and Fatah leader President Mahmoud Abbas met recently in Cairo and agreed to set a timetable to implement the deal and reunite Palestine under one government.



The party leaders agreed that the CEC would resume operations in Gaza by the end of January.

The electoral roll has not been updated in Gaza since the last local elections were held in January 2005.

In July 2012, Hamas suspended the CEC's work a day before it was due to begin registering voters in Gaza, citing the continued arrest of Hamas members in the West Bank and its questions over the commission's impartiality.

Meanwhile, al-Bardawil said a new chief of Hamas' politburo will be announced soon.

Al-Bardawil said the party had completed "90 percent" of the process to elect Mashaal's successor, but the announcement of a new leader had been delayed by "technical issues."

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=558897>

- **Palestine says may have no choice but to take Israel to ICC**

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) -- The Palestinian Authority foreign minister declared Wednesday that Palestine will have no choice but to complain to the International Criminal Court if Israel proceeds with settlement expansion plans in the occupied West Bank.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting of the UN Security Council on the Middle East, Riad al-Malki said his government's decision will largely depend on what the Israelis do with the so-called "E1" area outside the Palestinian suburbs of East Jerusalem.

"If Israel would like to go further by implementing the E1 (settlement) plan and the other related plans around Jerusalem then yes, we will be going to the ICC," he said. "We have no other choice. It depends on the Israeli decision."

The Palestinian Authority has previously suggested that bringing its various

disputes with Israel to the Hague-based court was an option, but al-Malki's remarks on Wednesday were the most direct threat his government has made against Tel Aviv to date.

The International Criminal Court prosecutes charges of genocide, war crimes and other major human rights violations. Palestine must first apply to join the court, and once a member it could refer Israel for investigation.

Palestine became eligible to join the ICC after the U.N. General Assembly upgraded its status at the world body in November from "observer entity" to "non-member state."



After the Nov. 29 vote -- on the 65th anniversary of the adoption of UN resolution 181 that partitioned Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states --

Israel announced it would build 3,000 more settler homes in East Jerusalem.

E1 covers some 12 square km and is considered particularly important because it not only juts into the narrow "waist" of the West Bank, but also backs onto East Jerusalem, where Palestinians want to establish their capital.

Approximately 500,000 Israelis and 2.5 million Palestinians live in the West Bank including East Jerusalem. The United Nations deems all Israeli settlements in the West Bank to be illegal.

'State of Palestine'

U.N. Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry told the 15-nation Security Council settlements were contrary to international law and "increasingly an obstacle to peace." But he also warned Palestine against pursuing international action.

The council meeting on the Middle East represented its first public debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the Palestinian UN status upgrade. Al-Malki and a number of council members

referred to the "State of Palestine" in their speeches.

The words "State of Palestine" were also emblazoned on the name plate for the Palestinian delegation.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice made clear to the council that such public references to the "State of Palestine" do not make it a sovereign state.

"Any reference to the 'State of Palestine' in the United Nations, including the use of the term 'State of Palestine' on the placard in the Security Council or the use of the term 'State of Palestine' in the invitation ... do not reflect acquiescence that 'Palestine' is a state," she said.

The United States, Israel and seven other members of the 193-nation General Assembly voted against the Palestinian UN status upgrade in November.

The White House on Wednesday renewed its call for a resumption of long-stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in the wake of Israeli elections in which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

emerged the winner but with a weaker-than-expected showing for his right-wing bloc.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=558894>

- **US renews call for resumption of Israeli-Palestinian talks**

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- The White House on Wednesday renewed its call for a resumption of long-stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in the wake of Israeli elections in which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emerged the winner but with a weaker-than-expected showing for his right-wing bloc.



White House spokesman Jay Carney declined to speculate on Netanyahu's efforts to forge a new governing coalition after center-left parties scored surprising gains but said President Barack Obama

would likely call the prime minister to congratulate him on his election win.

"We believe that what needs to take place is direct negotiations between the two parties that addresses the final-status issues and results in a two-state solution," Carney told reporters when asked about the possible consequences of the election for moribund peace efforts.

Obama in his first term failed to make progress in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking but his administration has signaled that it may make another peace push in his second term, which started with his inauguration earlier this week.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=558852>

- **Palestinians Skeptical about Israeli election results**

RAMALLAH, January 23, 2013 (WAFA) – A senior Palestinian official Wednesday said there was skepticism that any new Israeli government can change facts on the ground created by former governments that were the reason for ending the peace process.

Hanan Ashrawi, member of the Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee, said at a news conference in Ramallah that Palestinians did not jump with joy when results of the Israeli elections held on Tuesday showed a boost for centrist parties.

She admitted, however, that the election results, which split the vote in half between the right-wing parties and the centrists, came as a surprise to everyone.

“It was a surprise to everyone that the center and center left have revitalized themselves,” she said.

However, she added, “when it comes to Palestinians, no one is jumping with joy.”

Ashrawi said that it remains unclear what form the new government is going to take, but she said the Palestinians do not expect any major change regardless of what kind of government is formed.

“We do not think that peace is on the horizon,” she said. “I do not expect miraculous transformation in Israeli policy.”

The PLO official said the Palestinians should be prepared for all options regardless who forms the next government.

She said that the Palestinians should continue to focus on non-violent popular resistance and reunite their ranks to face an uncertain future.

Ashrawi expected that pressure will mount on the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table with Israel, but she insisted that unless Israel stops settlement construction and agrees to withdraw from all the territories it occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, negotiations will not resume.

“We negotiate the moment the Israeli government shows signs that it wants peace,” she said. “We cannot go back to business as usual.”

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21551>

- **Presidency: Israel Should Accept Palestinian State**

RAMALLAH, January 23, 2013 (Wafa) - Presidential spokesman Nabil Abu

Rudeineh Wednesday said that the Palestinians “will deal with any Israeli government that abides by the United Nations General Assembly resolution that calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital.”

He said that “this is way we will deal with the coming Israeli government, which has to choose between peace and stalemate that can be negative to all parties.”

Abu Rudeineh added that “we are ready to work with any government in Israel that accepts the existing international terms of reference that are based on UN resolutions.”

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21550>

- **Liberman adopts Lapid's talking points; Shas recalcitrant**

By JPOST.COM STAFF

Former FM says gov't must focus on domestic issues if it is to succeed; Yishai says he will never accept sending yeshiva students to IDF, demands ministry for Deri; Barak: Elections a win for ignored social justice movement.

Social Justice protesters on White Night  
Social Justice protesters on White Night  
Photo: Reuters

Former Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman echoed the talking points of Yair Lapid's newly-powerful Yesh Atid in a Thursday morning interview with Army Radio, saying that the coming government will focus on domestic issues such as equalizing the burden of IDF service, high commodity prices, and affordable housing.

His comments came as Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu began the process of building a new government, and could indicate that the number two on the Likud Beytenu list would prefer a coalition with Center-Left parties over one with haredi parties.

"We will concentrate on domestic issues," Liberman said. "This government, if it wants to succeed, must concentrate on issues of the broad public."

Shas chairman Eli Yishai, meanwhile, told Army Radio that he was adamant that his party would not compromise on its core values, which include allowing yeshiva

students to continue their studies in lieu of IDF service.

"We would never agree to the Plesner recommendations," Yishai said, referencing the Kadima party's unsuccessful 2012 attempt to resolve the issue of ultra-Orthodox enlistment. "It's not realistic to come and say we will draft everybody. The haredim will come as one and say 'we'll go to jail.'"

The issue will most likely put him at odds with both Lapid and Liberman, who are focused on altering the status quo on the issue.

Furthermore, Yishai added another caveat, saying that he would not bring his Shas party into government unless Arye Deri was given a ministerial portfolio. Deri served jail time for taking bribes during his tenure as interior minister, and has drawn the ire of Netanyahu for harsh criticism levied against the prime minister during elections.

That said, Yishai said he would sit with Netanyahu for coalition talks in the near future, and expressed confidence that his party would sit once again in government.

"Netanyahu told me that he was interested in forming a coalition with his 'natural (haredi) partners,'" he said, hinting that such a deal would be an issue of "meetings and hours."

Yesh Atid's Shai Moshe Piron, number two on the party list, reiterated his party's claim that it would not join a coalition unless it focused on the party's three core issues. "First and foremost, the government must work towards equalizing the burden of IDF service," he told Army Radio. "Second, we must return to negotiations with the Palestinians. And third, we must reform the electoral system."

He said that Lapid will meet Netanyahu next week for coalition talks.

Future MK Ofer Shelah - number six on the Yest Atid list - reiterated Piron's comments in an interview with Israel Radio. Shelah asserted that Yesh Atid will stand by its demand for negotiations with the Palestinians to reach an agreement and will not be satisfied by empty talk.

"A diplomatic settlement is essential," he stressed. He added that the party would

also demand that the government equalize the burden by passing a law within five years that will require all 18-year-old to serve the state through military or civilian service.

Shelah also explained that Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid refused Labor's call to try to form an "obstructing bloc" with the left-wing parties, because he said there is no chance that they could form a government with this bloc.

Barak comments on Israeli elections

Outgoing Defense Minister Ehud Barak on Wednesday characterized the Israeli elections as a victory for the social justice movement, which he admitted had been long ignored by the government he was a part of.

Speaking to CNN, Barak said "I think that what we call the social protest - the people who went in hundreds of thousands to the streets last year, and were basically ignored by the government, which I am a part of - they came to the envelopes to say, for us, we want our share of what happens to Israel. It was

telling the government: There is a limit to what you can expect of us."

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=300757>

- **In 12 settlements: More Likud members than votes**

Numbers obtained by 'Post' show settlers joined Likud to back hawks in primaries, voted for other parties in general elections.

A dozen West Bank settlements have more Likud members than people who voted for Likud Beytenu in Tuesday's election, according to numbers obtained exclusively by The Jerusalem Post.

Likud officials have complained for years that settlers have joined the party en masse in order to back hawks in party primaries with no intention of voting for the party in general elections. The officials' fears were proven correct by Tuesday's results.

Shilo in Samaria has 303 Likud members, but only 127 people voted for Likud Beytenu there. Yitzhar in northern

Samaria, which has 93 Likud members, had only 21 Likud Beytenu votes.

In the Jewish community in Hebron, there are 59 party members, but only 21 voted Likud Beytenu. In Beit El, which has 491 members, only 212 voted Likud Beytenu.

There were also fewer Likud Beytenu votes than Likud members in Ofra, Elon Moreh, Revava, Itamar, Kedumim, Mitzpe Yeriho, Otniel and Eli.

Likud activist Barak Herscowitz compiled the numbers for his blog, Pa’amon Haherut (“Liberty Bell”). “For years, there has been a problem with settlers joining the Likud and not voting for the party in general elections,” Herscowitz said. “What they are doing is not illegal, but they are taking advantage of the system to gain power and influence.”

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu faced sharp criticism from ministers, MKs and activists in his party on Wednesday for the Likud’s downfall in Tuesday’s election.

But while the activists spoke freely and openly, the ministers and MKs were

careful to speak anonymously in order to avoid Netanyahu’s wrath and not prevent themselves from receiving posts in the next government.

For a Jerusalem Post interview with Yair Lapid, [click here](#)

The activists said they expected Netanyahu to face challenges to his leadership but only after he appoints his cabinet.

The Likud politicians blamed Netanyahu for leading the party from 27 seats in the 2009 election to the 20 Likud seats among the 31 won by the joint Likud-Yisrael Beytenu list on Tuesday.

“Bibi [Netanyahu] had all the tools to win the race,” a minister said in closed conversations.

“He could have set the agenda every day, but he did another spin campaign every day and it kept on falling. The Likud is a political burden for him. We can’t escape the conclusion that he wanted a smaller Likud and that’s why he lost.”

Likud activists complained that the party made no effort to use them to help it win more seats. They said Netanyahu thought he could replace the party's infrastructure of activists with Facebook but was proven incorrect.

"Netanyahu paralyzed the party," said Ashkelon Likud activist Eli Cornfeld, who was once close to Netanyahu.

"The party's director-general, institutions and branches are not functioning. There is no transparency. No one knows where the money is going. Bibi has treated party activists as his indentured servants, so it should have been no surprise to him that we fared so poorly," Cornfeld said.

Fingers in the Likud were also pointed at Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar, who chaired the party's campaign; Environmental Protection Minister Gilad Erdan, who headed its public relations team; and former minister Tzachi Hanegbi, who led the Election Day operations.

The activists accused Sa'ar and Hanegbi of distributing NIS 15 million worth of government-funded jobs in polling stations to their political cronies and

Erdan of not giving Likud branches funding to put up banners and signs in their communities.

"Their behavior divided party branches around the country and caused demoralization from Kiryat Shmona to Eilat," Cornfeld said.

"They castrated the field, where the Likud has its main advantage over the other parties. We have activists who are thirsty for work and they didn't take advantage of them," he said.

As an example, Cornfeld cited a polling station in Ashkelon in which only one car was made available to bring elderly people to vote. Many of the 10,000 people registered to vote at the station stayed home, because no one could give them a ride, he said.

The activists complained about the deal with Yisrael Beytenu, which they said did not bear fruit.

Yisrael Beytenu chairman Avigdor Liberman also faced private criticism about the arrangement. At a press conference in Jerusalem, he justified the

agreement, saying it enabled the nationalist camp to stay in power.

In an effort to make up for the joint list's poor showing, Liberman said he would work toward the passage of the so-called "Norwegian Law," which would enable ministers to conditionally leave the Knesset in favor of the next candidates on their party's list.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=300740>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **INTERVIEW: Brotherhood sec-general says Egypt's 'undemocratic' opposition losing street**

In an interview with Ahram Online, Mahmoud Hussein, secretary-general of the Muslim Brotherhood, takes a swipe at the opposition, talks about relations with the US and Israel and defends the Renaissance Project

What is your assessment of two important periods in Egypt's modern history: one, the transitional period in which the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) was in power and, two, the past six

months in which Egypt has had a civilian president?

We all saw what happened in the first period, and we all have our comments. Of course SCAF was able to protect the revolution and safeguard the lives of the demonstrators. It managed to somehow pressure Hosni Mubarak and his regime into leaving. It organised free and fair parliamentary elections for the first time in decades. And it was able to end the transitional period and transfer power to a civilian president.

After Mohamed Morsi took power we sensed that there were attempts to undermine [presidential] authority and push it aside and also to banish the People's Assembly, an institution that was elected by 33 million Egyptians. There were attempts to disband the Shura Council [parliament's upper house] and the [ongoing] Constituent Assembly [that was tasked with drafting the new constitution]. We were about to find ourselves in a constitutional vacuum, with Morsi left alone and set to fail. Many people joined forces, including businessmen who got rich under the old regime and who got involved in politics.

What do you think of the opposition's reaction to the measures taken so far, especially with regard to the referendum?

The opposition made a serious mistake when it resorted to lying and disinformation and when it used undemocratic methods to change things. We have seen street action that wasn't peaceful, and an attempt to storm Al-Ittihadiya Palace [the presidential palace]. People were prevented from entering Tahrir Square and violence was committed when Brotherhood offices were set on fire and thugs were sent to Al-Qaed Ibrahim Square.

None of this was democratic and yet no [opposition] politicians denounced these actions. Indeed, they were pleased with what happened. Perhaps investigations will show they were implicated in what happened.

But there are many controversial articles, important ones, nearly 15 of them, in the constitution. Why didn't you take that into consideration when civil groups pulled out of the Constituent Assembly?

The points of controversy were less than clear. When the vice president sat down with members of the Constituent Assembly the discussion was not specific and no alternatives were put forward, only general remarks. Besides, we don't believe that the constitution encroaches on the rights of Copts or the judiciary. What was interesting is how the politicians came up with fabricated articles and attributed them to the constitution. Nowhere in the world do you find politicians fabricating provisions and presenting them as if they were part of the constitution.

So the Muslim Brotherhood is satisfied with the constitution?

The constitution doesn't cover everything it should. But at the end of the day it is a human effort, so this is natural. We endorse and support the main body of the constitution which comprises 236 articles, some of which were subject to disputes over phrasing or form. But at the end of the day there is a mechanism in place to amend the constitution. The 100 members [of the Constituent Assembly] did a great job. We believe that in terms of general

framework, public policy and freedoms this constitution is excellent.

The National Salvation Front rejected the constitution and Hamdeen Sabbahi vowed to struggle to bring it down. What is your comment?

This is a punishable offence. How can a politician stand in public and say that he wishes to bring down the constitution? Should society view him as a politician or a thug? This remark is perhaps linked to polling irregularities during the referendum.

The constitution was presented in a referendum monitored by all civil society organisations and aired on various television channels. We didn't see one person saying that he was forced to vote yes or no. And then they claim it was forged. There is an Elections Committee and it is in charge of receiving such complaints and deciding on them.

But to say that you want to bring down a constitution that was approved by the people; this is a remark that befits a thug, not a politician. No offence.

How do you see the National Salvation Front?

If it acts as a strong opposition, this would be good for political life. Strong opposition means coming up with alternatives and discussing them with the people. Doesn't the opposition wish to become the majority? This can only happen through speaking to the people, so that they may be convinced and offer their support.

I don't see this happening. The opposition adopted non-democratic and non-political means, and I believe that it has lost a lot. If the referendum were to be held today the opposition would get fewer votes. It is losing in the streets because it resorts to lying and disinformation.

As for the crisis surrounding the prosecutor-general and other events, these look connected but they are not. Hasn't the entire nation been calling for his resignation since 25 January? Is not he the one who investigated all those cases and failed to get one conviction? Hasn't he received many reports accusing people of financial corruption but failed to bring any to justice?

What is the nature of the relationship between the presidency and the Brotherhood?

We have said repeatedly that the presidency is independent in its decision-making and that it acts in the manner it finds most suitable, either through advisers or the secretariat. Political parties and other groups also act independent of the presidency.

The Brotherhood makes its decisions independently and has nothing to do with the presidency; the presidency's decision-making is independent and has nothing to do with the Brotherhood.

Likewise, the decisions of the [Freedom and Justice] Party have nothing to do with the Brotherhood or the presidency. If we want to convey an opinion or advice, or we are asked to do so, we relay our views to the presidency in the normal way. We do not interfere in the decisions of the presidency. Nor does the presidency interfere in our decisions.

Let's discuss the clashes that took place on 'bloody Wednesday'. Before the clashes took place Brotherhood leaders made

statements which were threatening in nature.

The clashes didn't happen because of the protesters. Between 3pm and 6.30pm nothing happened. Those who started the clashes came from behind, with a new group that was not from the [anti-MB] protesters. They were people who wanted to start trouble and had planned it all out. They brought in weapons and moved in from the back. This wasn't something that was taken into account when the decision was made.

Who were these people?

Ask the prosecution. It is the prosecution that set them free. They also had... [doesn't finish sentence]. And yet they were set free.

If the events were as you portray them why did the prosecution set these attackers free?

They were not exonerated. They are still under investigation. But ask the prosecution. The prosecution released them. Evidence exists. People died. The people who came from behind are the ones who killed the demonstrators. Are

they thugs? Is this what they were? Or are they something else?

But what about the video evidence? What about the detention and torture of anti-Morsi protesters caught on film?

I question these videos. If they are proven to be true, then what happened was wrong. But it can be explained. The [Brotherhood supporters] arrested some of those who were involved in the killing of pro-Morsi protesters and handed them to the police. Some of them they handed to the Republican Guard, but they let them go.

You're saying that the police collaborated with the opposition?

What do you do when the police and the Republican Guard let those [captured by the Brotherhood] go? What action do you take when those who are captured are set free? In the videos you see actions that no one should take. The use of violence to extract confessions or inflict punishment is impermissible.

Is there any chance of having real dialogue with the opposition?

We believe in dialogue with everyone, with opponents, with dissidents, and even with enemies, with a few exceptions regarding the Israeli occupiers.

Our doors are wide open. We have never been asked to come to a dialogue and refused, never.

When the army asked you to come to a dialogue it was said that you turned down the invitation because it came from the army and not the president.

No, we agreed to go. They [the military] are the ones who hesitated and cancelled [the invitation]. Dr Mahmoud Ezzat and myself went and we waited there.

We didn't object. The invitation was not for dialogue. And the president's position [on the invitation] had nothing to do with us. We kept getting conflicting messages. We had already decided who was going to attend even though we didn't receive an official invitation. No one called us. When the whole thing was cancelled we only knew about it from television.

What about the different schools of thinking within the Brotherhood, and the relation between preaching and politics? According to recent studies there are three schools of thought within the Brotherhood - that of Hassan Al-Banna, of Sayyed Qutb, and of the jihadists. In his book *The Secret of the Temple Tharwat El-Kherbawi* speaks of an alliance between the Brotherhood and (jihadist leader) Shukri Mustafa.

We do not accept any accusations directed at the Brotherhood by outsiders. These are unfair and totally groundless.

But (authors) like Hossam Tammam and Tharwat El-Kherbawi were Brotherhood members.

They were. But why did they leave the Muslim Brotherhood, out of love or rancour?

Because of differences, perhaps?

So the right person to assess the Brotherhood is the one who differs with it? What were the differences? Did he disagree, as he claims, about ideas? Did he leave because of a certain issue, or

because of other reasons? These [accounts by Tammam and El-Kherbawi] are utter lies.

The Brotherhood has no militia. It has no military training. It has no secret outfit. It had none of these things under the deposed regime or the one preceding it. The Muslim Brotherhood's structure is well known. State Security (SS) knew the names of the heads of the Brotherhood's administrative offices nationwide. It knew the Brotherhood organisational chart across the country.

It used this knowledge to arrest them. How can you say that there is a secret outfit? The names of the members of the Guidance Bureau are public. We meet every Saturday and Wednesday in front of the media. The Brotherhood Consultative Assembly meets in broad daylight.

So the Ten-Member Outfit, or tanzim al-asharat, that is said to have changed the course of the Brotherhood is an illusion, and reformists were never dismissed from the Brotherhood?

We don't know anything about these things. We don't have Al-Banna people

and Qutb people and reformists, none of that. We are one group. We disagree on some topics and agree on others.

In the Guidance Bureau we adhere to the opinion of the majority. The supreme guide and his deputies may have an opinion but if the majority is against it, then the supreme guide and his deputies have to go by the views of the majority. We are unique in that way.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the army have a history. The fact that you were sentenced by military courts, does it make you bitter or vengeful?

No. This wasn't the army's fault. We blame the regime which wanted to drive a wedge between the army and us.

Some accuse the Brotherhood of trying to infiltrate the army, and say the latter needs to be protected from ideological infiltration by any group. How do you react to this? And is it true that you requested a quota [for your members] in military colleges?

Not true. The Brotherhood is part of the fabric of this country. When Copts join the

army do they do so as Copts or Egyptians? We haven't requested a quota. To this day, two years after the revolution, our members are still banned from admission to military colleges on grounds of their (political) affiliation.

Now that you are in power what is the nature of your relations with the US? Washington has been accused of taking your side even at the expense of the country and of the army.

We have no relations with the US, or not in the way official institutions have with a country. We have made it clear that we cannot have relations with the US except through the Foreign Ministry. But delegations from Congress or US institutions do meet some parliamentarians. Also, the US ambassador met the supreme guide.

All of this is permissible and fully publicised. We do not take funding from anyone. We dare any institution, country, society, or group anywhere in the world to claim that they gave the Brotherhood a single penny.

How about political support?

We dare anyone, with a sense of fairness, to claim that the US and Europe offer support to the Islamists to be in power.

The US ambassador called SCAF hours before Morsi was declared president, something that triggered controversy.

The US wants to protect its interests. The US was of the view that if the deposed regime came to power once again through forgery a second revolution would break out. Its intercession was not out of bias to Mohamed Morsi but for the election results to be declared without forgery. SCAF and the Elections Committee had knowledge that Morsi was ahead. In this case America stood by legitimacy to avoid a revolution that may turn the country against it.

Under Brotherhood rule an agreement was signed with Hamas, one clause of which mentions the “halting of hostilities”, a reference to resistance operations. How could you accept this?

I believe this was a historic achievement for the Palestinians and for Egypt. America and Israel had to accept that Egypt play

this role. Wordplay aside, Israel agreed to break the blockade and guarantee the life of resistance leaders. Regardless of what words were written on paper, was it not an achievement for Khaled Meshaal to visit Gaza?

What of scenarios suggesting part of the Sinai be an alternative homeland for the Palestinians?

This is a figment of imagination that is unacceptable to Egyptians and Palestinians. The Palestinians went to Rafah and Arish under Mubarak — in 2006 — and stayed there for days. And they broke down the wall.

Isn't there a Palestinian camp in Sinai now?

It is a camp that belongs to Mohamed Dahlan, and the deposed regime is the one to ask about it.

But the camp is still there, under President Mohamed Morsi.

Ask the General Intelligence about it. The Palestinian people refused to stay for one day [in Sinai] and went back [to Gaza] of

their own free will, without anyone asking them to do so. The Egyptians do not allow anyone to stay on their land, not even for one day.

You have no worries about the situation in Sinai?

Right, no worries.

You also have no worries about Camp David. The peace treaty was something you used to raise hell about, demanding its abrogation?

The peace treaty is unfair to Egypt, but I am not worried. The Brotherhood rejects Camp David and is entitled to do so. But the presidency has its own views. It may discuss the treaty, amend it, or bring it to the People's Assembly for review. This is [the presidency's] business. No need to confuse the Brotherhood with the presidency.

The Renaissance Project, or mashrou al-nahda, which was the main item in the Brotherhood's presidential campaign, is now being described as vague.

There are unjust accusations. We presented the project in writing. Those who claim that this project is an illusion, or vague, must understand that it cannot be accomplished overnight.

This project has nothing to do with the presidency. It cannot be linked to a presidential term. We will lead the Renaissance Project for 20 to 30 years. It is a project that must be discussed widely in society and be amended or altered by experts until it becomes a project for all Egypt and not just for the Brotherhood. But the political and social climate is not conducive to such discussions. The presidency is going to bring it to public discussion soon because it has been working on a part of it.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/63044/Egypt/Politics-/INTERVIEW-Brotherhood-secgeneral-says-Egypt-undem.aspx>

- **African forces move towards central Mali**

The first AU troops moves towards central Mali to replace the French mission in fighting against Al-Qaeda-associated militants

African forces were moving towards Mali's centre Thursday, as pressure grew on Malian troops over summary killings and rights abuses in a French-led assault on Al Qaeda-linked groups.

The first troops from a UN-mandated African force aimed at replacing the French mission have "already started to move towards central towns," Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said in Paris Wednesday, adding that the force had deployed "far quicker than envisaged".

He said 1,000 troops from West African countries and Chad had already arrived in Mali, which has been split in two since April.

"The African force is deploying much faster than expected," Fabius said. "Obviously that poses a number of logistical difficulties but I have to say that I have seen a very big effort by our African friends."

A Malian defence official said that 160 soldiers from Burkina Faso had arrived in Markala, 270 kilometres (170 miles) north of the capital Bamako, to "take up the

baton from the French" guarding a strategic bridge on the Niger river.

"They are already in place and could then go on to Niono and Diabaly," two towns farther north, the source said, adding: "After the French, it will be the Africans who are on the ground".

The UN has authorised the deployment of a 3,300-strong force under the auspices of 15-nation West African bloc ECOWAS. But the involvement of Chad, which has committed up to 2,000 troops, means the force could now be much bigger.

Nearly two weeks after France swept to Mali's aid to stop an Islamist advance towards Bamako, reports emerged of atrocities committed by Malian soldiers and growing fears of attacks among light-skinned ethnic communities.

The majority of the Al-Qaeda-linked rebels being hunted by the armies are either Tuaregs or Arabs.

The International Federation of Human Rights Leagues said that in the central town of Sevare at least 11 people were executed in a military camp near the bus

station and the town's hospital, citing evidence gathered by local researchers.

Credible reports also pointed to around 20 other people having been executed in the same area and the bodies having been dumped in wells or otherwise disposed of, the organisation said.

At Niono, also in the centre of the country, two Malian Tuaregs were executed by Malian soldiers, according to the FIDH.

The organisation called for an immediate independent inquiry to "determine the scale of the abuses and to punish the perpetrators".

The rights group Human Rights Watch said its investigators had spoken to witnesses who saw the executions of two Tuareg men in the village of Siribala, near Niono.

The group also said witnesses had reported "credible information" of soldiers sexually abusing women in a village near Severe, and called on the government to urgently investigate these incidents.

French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian urged extreme "vigilance" against any abuses, saying the "honour of the (Malian) troops is at stake".



"We cannot accept any rights violations. The international community will face a very serious situation if (the intervention force) is identified with abuses," Fabius added.

Le Drian said France had run up a bill of 30 million euros (\$40 million) in 12 days in Mali, but added that it would not make a serious hole in the defence budget, which included about 630 million euros for external operations.

France said it had already deployed 2,300 soldiers in Mali, its former colony, whose poorly trained and equipped force has been overwhelmed by Islamist rebels occupying the vast arid north and seeking to push south.

Malian army chief General Ibrahima Dahirou Dembele promised that any soldier involved in abuses would be brought to book.

"One mustn't get confused. Every white skin is not a terrorist or a jihadist and among the enemy which attacked our different position were many black skins. We are among brothers, whether one is black or white."

International moves to aid the French-led operation have accelerated, with the US military airlifting French troops and equipment from France into Mali.

Italy, Germany, Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Arab Emirates are also providing transport planes or helicopters required to help move the African and French troops around Mali's vast expanses.

Mali's year-old crisis began when Tuaregs returning from fighting for slain dictator Moamer Kadhafi in Libya, battle-hardened and with a massive arsenal, took up a decades-old rebellion for independence of the north, which they call Azawad.

They allied with hardline Islamists and seized the key towns of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu in a matter of days.

The Islamists later broke with their Tuareg allies, and with firm control of the north, implemented an extreme form of Islamic law.

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, who has pledged to send 900 soldiers to Mali, meanwhile said that local extremist group Boko Haram was linking up with Al-Qaeda's north African branch operating in northern Mali and other north African nations.

If not contained, Boko Haram would threaten "not only Nigeria, but west Africa, central Africa and of course north Africa", he told CNN.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/63167/World/Region/African-forces-move-towards-central-Mali.aspx>

- **Morocco takes a step on path to gender equality**

Women's rights in Morocco are poised to make a breakthrough with the probable

scrapping of a law allowing rapists of minors to avoid jail by marrying them, but the road to gender equality remains long.

The kingdom was shocked in March 2012 by the suicide of Amina Filali, 16, who was forced to marry the man who violated her. For him it was a way under Article 475 of the country's penal code to remain a free man.

On Monday, the country's Islamist government expressed its backing for a bill to repeal this section of the law.

The justice ministry has also said it supports a proposal by parliament to alter the article, under which the rape of a minor is punishable by several years in prison unless the victims and their aggressor wed.

The proposal has yet to be formally approved by both houses, however.

The ministry said it was prepared to go further than scrapping the paragraph on marriage, suggesting harsher punishments for those who rape minors, including up to 30 years in jail rather than the current stipulated five.

"The amendments by nature guarantee the necessary protection for minors against sexual assault," said Justice Minister Mustapha Ramid.

Driss El Yazami, president of the National Council for Human Rights, told AFP that the way was now clear for a favorable amendment in both houses.

"Any progress is noteworthy and it is clear that there was a shocking provision" in the current law, he said, but also called for speedier reforms.

"The question is not simply to affirm the principle of equality, but to see how parity" can be achieved, he said, noting that his council urged the creation of a superior body on equality as stipulated under the constitution.

But progress towards gender equality in Morocco is moving slowly.

Since 2004, following an initiative by King Mohammed VI, Morocco has had a new family code (moudawana) governing polygamy.

However, the daily Le Soir Echos has cited alarming data showing that marriages of minors are on the rise in the kingdom, with 34,000 cases reported in 2010 – up from 29,847 in 2008.

A key concern is violence against women, said Khadija Ryadi, president of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights.

Six million Moroccan women have suffered physical or verbal violence, more than half suffering abuse in marriages, according to Bassima Hakkaoui, the only female minister in a government dominated by Islamist Justice and Development Party which won the 2011 parliamentary polls.

Media reports have also highlighted other cases.

In early January an attempted suicide by a house maid caused an emotional outpouring in Morocco. The entire incident was recorded on video by a neighbor and posted on the Internet.

The young woman, who leapt from the fourth floor of an apartment building in Casablanca where she worked, said she

was raped two years ago and rejected by her family.

She was saved by a young man who caught her but was killed doing so.

The maid said afterwards she had wanted to kill herself because of "continued exploitation."

Morocco has up to 80,000 minors who work as domestics, according to several associations.

Last week there was also an angry tumult when a member of parliament initially sentenced to a one-year jail term in a rape case was acquitted on appeal.

"The constitution has allowed some progress in theory, but there has been no tangible contribution," said Ryadi.

"If it hadn't been for the Amina Filali case, we would not have even be talking about Article 475" on the rape of minors, she added.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings, the kingdom in mid-2011 enshrined "equal rights and freedoms" for

men and women, adding that "the state would work to achieve parity" between the two.

Analyst Yazami says that what is needed now is a change of mentality.

"In addition to legislative reforms, there is probably very important work to be done in terms of education and mentality," he said.

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/international/morocco\\_takes\\_a\\_step\\_on\\_path\\_to\\_gender\\_equality](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/international/morocco_takes_a_step_on_path_to_gender_equality)

- **Salafists blamed after Sufi shrine torched in Tunisia**

Sufis said on Wednesday that another one of their shrines in Tunisia has been torched, pinning the blame on foreign-backed Salafist ultra-conservative Muslims.

In the 35th such attack in seven months, unidentified assailants on Tuesday night hurled Molotov cocktails at the Sidi Ahmed Uwerfelli shrine in Akuda, 140 kilometers (85 miles) south of Tunis.

"The people behind all the attacks are Wahhabis," a Salafist branch of Islam rooted in Saudi Arabia, Mazen Sherif, the deputy head of a sufi union set up to counter the attacks, told a press conference in Tunis.

"This is just the beginning. They will go on to destroy the [Roman] sites in Carthage, El Jem and Duga. Then they will force men to grow beards and women to wear the hijab [full veil]," he said.

According to his union, which urged Tunisia's Islamist-led government to take effective action, such attacks are financed from abroad.

Since the early centuries of Islam, Sufi orders have always aroused suspicion among orthodox Muslims.

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/salafists\\_blamed\\_after\\_sufi\\_shrine\\_torched\\_in\\_tunisia](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/salafists_blamed_after_sufi_shrine_torched_in_tunisia)

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Miqati: Cabinet's resignation would lead to political crisis**

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Miqati reiterated on Wednesday that his cabinet's resignation could lead to a national political crisis.

"Any uncalculated resignation can lead to another political crisis in Lebanon. This is why I have called upon all parties to agree on a new electoral law, [so that] a new cabinet can be formed [after the elections]," Miqati said during an interview that aired on Al-Arabiya TV Wednesday evening.

The Lebanese premier also stated that his cabinet has control over the public debt.

"The public debt, which amounts to almost \$56 billion is still under control, and the country's [fiscal situation] is improving in a consistent way..."

PM Miqati also said that the cabinet's proposed solutions for the debt revolved around four points.

"Managing the cabinet's expenses in a more effective way, improving management of public properties.... improving the management of public debt, and paving the way towards private

sector involvement in infrastructure [projects]."

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/miqati\\_cabinets\\_resignation\\_would\\_lead\\_to\\_political\\_crisis](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/miqati_cabinets_resignation_would_lead_to_political_crisis)

- **Future MP denies conflict between March 14 forces**

Lebanon's opposition Future bloc MP Amin Wehbe denied on Wednesday that there is a conflict between March 14 parties amid differences over which electoral law to adopt.

"There is no conflict between March 14 forces, since the coalition is not one party but an alliance of political contingents that agree on fundamental matters," Wehbe said following a meeting with Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea.

The Future MP ruled out the possibility of postponing the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Lebanon's four major Christian parties, including the opposition Lebanese Forces and Kataeb parties, endorsed the Orthodox Gathering's draft law that proposes citizens vote for candidates of

their own sect. However, the NLP, Future Movement, Progressive Socialist Party and independent March 14 Christians oppose the draft.

Members of a parliamentary sub-committee began earlier in January their discussion of different draft laws in order to choose a proposal to replace the 1960 electoral law. Lebanon's different political contingents remain divided over which law to adopt despite the cabinet's approval in September 2012 of a draft law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts.

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/future\\_mp\\_denies\\_conflict\\_between\\_march\\_14\\_forces](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/future_mp_denies_conflict_between_march_14_forces)

## 6. SYRIA

- **UN says 650,000 have fled Syria, situation worsening**

More than 650,000 people have fled the conflict in Syria, a top United Nations official said on Wednesday, as Turkey's foreign minister pledged Ankara would continue to accept refugees.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, UN aid chief Valerie Amos said the humanitarian situation in Syria was "already catastrophic and clearly getting worse".

"The harsh winter is exacerbating the already appalling conditions. More than 650,000 people have left the country," she added.

The United Nations says more than 60,000 people have died in the Syria conflict which began 22 months ago with peaceful protests that erupted into deadly violence in the wake of a harsh regime crackdown.

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

"I hope there is no doubt left in the mind of our political leaders as to the scale of the human tragedy unfolding in Syria," said Amos.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said his country was sheltering some 160,000 refugees in 16 camps and announced that his government was

building another to house the steady flow of people fleeing the unrest.

"We will continue to have a policy of open door and we will never close our borders," pledged Davutoglu, although he acknowledged: "The flow of refugees is really alarming us."

"We don't know how many children we lost. We don't know how many pregnant women we lost who also lost their children," he said.

"How long will we wait? How long will the Security Council be silent in front of this humanitarian crisis."

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala/testnews/un\\_says\\_650000\\_have\\_fled\\_syria\\_a\\_situation\\_worsening](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala/testnews/un_says_650000_have_fled_syria_a_situation_worsening)

- **Fighting rages in Syria, Russia lashes out at opposition**

Fighting raged in several Syrian flashpoints on Wednesday as key Damascus ally Moscow lashed out the Syrian opposition for its "obsession" with toppling President Bashar al-Assad.

In a related development, Russian President Vladimir Putin offered to host an international conference aimed at aiding the more than 650,000 refugees the UN says have fled the 22-month conflict in Syria.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said five members of one family - a couple and three children - were killed in a dawn missile attack on the village of Abu Taltal in Aleppo province.

In a video released by activists, the bodies of the three children, a boy and two small girls, can be seen lying on blankets on a hospital bed.

Their brightly colored clothes are stained with blood and their faces are turned away from the camera.

The Observatory has previously reported more than 3,500 child deaths in Syria's conflict.

In Ras al-Ain in the Kurdish northeast, battles raged between Kurdish militia and Islamist rebels, the Observatory said, adding that more than 58 people have

been killed in a week of fierce fighting there.

The main opposition Syrian National Coalition, which has been recognized by dozens of states and organizations as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people, said it has contacted rebel leaders in the area, urging them to stop the fighting.

Wednesday's violence came a day after at least 123 people were killed, among them 62 civilians including 15 children, said the Observatory. The UN says more than 60,000 people have died since the conflict first erupted in March 2011.

In Moscow, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov criticized Syria's opposition for its "obsession" with toppling Assad, and warned of a long conflict.

"For now, everything is running up against the opposition's obsession with toppling Bashar Assad's regime," Lavrov told reporters.

"As long as this irreconcilable position remains in place, nothing good can

happen. Armed actions will continue and people will die."

He said that the opposition's insistence on ousting Assad was stymying efforts to find a diplomatic solution backed by the former international peace envoy Kofi Annan and his successor Lakhdar Brahimi.



Lavrov took particular aim at the Syria National Coalition -- a broad-based group backed by the West founded in Doha last year -- for making the ouster of Assad one of its fundamental aims.

His comments came as New York-based advocacy group Human Rights Watch warned that rebel groups appeared to have destroyed or allowed the looting of minority religious sites in northern Syria.

"The destruction of religious sites is furthering sectarian fears and

compounding the tragedies of the country," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at HRW.

And as the UN said on Wednesday that more than 650,000 people have already fled Syria to neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, President Vladimir Putin of Russia offered to host an international conference in Moscow on the refugee crisis.

"If the interested nations agree to this, we will be ready to propose Moscow as the venue," news agencies quoted Putin as saying.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization meanwhile warned that Syrian agriculture has been shattered by the conflict, putting the livelihoods of about half of the country's population at risk.

"Twenty-two months of conflict has left Syria's agricultural sector in tatters with cereal, fruit and vegetable production dropping for some by half and massive destruction of irrigation and other infrastructure," the organization said in a statement.

The UN says that about 80 percent of 10 million Syrians - about 46 percent of the population - derive their livelihoods from agriculture.

Everything is running up against the opposition's obsession with toppling Bashar Assad's regime.

[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala\\_testnews/fighting\\_rages\\_in\\_syria\\_russia\\_ashes\\_out\\_at\\_opposition](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala_testnews/fighting_rages_in_syria_russia_ashes_out_at_opposition)

- **No peace for Syria unless opposition talks to Assad-Russia**



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday there could be no peaceful resolution of the conflict in Syria as long as opponents of President Bashar al-Assad demand his exit from power and refuse to negotiate with his government.

Lavrov's comments at an annual news conference signalled no shift in the

position of Russia, which says Assad's exit must not be a precondition for a deal to end 22 months of violence in which more than 60,000 people have been killed.

"Everything runs up against the opposition members' obsession with the idea of the overthrow of the Assad regime. As long as this irreconcilable position remains in force, nothing good will happen, armed action will continue, people will die," Lavrov said.

Russia has been Assad's most powerful foreign protector during the violence that started with a crackdown on protests but has escalated into civil war, vetoing three U.N. Security Council resolution aimed to push him out or pressure him to end bloodshed.

Russia flew 77 of its citizens fleeing the Syrian violence to Moscow via Lebanon on Wednesday but Lavrov said the situation in Syria did not require a mass evacuation of Russian citizens.

Speaking of large-scale naval exercises Russia is holding in the Black Sea and in the Mediterranean Sea, not far from Syria,

Lavrov said the naval presence was a positive factor.

"Of course we have no interest in the Mediterranean region becoming even more destabilised. And the presence of our fleet there is undoubtedly a stabilising factor," Lavrov said.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/63096/World/Region/No-peace-for-Syria-unless-opposition-talks-to-Assa.aspx>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

### • Kuwaiti parliament backs law to privatise airline

Kuwait's parliament approved an amended draft law on Wednesday paving the way for the long-overdue privatisation of Kuwait Airways, state-run news agency KUNA reported.

Parliament first backed privatising loss-making Kuwait Airways Corp KAC.L in 2008 but the process has been repeatedly held up by the global economic crisis, political turmoil and a restructuring at the airline.

Under the draft law, the carrier will change its name to Kuwait Airways Company and own all assets and property of KAC, except for outstanding payments from the Iraqi government and Iraqi Airways, KUNA said.

Iraq and Kuwait agreed last year that Baghdad will pay \$500 million in compensation for Gulf War-era debts. The cash will go to the state treasury, not KAC, the report said.

The Kuwaiti carrier faces challenges such as high labour costs, an aging fleet and tough competition from other Gulf airlines, Communications Minister Salem al-Athaina said, according to KUNA. He did not give a timeline for the privatisation process.

Under a plan approved by the cabinet in April the government will offer a 35 per cent stake to companies listed in Kuwait and to "specialised" local or international firms within three years.

The government would retain 20 per cent with 5 per cent to be distributed to KAC employees.

The remaining 40 per cent would be allotted in the same way to citizens registered with the Public Authority for Civil Information, the Kuwaiti body that issues civil identity cards.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/63150/Business/Economy/Kuwaiti-parliament-backs-law-to-privatise-airline.aspx>

- **Abu Dhabi explores wheat cultivation in the emirate**

Capital looking for suitable wheat varieties in addition to a number of other crops

Abu Dhabi: Plans are underway for wheat cultivation in Abu Dhabi in addition to a number of other crops, a senior official told Gulf News on Wednesday.

As part of a research project, about 100 varieties of wheat used for the production of flour used to make bread were cultivated in Al Ain region in early November last year, and the initial results were positive, Mohammad Jalal Al Reyaysa, director of communication and community service at Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority (ADFCA), said.

The research project is studying all those 100 varieties of wheat in terms of their productivity and suitability to local conditions, he said.

Al Salaamaat Research Stations of ADFCA in Al Ain are continuing the research project to find the wheat variety suitable for the emirate, Al Reyaysa said.

Any further decision on introducing the wheat in farms will be taken based on the final findings of the research, Al Reyaysa said.

The wheat samples were acquired from international research centres such as the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre, Mexico.

The official said the preliminary findings suggested the soil in the emirate was suitable for wheat cultivation.

About the feasibility of utilising huge amounts of water for wheat cultivation, Al Reyaysa said such aspects of large-scale farming were explored under broader research.

Asked the cost-effectiveness of domestic cultivation compared to the import of wheat, he said the research covers all such practical aspects and a final decision will be taken based on those findings.

Although the successful cultivation was carried out in the Al Ain region, the research is exploring the possible cultivation in other areas as well, the official said.

Asked whether the authority will go ahead with the cultivation as part of ensuring strategic food security, if even it is not cost-effective, Al Reyaysa said such a decision will not be made on that single aspect. "We will go ahead with the large-scale farming, considering the feasibility on all fronts," he said without giving any timeframe for the completion of the research.

He said the research on wheat is followed by a successful research on cultivation of citrus fruits in the emirate. "We have successfully introduced citrus fruits such as orange and lemon in farms in the emirate a year ago, based on a similar research," Al Reyaysa said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/environment/abu-dhabi-explores-wheat-cultivation-in-the-emirate-1.1136891>

- **Manama keen on reinforcing ties with Nato**

King Hamad laudes Nato's role in ensuring regional stability

Manama: Bahrain is keen to improve its relations and cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, King Hamad Bin Eisa Al Khalifa has said.

Receiving a delegation from Nato's Parliament Assembly Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Defence and Security Cooperation, King Hamad said that Bahrain, a major non-Nato ally, wanted to boost ties with the alliance and to exchange expertise in areas that reinforced security, stability and peace in the region and the world, Bahrain News Agency (BNA) reported.

The Bahraini monarch, whose country was declared a major non-Nato ally in 2002, praised Nato's "positive efforts and effective contributions to bringing peace and preserving security and stability in the

region and other areas throughout the world."

King Hamad also expressed his gratitude to Nato for its "keen interest in developing cooperation with Bahrain in the military and security fields."

The visiting delegation, headed by Sir John Stanley, included members from the UK, Turkey, France, Estonia, Belgium, Portugal, The Netherlands and Croatia. Bahrain and other Gulf Cooperation Council countries have been pushing for closer cooperation with the transatlantic alliance since 2004 when Nato launched the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative to "contribute to long-term global and regional security by offering GCC countries practical bilateral security cooperation with Nato. Nato officials said the ICI was complementary, but distinct from the Mediterranean Dialogue Nato launched in December 1994, with countries in North Africa and eastern Mediterranean.

Kuwait joined the ICI in December 2004, followed by Bahrain and Qatar in February 2005 and the UAE in June 2005.

In 2006, Kuwait was the first ICI country to host the North Atlantic Council for a conference on cooperation with Gulf Countries. The NAC later took part in conferences in Bahrain in 2008 and the UAE in 2009.

In December, Kuwait announced that it allocated a piece of land to Nato in Kuwait as part of the ICI.

“The move consolidates Kuwait’s interest in international missions, especially that Kuwait was the first GCC country to join the ICI,” Shaikh Sabah Al Khalid, the deputy prime minister and foreign minister, said.

The land will be used by Nato as a training site under the ICI, he added.

“We are interested in the region’s security and stability and in being partners with anyone who seeks to achieve them. We are also interested in facilitating everything that is related to our contacts and consultations with Nato,” the minister said, quoted by Kuwait News Agency (Kuna).

The Nato training site in Kuwait is the first to be set up in a GCC state.

At its Chicago summit in May, Nato in its final communique said that it looked forward to a better understanding of common security threats in the region.

“We will strengthen political dialogue and practical cooperation in the ICI,” the communique said. “We warmly welcome the generous offer by the State of Kuwait to host an ICI Regional Centre, which will help us to better understand common security challenges, and discuss how to address them together. We encourage our ICI partner countries to be proactive in exploiting the opportunities offered by their partnership with Nato. We remain open to receiving new members in the ICI,” the 28-member alliance said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/manama-keen-on-reinforcing-ties-with-nato-1.1136492>

- **Contacts initiated with political societies**

The nominated representatives will attend a meeting to agree on the agenda of the political dialogue

Manama: Bahrain's justice ministry on Wednesday launched contacts with political societies to nominate their representatives at the national dialogue. The representatives will attend the first meeting between the various components to agree on the agenda of the political dialogue, the ministry said in a statement.

The ministry said that it started the contacts based on the royal directives to invite political societies and independent personalities to continue the dialogue on political topics and build upon past achievements to reach further national agreements.

The justice minister has been tasked with implementing the drive to hold the talks aimed at breaking the political deadlock in the country.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/contacts-initiated-with-political-societies-1.1136681>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **US-led drone crashes in southeast Afghanistan**

Press TV

January 23, 2013

A spy drone belonging to the US-led forces in Afghanistan has crashed in the country's southeastern Paktika Province, Press TV reports.

The aircraft went down in the Jani Khel district of the Afghan province on Tuesday.

Taliban militants claimed that they had downed the spy drone.

NATO confirmed the crash in a statement on Wednesday. However, it did not provide any details about the cause of the incident.

The United States regularly uses drones for attacks and spying missions in Afghanistan, as well as in Pakistan's northwestern tribal belt near the Afghan border, among other places.

Washington claims that the airstrikes target militants, but local sources say civilians have been the main victims of the attacks.

In the latest such attack on Monday, dozens of people were killed in two successive drone strikes in Afghanistan's eastern Nuristan Province.

The United Nations says the US assassination drone attacks are "targeted killings" that flout international law.

The airstrikes were initiated under former US President George W. Bush, but have been escalated under incumbent President Barack Obama.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity remains across the country.

- **US-led soldier killed in Taliban attack in eastern Afghanistan**

Press TV

January 23, 2013

One US-led soldier serving with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been killed in an attack by the Taliban militants in eastern Afghanistan.

The US-led Western military alliance confirmed the Wednesday incident. However, there was no report on the exact location of the incident or the soldier's nationality.

Earlier on January 16, another US-led soldier was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) in war-torn Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, a British soldier serving in the Lashkar Gah district of Helmand Province also died at a UK hospital on the same day as a result of injuries he had received two days earlier in an IED blast in Afghanistan.

According to the website icasualties.org, a total of 3,255 US-led troops have lost their lives in Afghanistan since 2001, when the United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan as part of Washington's so-called war on terror.

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

Hundreds of foreign soldiers were killed in the war-torn country in 2012 alone.

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

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

- **1 Afghan policeman killed in blast in western province**

HERAT, Afghanistan, Jan. 23 (Xinhua) -- One Afghan policeman was killed and five were wounded when a bicycle bomb hit a police van in the country's western province of Herat Wednesday, acting-provincial police chief said.

"One service man with Fast-Reaction police forces were killed and five policemen were wounded as explosive attached to a bicycle went off in Muslakh area along the main road from provincial capital Heart city to bordering city of Islam Qala at about 12:30 p.m. local time," General Abdul Hamid Hamidi told Xinhua.

He said the police vehicle was running in the road when the blast took place. The

injured, some in critical conditions, were shifted to a nearby hospital.

He also said no civilian casualties were reported in the incident in the province 640 km west of capital Kabul.

Security forces have cordoned off the area for precautionary measures.

No group claimed responsibility for the attacks, but Taliban suspects routinely claim responsibility for such attacks. The Taliban, who ruled the country before they were ousted by a U.S.- led invasion in late 2001, renewed armed insurgency, staging ambush and suicide attacks, killing combatants as well as civilians.

On Monday, three unarmed traffic policemen were killed and 12 others including eight civilians were wounded when Taliban launched a coordinated attack against traffic police office building in Kabul, sparking an eight-hour gunbattle which left all five militants dead.

The government forces are taking the lead in providing security for the country as the Afghan army and police took full security responsibilities from U.S. and NATO forces

in areas where more than 75 percent of the population lives, parts of a process which will run through 2014 when Afghanistan takes over the full leadership of its own security duties.

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

- **23 newly graduate women join Afghan army in western province**

HERAT, Afghanistan, Jan. 23 (Xinhua) -- Nearly two dozen of newly graduate women were commissioned to Afghan National Army (ANA) in western province of Herat on Wednesday, an army official said.

"Up to 23 women after completion of four-month training course received their certificates and commissioned to ANA," commander of Army Corps 207 Zafar, General Taj Mohammad Jahid, told Xinhua.

The female officers will serve in the Corps 207 Zafar which provide security for western provinces, he said.

More than 1,000 women have been serving in Afghan army across the country.

The Afghan government and NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A) have stepped up efforts to train and equip Afghan police and army as NATO-led forces have handed over to Afghan forces the security responsibilities of areas where more than 75 percent of the population lives, parts of a process which will run through 2014 when Afghanistan takes over the full leadership of its own security duties.

<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 those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

*\*Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcısı Nebahat Tanriverdi O** tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir.*



ORSAM

ORTADOĐU STRATEJİK ARAŐTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES  
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ  
ÖZGÜR DÜŐÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT  
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION

*Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*