



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

**Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries**

**Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset**

**The Restructuring Proces of Iraq**

**Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci**

**Energy Security**

**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**  
**02 JANUARY 2013**  
**NO: 1522**

<b>1. IRAQ.....</b>	<b>2</b>
• The Arabs in Kirkuk ask the Arab league to help them. ....	2
• Iraqiya MP: Iraqiya coalition holds an emergency meeting today.....	2
• Al-Maliki: The cancellation of decisions and laws is within the powers of the parliament. ....	3
• Al-Mutlaq, al-Nujaifi discuss the latest developments in Iraq. ....	4
• Muqtada al-Sader criticizes al-Maliki. ....	5
• Iraq PM warns Sunni protesters, makes small concession .....	6
<b>2. IRAN .....</b>	<b>8</b>
• Iran self-sufficient in electronic warfare equipment: Cmdr.....	8
• Velayat 91 drill displays Iran's defensive powers: Navy cmdr.....	9
• Iran not meddling in regional states: deputy FM .....	10
• Iran blasts Obama for Latin America law .....	12
<b>3. SYRIA.....</b>	<b>13</b>
• Syria begins 2013 with shelling and clashes.....	13
<b>4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE .....</b>	<b>15</b>
• Settler-Palestinian clashes near Esh Kodesh enter 2nd day.....	15
• Likud politicians call on Israel to annex Area C .....	17
• Jerusalem presses case for EU to ban Hezbollah .....	20
• PM: Hamas could replace PA if peace deal rushed .....	21
• Olmert warns Israelis not to vote Tzipi Livni Party.....	24
• Dozens injured in Jenin clashes after undercover Israeli arrest raid .....	25
<b>5. AFRICA and EGYPT .....</b>	<b>26</b>
• Egypt's foreign policy won't change, but leadership being put to test.....	26
• Copts and Muslims commemorate Two Saints Church bombing .....	30
• Egypt cracks down on satirists and media .....	31
<b>6. JORDAN and LEBANON.....</b>	<b>33</b>
• Riot at Lebanon's Roumieh prison contained .....	33
<b>7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....</b>	<b>34</b>
• UAE busts cell 'linked to Egypt Brotherhood' .....	34
<b>8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN .....</b>	<b>36</b>
• Afghan negotiator welcomes release of Taliban.....	36

## 1. IRAQ

- **The Arabs in Kirkuk ask the Arab league to help them.**

Kirkuk / NINA / Arab Political Council in Kirkuk called the Secretary General of the Arab League Nabil Elaraby and all Arab countries not to stay idle and leave the Arab people of Kirkuk among the agendas and what it called shaky positions. "

The council explained in a statement today 2, Jan "through statements made in some media that some leaders of Turkmen stated that the Turkish state does not object to consider Kirkuk within Kurdistan .. we, the Arabs in Kirkuk and the representatives of the political Council of Arab, say that Kirkuk is an Iraqi city and we will defend Kirkuk because it is a matter of life or death .

The Council called on the Arab world "to protect this component that is steadfast since 2003 and to support the central government and strengthen its position towards Kirkuk and the people of Kirkuk against the ambitions of the Kurdish parties."

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

- **Iraqiya MP: Iraqiya coalition holds an emergency meeting today.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Mohammed al-Khalidi said "that the Iraqiya coalition will hold an emergency meeting today to discuss the current political crisis and the call for an emergency session of the House of Representatives next Sunday."

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / "The Iraqiya coalition, since the beginning of the crisis, is in ongoing meetings in order to reach solutions," noting that "today's meeting will discuss the call of the House Speaker Osama Nujaifi to hold an emergency session of parliament on Sunday."

Khalidi expressed hope that the Council will gather to achieve a quorum to hold the meeting and discuss the latest developments in the political arena over the demands expressed by the masses in many of the provinces through demonstrations and sit-ins. "

The House Speaker Osama Nujaifi called for a special session of the House of Representatives on Sunday to discuss the current political crisis.

It is mentioned that several provinces have witnessed, during the past few days, sit- ins and protests over poor services and the deterioration of the security situation as well as disorder in the political arena . The sit-in and demonstrations in Anbar province and other provinces demand to release detainees and cancel the Article 4 of terrorism and re- consider the accountability and justice law and other demands.

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

- **Al-Maliki: The cancellation of decisions and laws is within the powers of the parliament.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki confirmed that "The cancellation of decisions and laws is within the powers of the parliament , not within the authorities of the government or the Prime Minister."

A statement of Maliki's Office quoting him as saying, in a letter to the Iraqi people today 2, January, "We are following, with great concern, what is happening in a number of provinces where demonstrations are demanding to achieve a number of demands that we believe some are legitimate demands, which some were mingled with some other demands that fundamentally in contradict with the nature of the political system in the country, which we must resort to the Constitution and the law, and not to provide the opportunity for the enemies of the political process of the armed groups and terrorist groups and former regime to penetrate the demonstrations. Their attempts are clear to ride the wave that will lead to chaos and unrest and threatening the national unity and civil peace and drag the country to sectarian fighting. "

He added "We draw the attention of all the Iraqi people that the Council of Ministers as well as the prime minister do not have the constitutional authority to cancel laws that legalized by the House of Representatives, especially the law of accountability and justice and anti-terrorism law. The general amnesty law is not approved in the House of Representatives so far , and here is the serious paradox that raised question marks about some big parties and political figures in the political process of mixing the things when they call on the government to cancel these laws and they know it is the responsibility of Parliament not the government.

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

- **Al-Mutlaq, al-Nujaifi discuss the latest developments in Iraq.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq discussed with House Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi the latest developments in the political arena.

A statement by the Mutlaq's Office today 2,Junauary said: "al-Nujaifi and Mutlaq discussed, during the meeting, the call to the House of Representatives to hold an emergency session to discussed the protests and demonstrations in some of the Iraqi provinces in addition to the agreement to call the Iraqiya coalition to an urgent and comprehensive meeting in order to discuss the call for the Parliament to hold an emergency meeting."

The statement added that "The views were close on the demands of the demonstrators and they also stressed the importance of responding to these demand as a legitimate demands represent the concerns of the Iraqi people."

The statement continued, "in the meeting, they call the political blocs to work seriously in the parliament and in the government in order to implement these demands."

Nujaifi Congratulated Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq for his safety from the assassination attempt against him recently.

The House Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi called to hold a special session of the House of Representatives on Sunday to discuss the current political crisis.

A source in the Office of al-Nujaifi told / NINA / yesterday that "House Speaker called on Council members to attend a special meeting to discuss the latest developments in the political arena in the light of widespread protests, demonstrations and sit-ins across the country."

It is mentioned that several provinces have witnessed, during the past few days, sit- ins and protests over poor services and the deterioration of the security situation as well as disorder in the political arena . The sit-in and demonstrations in Anbar province and other provinces demand to release detainees and cancel the Article 4 of terrorism and re- consider the accountability and justice law and other demands.

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

- **Muqtada al-Sader criticizes al-Maliki.**

Najaf / NINA / the leader of the Sadrist movement, Muqtada al-Sadr attacked the prime minister Nuri al-Maliki , accusing him of removing others.

Al-Sadre accused Maliki of excluding others, partners, and tied their hands and he turned all nations against Iraq.

Al-Sader criticized what he called getting power and seek to dictatorship and multiple responsibilities, accusing Prime Minister to be silent about corruption and corrupters .

About the demonstrations taking place in Anbar and other provinces, he said that the Iraqi people has the right to demonstrate, saying that he warned more than that and warned that Iraqi Spring is coming and no one cares and I want to go and share with the people of Anbar, but what prevented me is raising the pictures of Saddam and sectarian slogans.

About civil disobedience in some provincial Sader said: "Although I would not advise this option, but it could be the last option.

Al-Sader said he would like to meet with the scholar Sheikh Abdul-Malik al-Saadi and he considers him as one of the national symbols that he wants the unit for Iraq in his advice to the demonstrators.

Sader denied that this support for the demonstrations is a beginning of a new alliances ahead of the elections, noting that he finds compelled to direct such a speech because he is a cleric and would like to advice Maliki.

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

- **Iraq PM warns Sunni protesters, makes small concession**

BAGHDAD (Reuters) -- Iraq's Shite prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, has warned he will not tolerate Sunni anti-government rallies indefinitely, but made a concession to their demands by promising to free some women prisoners.

Thousands of Sunnis have been taking to the streets of Iraq for more than a week in protest against Maliki, whom they accuse of discriminating against their sect and being under the sway of their non-Arab Shiite neighbour Iran.

The incident has once more threatened to plunge a delicate power-sharing deal into turmoil, just as President Jalal Talabani, a moderating influence, is in Germany for medical care after suffering a stroke.

The cradle of the protests is Anbar province, a Sunni stronghold in western Iraq, where demonstrators are blocking a key highway to Jordan and Syria.

In a televised interview late on Monday, Maliki said there were foreign agendas behind the protests, which he described as "unconstitutional".

"I say to those who follow these agendas: Don't think it's difficult for the government to take measures against you or to re-open the road and put an end to this matter," Maliki said.

"We have been very patient with you, but don't expect this issue to be open-ended."

The protesters are demanding an end to what they see as the marginalisation of the Sunni minority, who dominated Iraq until the US-led invasion of 2003 toppled Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein.

They want Maliki to abolish anti-terrorism laws that they say he has used to pursue political rivals such as the Sunni vice president, Tareq al-Hashemi, who fled after being accused of running death squads and was sentenced to death in absentia.

Sunni anger was re-ignited when Maliki evoked memories of that incident by detaining the bodyguards of his Sunni finance minister, Rafea al-Esawi, hours after Talabani was flown out.

Leading Sunni cleric Khaled al-Mullah, a participant in negotiations between the protesters and the government, said Maliki had acceded to one Sunni demand.

"In our first meeting with Prime Minister Maliki, he promised us that he will write a special pardon for all women who have criminal charges," Mullah said.

He put the number of female prisoners in Iraqi jails at 920, and said around 700 of them would be eligible for release.

Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, a rival of Maliki's, voiced support for the protesters' demands and said Iraq was not immune to the changes transforming the region.

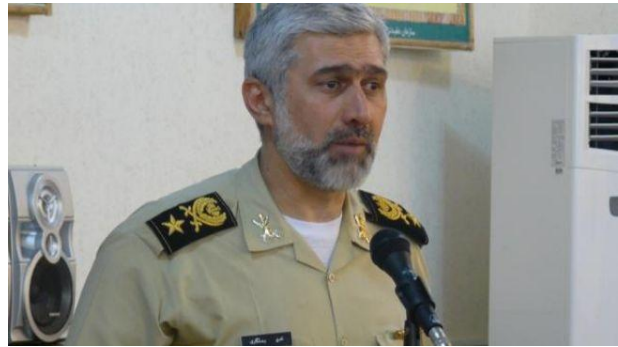
"I have said before: The Arab Spring is coming and Iraq's spring will come too," Sadr told a news conference in the Shi'ite holy city of Najaf.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=552779>

## 2. IRAN

- **Iran self-sufficient in electronic warfare equipment: Cmdr.**

Spokesman for Iran's Velayat 91 naval drill Rear Admiral Amir Rastegari says the Islamic Republic is self-sufficient in electronic warfare equipment.



"Despite sanctions, we have developed capabilities that have made us independent from other countries in electronic warfare equipment," Rastegari said on the sidelines of the final day of the massive naval maneuvers on Wednesday.

The Iranian commander noted that Iran's Defense Ministry has developed communication, radar and signal technologies to identify and counter hostile electromagnetic waves and launch necessary offensives.

Rastegari also announced that modern electronic warfare systems were tested on surface and sub-surface vessels as well as air defense units during the last day of the Velayat 91 naval drill.

Iran's Navy launched the six-day naval drill on December 28, 2012, in order to display the country's capabilities in defending its maritime borders.

The specialized maritime maneuver covers an area from east of the Strait of Hormuz in the Sea of Oman to north of the Indian Ocean as far as the 18th parallel north.

The Iranian Navy successfully test-fired the latest version of the indigenous surface-to-air missile Ra'd (Thunder) and launched its indigenous short-range cruise missile dubbed Nasr (Victory) on the fourth day of the major military exercises.

Over the past few years, Iran has held several military drills to enhance the defensive capabilities of its armed forces and to test modern military tactics and equipment.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly assured other nations, especially its neighbors, that its military might poses no threat to other countries, stating that its defense doctrine is based on deterrence.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/02/281371/iran-selfreliant-in-ewarfare-equipment/>

- **Velayat 91 drill displays Iran's defensive powers: Navy cmdr.**

Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari says the Velayat 91 military drill displays the country's defensive capabilities and power and conveys the message of peace and friendship to regional countries.



“The objectives of the Velayat 91 drill are to display the Islamic Republic’s power in establishing security in seas and to convey the message of peace and friendship to regional countries,” Sayyari said on Tuesday night.

He added that the drill show the Islamic Republic’s capabilities in defending the country’s borders and the Navy’s ability to provide security in waters, in particular the Strait of Hormuz, the Sea of Oman and north of the Indian Ocean.

The Iranian Navy launched the Velayat 91 drill on December 28.

According to an earlier announcement by the Iranian Navy commander, the specialized maritime maneuver covers an area from “east of the Strait of Hormuz in the Sea of Oman and north of the Indian Ocean as far as the 18th parallel north.”

Sayyari added that the Velayat 91 drill was different from previous maneuvers as the Navy significantly enhanced the capabilities of its military equipment, including submarines, torpedoes, missile-launching warships, shore-to-sea and surface-to-air missiles, and carried out the drill in a large area of one million square meters.

Over the past few years, Iran has held several military drills.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly assured other nations, especially its neighbors, that its military might poses no threat to other countries, stating that its defense doctrine is based on deterrence.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/02/281363/velayat-91-drill-displays-iran-power/>

- **Iran not meddling in regional states: deputy FM**

A senior Iranian Foreign Ministry official has dismissed claims that Iran is meddling in the internal affairs of regional countries.

“Iran’s strategy toward all regional countries is based on friendship, good neighborliness, and mutual respect,” IRNA quoted Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian as saying on Tuesday.

He went on to say that the false allegations about the Islamic Republic are being made by those countries that clearly support the war in Syria or whose military forces are still present on the Persian Gulf island of Bahrain.

The Iranian official denounced the Bahraini government’s ongoing crackdown on anti-regime protesters as a “blatant violation of human rights” and said the current situation in the country “threatens regional security.”

Since mid-February 2011, thousands of pro-democracy protesters have staged numerous demonstrations in the streets of Bahrain, calling for the Al Khalifa royal family to relinquish power.

On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates invaded the country to assist the Bahraini government in its crackdown on the peaceful protesters.

According to local sources, scores of people have been killed and hundreds arrested in the crackdown.

Physicians for Human Rights says doctors and nurses have been detained, tortured, or disappeared because they have "evidence of atrocities committed by the authorities, security forces, and riot police" in the crackdown on anti-government protesters.

The protesters say they will continue holding anti-regime demonstrations until their demand for the establishment of a democratically elected government is met.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/02/281338/iran-not-meddling-in-regional-states/>

- **Iran blasts Obama for Latin America law**

Foreign ministry in Tehran criticises Obama for enacting law aimed at countering its alleged influence in Latin America.



Iran has blasted US President Barack Obama for enacting a law aimed at countering Tehran's alleged influence in Latin America, saying it was an overt intervention in the region.

"It is an overt intervention in Latin American affairs... that shows they are not familiar with new world relations," Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told reporters on Tuesday.

The United States, he said, "still lives in the Cold War era and considers Latin America as its backyard".

"We recommend that they respect the nations' right in today's world... world public opinion does not accept such an interventionist move."

Mehmanparast said Tehran's relation with all nations, in particular with Latin American countries, was "friendly" based on "mutual respect and interest".

On Friday, Obama enacted the law which through a new diplomatic and political strategy to be designed by the State Department is aimed to counter Iran's alleged influence in Latin America.

The Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act, passed by legislators earlier in 2012, calls for the department to develop a strategy within 180 days to "address Iran's growing hostile presence and activity" in the region.

The text also calls on the Department of Homeland Security to bolster surveillance at US borders with Canada and Mexico to "prevent operatives from Iran, the IRGC (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps), its Quds Force, Hezbollah or any other terrorist organisation from entering the United States".

However, senior State Department and intelligence officials have indicated there is no apparent indication of illicit activities by Iran.

Iran, placed under a series of international sanctions because of its suspect nuclear programme, has opened six new embassies in the region since 2005 - bringing the total to 11 - and 17 cultural centres.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/01/20131111127195912.html>

### 3. SYRIA

- **Syria begins 2013 with shelling and clashes**

Many Syrians woken on New Year's Day to sound of aerial bombardment as officials confirm Aleppo airport has been closed.

Many Syrians woke up on New Year's Day to the sound of countrywide aerial bombardment by government forces, as officials said that the international airport in the country's second city had been temporarily closed due to repeated attacks by rebel fighters.



The closure of the aviation hub in Aleppo came as President Bashar al-Assad's forces bombarded rebel-held areas and clashed with opposition fighters in several towns.

"There have been continued attempts by opposition militants to target civilian aircraft, which could cause a humanitarian disaster," an official at the airport told the AFP news agency on condition of anonymity on Tuesday.

The official said the airport would be closed for a "very short period of time" while the army sought to regain control of surrounding areas where many rebels had set up base.

However, authorities said that the airport was closed for maintenance work to the runway and other facilities.

Fighting in Aleppo has been at a stalemate for months since July when opposition fighters launched a massive assault on the city, Syria's most populated city.

Meanwhile, in Damascus, residents entered the new year to the sound of artillery hitting southern and eastern districts that form a rebel-held crescent on the outskirts of the capital, the centre of which is still firmly under government control.

'No Happy New Year'

Many soldiers manning checkpoints in the centre fired celebratory gunfire at midnight, causing alarm in a city where streets were largely deserted.

"How can they celebrate? There is no 'Happy New Year'," Moaz al-Shami, an opposition activists who lives in the central Mezzeh district, said.

Shami said rebel fighters attacked one checkpoint in the district of Berzeh early on Tuesday.

Opposition groups said mortar bombs hit the southwest suburb of Daraya, where the army launched a military offensive on Monday to retake the battered district.

The air force pounded Damascus's eastern suburbs, opposition activists said.

An estimated 45,000 people have been killed in the revolt, which started in early 2011 with peaceful protests demanding democratic reforms but turned into an armed uprising after months of attacks on protesters by security forces.

In the central city of Homs, shells landed on the Old City neighbourhoods early on Tuesday, activists said

"The Old City is under siege. There is shelling from all sides," a resident there said.

Homs lies on the strategic north-south highway and parts of the ancient city have been levelled during months of clashes.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based monitoring group, reported 160 people killed on the final day of 2012, including at least 37 government troops.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201311142753400258.html>

## 4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **Settler-Palestinian clashes near Esh Kodesh enter 2nd day**

Clashes break out between settlers and Palestinians farming under IDF protection near West Bank outpost; violence follows arrest of 4 Israelis, injury of 2 border police officers.

Clashes broke out for the second day running between Palestinians and settlers outside the West Bank outpost of Esh Kodesh near the Shiloh settlement Wednesday morning, Army Radio reported.

IDF forces accompanied the Palestinians to the area on Wednesday in order to allow them plough a tract of land they own near the outpost. However, according to outpost inhabitants, the land belongs to residents of Esh Kodesh.

Settler residents of Esh Kodesh held prayers on Wednesday morning in the area, which appears to have sparked the conflict with Palestinian residents for a second day.

On Tuesday, two Border Police officers were lightly injured and four Israelis were arrested during clashes that occurred near the Esh Kodesh outpost.

According to security sources, a recent High Court of Justice ruling mandated that the Palestinians be allowed to plough a tract of land near the outpost. Aron Katsof, a resident of Esh Kodesh, said outpost inhabitants have cultivated that field for 10 years and that the issue is still in the midst of a legal dispute.

The army, he said, notified them at 10 p.m. on Monday that Palestinians would arrive to work the land the next morning, said Katsof.

In reaction to the news, women and children from the outpost went to the field and held a picnic, said Katsof, who was at the scene during the incident. He alleged that Border Police violently evicted Esh Kodesh residents from the field, including shooting tear gas and stun grenades at the women and children.

Katsof added that the IDF tried to stop the Border Police from targeting the women and children.

The Border Police said it had responded to a stone-throwing incident involving Palestinians and settlers near Esh Kodesh and had used riot dispersal means, denying that its officers had attacked women and children.

Katsof provided The Jerusalem Post with video clips that showed women and children in the field. In some of the footage, Border Police officers could be seen hitting male settlers with a baton as they stood there.

Katsof said that Palestinians stood on a hill above the scene, threw stones and at times sang nationalistic songs in Arabic about attacking Tel Aviv.

He warned that the IDF and Border Police actions against the Esh Kodesh residents only emboldened Palestinian hostility toward the outpost and its residents lives.

Security sources in turn said they were investigating an incident that occurred in the middle of the night in which settlers vandalized about 100 trees belonging to the Kusra village. It further alleged that the settlers entered the village and destroyed windows and vandalized a tractor.

The Yesh Din NGO similarly told the Post that settlers had attacked the village, including entering a home. It added that it counted 220 vandalized olive trees.

Katsof denied the report, noting that the IDF and Border Police were already watching the outpost overnight, and that it would have been impossible for its residents to have engaged in such activity.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=298124>

- **Likud politicians call on Israel to annex Area C**



Edelstein, Elkin say lack of annexation strengthens international community's demand for withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines.

Israeli annexation of the West Bank's Area C – where all settlements are located – received public support from two high-ranking Likud politicians on Tuesday evening, Public Diplomacy Minister Yuli Edelstein and MK Ze'ev Elkin.

“Lack of Israeli sovereignty over Area C means the continuation of the status quo,” said Edelstein, as he spoke about an area of the country that is now under Israeli military control. “It strengthens the international community's demand for a withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines.”

But Edelstein and Elkin cautioned that annexation was a process that should happen slowly, not immediately.

The two men were among a lineup of speakers at a Jerusalem conference organized by Women in Green, on the “Application of Israeli Sovereignty over Judea and Samaria.” It is the group's third annual conference on this topic.

Support for annexation has increased in the aftermath of the UN's General Assembly decision in November to upgrade the Palestinian status to that of non-member observer state.

Former Foreign Ministry legal adviser Alan Baker warned the conference that annexation was an abrogation of the 1993 Oslo Accords, in which Israel and the Palestinians committed to resolve their dispute through negotiations, rather than unilateral measures.

“Israel recognized its right to annex Area C, but has chosen not to do so for diplomatic reasons,” said Baker, who explained that he did not support such a move because of its diplomatic

implications. “We have committed ourselves to negotiations in the Oslo Accord, which is still in effect, whether we like it or not.”

As one of the three legal experts who penned the Levy Report, which stated that Israel has a legal right under international law to settle Area C of the West Bank, he said he believed that the government should focus on strengthening the Jewish right to build over the pre- 1967 lines, adding that it should “stop apologizing all the time.”

Baker explained that “no one can deny the Jewish people its place as an indigenous people” on both sides of the pre-1967 lines. But he noted that international opinion increasingly refused to recognize this “historical fact.”

European politicians, he said, have shifted their language with regard to the West Bank from “disputed territories” to “occupied Palestinian territories.”

But Elkin said he disagreed with Baker. If the Palestinians do not have to adhere to the Oslo Accords, than neither do Israelis, he said.

MK Yariv Levin (Likud) said he supported annexation but did not believe it was that feasible. Instead, he urged politicians to focus on applying individual Israeli laws to West Bank settlements and its residents, rather than tackling the issue on a global scale. The same building laws should apply equally to Tel Aviv and to settlements in Judea and Samaria, he said.

Edelstein said, however, that it must be clear that Israel is moving toward annexation, or it weakens any argument it makes about Israel’s right to Judea and Samaria.

He noted that such a step would not end the international debate over Area C, as evidenced by the storm of controversy that continues to rage over Israeli sovereignty in east Jerusalem.

“Application of sovereignty does not automatically resolve the issue of disputed territories, as we say in the international legal language, but it is an important step that expresses our approach,” he said.

Failure to make such a strong statement, Edelstein added, “is like saying [Judea and Samaria] is not the legal wife, but a mistress.”

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=298082>

- **Jerusalem presses case for EU to ban Hezbollah**

Efforts focus on terror group’s links to 2005 Hariri murder, role in destabilizing Syria, 2000 kidnapping of Israeli businessman.



BERLIN – The Israeli government is redoubling its efforts to convince the European Union to outlaw Hezbollah within the 27-member body because of the Lebanese group’s record of terrorism.

According to reports in the Hebrew media, Israel’s new case involves showing Hezbollah’s role in the 2005 murder of Lebanese president Rafik Hariri, based on evidence culled from the international tribunal that investigated the bombing.

US Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the Republican head of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, tweeted on Monday that “Europe’s logic is baffling! It’s time 4 Europe 2 call Hezbollah what it is: a Terrorist Organization.”

In 2005, the EU parliament issued a resolution condemning Hezbollah for its terror activities in connection with Hariri’s murder. Policy- and lawmakers within the EU have ignored the resolution.

Israel is slated to reveal documentary material about Hezbollah's role in destabilizing Syria and joining forces with Bashar Assad's regime in the ongoing campaign to obliterate that country's pro-reform movement. Hezbollah's narcotics and money-laundering operations are part of Israel's dossier.

According to Ma'ariv, Hezbollah's 2000 kidnapping of Elhanan Tannenbaum is part of the documentation.

Tannenbaum, an Israeli businessman and a reserve colonel in the IDF, was released as part of a prisoner exchange in 2004.

Israel's Foreign Ministry is concerned about a number of European objections. The Europeans believe Hezbollah, like Hamas, will challenge a ban in European courts based on insufficient evidence. The EU included Hamas in its terror list in 2003, but Hamas has challenged the ruling. The EU court in Luxembourg is expected to rule on the ban.

Germany, where there are 950 active Hezbollah members, and France have showed no interest in a Hezbollah ban.

<http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=298116>

- **PM: Hamas could replace PA if peace deal rushed**

Netanyahu says in spite of "voices urging concessions," he will avoid allowing a "third Iranian terror base" by putting security first.



In apparent criticism of President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu culled from this Shabbat's Torah portion to explain Tuesday why it would be foolish to run headlong into a peace agreement with the Palestinians that would entail deep concessions.

Netanyahu, in comments made before hosting at his Jerusalem residence his third Bible study session since May, quoted from the first chapter of Exodus: "A new king arose over Egypt who did not know of Joseph."

"That is true today as it was then," he said.

"The regime has changed in Egypt, in Syria the government is shaking, and that can happen as well in the Palestinian Authority territories in Judea and Samaria."

Netanyahu said that every sensible person understands that Hamas could take control of the Palestinian Authority, as it did in Gaza. "Therefore, contrary to the voices I hear in recent days encouraging me to run ahead, make concessions, withdraw, I think the diplomatic process needs to be managed in a responsible, not hysterical, manner, and with wisdom, not hastily. Otherwise a third Iranian terror base [in addition to Gaza and southern Lebanon] will be established in the heart of the country. Peace can only be achieved when security is guaranteed."

Peres on Sunday said Israel should embrace the changes in the Middle East, saying it has the choice of either sitting passively as things happen around it, or taking the initiative and with courageous steps positively influencing events.

Tuesday's 2 1/2 hour Bible study session marked the third installment of the Prime Minister's Bible Study Circle, something that began under David Ben-Gurion and continued when Menachem Begin was prime minister. It is dedicated to Sara Netanyahu's father, Shmuel Ben-Artzi, a noted Bible teacher and enthusiast who passed away in November 2011.

Unlike on the two previous occasions, this time Netanyahu's two sons – Yair and Avner – took an active part in the discussions. Avner, Netanyahu's younger son, asked why Pharaoh – if he was

interested in an effective slave force -- would opt to kill the boys, but keep the girls alive; while Yair asked what it meant that no archeological evidence of the Israelites' sojourn in Egypt has ever been found.

Netanyahu, explaining how during his first term in office he asked the Turkish prime minister at the time to return the Shiloach inscription to Israel, said that concrete, solid, scientific evidence going back thousands of years was important in proving Israel's connection to the land at a time when many were trying to falsify history.

The Shiloach inscription is a passage of Hebrew text dating back to the 8th century BCE recording the construction of the Hezekiah tunnel that brought water from the Gihon Spring to the Shiloach pool. The Turks turned down his request, Netanyahu said, noting – jokingly – that it will be much more difficult to convince today's Turkish prime minister to return the historic inscription.

Netanyahu asked the rabbis and scholars in his home two questions: when was the book of Exodus written, and what parallels are there to the Exodus story in ancient lore.

While no definitive answer was given to Netanyahu's first question, Rabbi Yaakov Meidan, the co-head of Yeshivat Har Etzion in Alon Shvut, did not look for ancient parallels to the story, but instead drew a parallel between the assimilated Moses – who saved his people – to the assimilated Theodor Herzl. Netanyahu said he found that parallel very apt.

The session was led by Tel Aviv chief rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, and included – among others – IDF chief rabbi Rafi Peretz, Efrat chief rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Tel Aviv University biblical scholar Yaira Amit, and radio linguist Avshalom Kor.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=298078>

- **Olmert warns Israelis not to vote Tzipi Livni Party**

Former prime minister lashes out against Livni, Yacimovich, Netanyahu; sings praises of Kadima chairman Shaul Mofaz.

Former prime minister Ehud Olmert lashed out at his foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, Tuesday, warning Israelis not to vote for her Tzipi Livni Party.

Speaking at an event for Kadima mayors in Ramat Gan, Olmert sung the praises of current Kadima chairman Shaul Mofaz and mocked the Tzipi Livni Party's slogan.

"I hear that the hope will vanquish the fear," Olmert said. "That is indeed a nice slogan and I am not against slogans. But what is the practical content behind it? If there is anyone who has already proven that he knows how to defeat fear in the streets and provide security and hope to the citizens of Israel, it is the man who as IDF chief of staff commanded over Operation Defensive Shield and defeated the second Intifada."

Olmert also did not spare criticism for Labor leader Shelly Yacimovich. He slammed the socioeconomic plan that Yacimovich unveiled last month and presented further Monday in a mock debate with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

"Labor wants to add billions to the budget," Olmert said. "Did they bother to find a source for funding that? This is populist, shoddy work. It displays a lack of credibility and a lack of experience."

A Labor spokesman responded that Labor was the only party with a comprehensive, responsible, and serious socioeconomic plan. the spokesman made reference to the ongoing criminal investigations against Olmert and said he would be wise to remain silent.

"Olmert, in his present situation, would do himself a lot of good if he would refrain from interfering in this election," the Labor spokesman said. "When Olmert was prime minister, social services were privatized, socioeconomic gaps widened, and the middle class was harmed."

Olmert saved the bulk of his criticism for Netanyahu, who he said was incapable of making decisions and is unfit to remain prime minister. He said Netanyahu had claimed credit for achievements of Olmert's government.

He urged voters to look at the list of candidates on the cusp of entering the Knesset in the polls before deciding what party to vote for in the January 22 election.

"Do you know who number 30 is in the Likud?" Olmert asked. "Do you know who is 15th in Labor? Or 10th on Livni's list? I know who is first on Kadima's list: A man who has brought a lot of benefit to the state, and that is why I felt compelled to stand beside him."

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=298067>

- **Dozens injured in Jenin clashes after undercover Israeli arrest raid**

TUBAS (Ma'an) -- At least thirty people were injured during clashes in a Jenin village on Tuesday after an undercover Israeli arrest operation in the area, Ma'an's correspondent said.

Israeli forces raided the village of Tamoun, south Jenin and arrested Murad Bani Odeh, a member of Islamic Jihad, leading to clashes with residents, a local official told Ma'an.

At least thirty people were wounded in the clashes, with live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas fired by Israeli soldiers, head of a local committee against settlements Ahmed Assad said.

One man was hit in the eye with a tear gas canister and taken to hospital for treatment and over 100 people suffered smoke inhalation from tear gas.

Dozens of Israeli military jeeps arrived in the area as reinforcements during the clashes and set up checkpoints at the entrances to the village, preventing people from leaving, Assad added.

Locals said that the Israeli soldiers were disguised as vegetable vendors during the arrest operation, The Associated Press reported.

The soldiers were part of Israel's Mistaarvim, or Arabized, elite unit, Israeli media reported.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=552724>

## 5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt's foreign policy won't change, but leadership being put to test**

Many would expect that, as an organization ascending to power from political isolation, the Muslim Brotherhood would engage in a foreign policy spree of weaving new relations with both old and new partners.

Idealists would certainly expect that, as an organization coming to power following a popular revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood would enact radical changes to foreign policy.

But in practice, neither expectation has been met.

For some analysts, Egypt's entrenched global relations are too intricate to be undone, tied as they are to questions of regional security. For others, domestic unrest, coming in multiple forms and from various sources, poses an impediment to Egypt's development of an astute and creative foreign policy.

Initial gestures to deepen relations with non-traditional partners (since taking office President Mohamed Morsy has visited Africa twice and China once) suggested that the Brotherhood would take Egyptian foreign policy in new directions. But many observers agree, all in all, that over the last six months the Muslim Brotherhood has reproduced Mubarak-era policies, and that it will continue to do so in the year to come. Despite this continuity, Egypt's allies are adapting to the country's new leadership in different ways.

### The Gulf

A strong bond ties Egypt to the Gulf, based on both being counterbalances to Iran's perceived Shia expansion in the region. Yet the configuration of political Islam in Egypt, in the form of Muslim Brotherhood rule, remains disconcerting for some Gulf players.

Sultan al-Qassemi, a columnist on Gulf affairs, argues that the Gulf states, save Qatar, are concerned with the Egyptian Brotherhood's choices and extent to which it will support regional Brotherhood offshoots in Jordan, Yemen and Syria.

For example, the United Arab Emirates is expected to put alleged affiliates of an unauthorized Muslim Brotherhood cell on trial in 2013. "How their Egyptian counterparts react will determine relations between Abu Dhabi and Cairo for years to come," Qassemi says.

### Israel

Morsy's successful brokering of a truce between Israel and Gaza following November's attack on the Strip was a relief to those concerned about the new Islamist leadership's antagonistic rhetoric. Banking on the organic ties between the Muslim Brotherhood and the militant Hamas government in Gaza, Israel may believe that Egypt's new leadership will be an even more efficient security contractor than the Mubarak regime.

But the truce leaves the right-wing Israeli government concerned about the state of the peace accords and the perceived rise in threats from militants in the neighboring Sinai Peninsula.

Despite the truce, Iman Hamdy, a professor of political science at the American University in Cairo, believes that the most Egypt can do for Gaza is provide moral support, as it did during the latest Israeli attack, and open its border with Egypt.

### The United States

The US appears to be waiting to see how events in Egypt unfold, considering the unknown consequences of the passage of the constitution and upcoming parliamentary elections. For now, the state of bilateral relations remains confused.

“The Egyptian opposition falsely imagines that there is a deal between the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, America wants to know who it should deal with,” Michael Hanna, a fellow at the New York-based Century Foundation, argues. “Even if it prefers to deal with a secular opposition, it made mistakes in the past in not dealing with Islamists, and so now it is trying to work with them.”

Traditional interests will continue to define the Egypt-US relationship, with regional security at the top of the list.

“I expect relations between Egypt and the US to continue to be driven by the principle that in politics, there are no permanent friends, only permanent interests,” says Elijah Zarwan, an analyst with the European Council on Foreign Relations.

“So long as certain conditions are met, the US foreign policy establishment seems willing to back whichever side they think will win, which for the moment remains the elected government,” he continues.

But Hanna contends that while America respects the results of the ballot box, this doesn't mean that it is pursuing the same policies it practiced with the Mubarak regime, whereby it closed its eyes to repression of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood in return for concrete foreign policy concessions. "[The US] knows the Egyptian people will not close their eyes to repression," Hanna says.

Similarly, Zarwan argues, "I don't know if the Brotherhood is fully aware of the problems that await it from the US Congress...they may confuse the Obama administration with Washington."

Turkey

Egyptian-Turkish relations have seen the first signs of rapprochement. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan took a positive stance toward the Egyptian revolution, and Turkey repeatedly offered assistance to Egypt, in what several Turkish scholars describe as a quest to deepen Turkey's position and influence in the region.

Meanwhile, Turkey's Justice and Development Party serves as a source of inspiration for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in the way that it is a religious party — variously described as moderate and modern — that has deployed its control gradually over the country, as well as cultivated productive foreign relations.

Mostafa al-Labbad, director of Al-Sharq Center for Regional and Strategic Studies in Cairo, says that while there is no fundamental change in Egypt's policy toward Israel and the United States, and no serious reconciliation with Iran, the one clear change might be the consolidation of links with Turkey.

But while the warming of Egyptian-Turkish relations may seem to be a win-win for both parties, Hanna sees major ideological differences between the Justice and Development Party and the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party.

“Religion plays virtually no role in political and social life in Turkey, while religion is everywhere in Egyptian society. Erdogan’s party and the Muslim Brotherhood are different,” Hanna says.

Indeed, Erdogan’s statements during a recent visit to Cairo that secularism is the most appropriate form of government attracted stinging criticism from the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi groups.

Given these obstacles, developments in bilateral economic relations are more likely, particularly given the expanded regional role that Turkey seeks to play and its expressed support for Islamist movements.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-s-foreign-policy-won-t-change-leadership-being-put-test>

- **Copts and Muslims commemorate Two Saints Church bombing**

The Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Saint Mark Episcopate Tawadros II held New Year's mass at the Two Saints Church in Alexandria, without prior notice, to mark the second anniversary of the bombing on New Year's Eve 2010.

In his sermon, the pope advised the congregation to repent from their sins and start the new year with prayers and good deeds.

Outside the church where 24 people were killed and more than 100 wounded, Muslims and the Christians held a vigil. They said security and executive authorities are intentionally delaying investigations into the incident.

They tied a large Egyptian flag linking the church with the mosque across the street, and placed pictures of the victims and lit candles.

Police are still investigating the incident.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/copts-and-muslims-commemorate-two-saints-church-bombing>

- **Egypt cracks down on satirists and media**

Morsi's government pursues charges against a satirist and a newspaper for "insulting" comments and "false" reporting.



An Egyptian satirist who has made fun of President Mohamed Morsi on television will be investigated by prosecutors following an accusation that he undermined the leader's standing, a judicial source has said.

Bassem Youssef's case will likely increase concerns over freedom of speech in the post-Hosni Mubarak era, especially when the country's new constitution includes provisions criticised by rights activists for, among other things, said the source on Tuesday, forbidding insults.

In a separate case, one of Egypt's leading independent newspapers said it was being investigated by the prosecutor following a complaint from the presidency, which accused it of publishing false news.

Youssef rose to fame following the uprising that swept Mubarak from power in February 2011 with a satirical online programme that has been compared to Jon Stewart's Daily Show in the US.

He has since had his own show on Egyptian television and mocked Morsi's repeated use of the word "love" in his speeches by starting one of his programmes with a love song, holding a red pillow with the president's face printed on it.

The prosecutor general ordered an investigation into a formal complaint against Youssef by an Islamist lawyer. The complaint accuses him of "insulting" Morsi, an Islamist backed by the Muslim Brotherhood, and "undermining his standing".

Human rights activists say it is the latest in a series of criminal defamation cases that bode ill for free speech as Egypt reshapes its institutions after Mubarak was toppled.

"The greatest threat to freedom of expression over the last four months has been this rise in criminal defamation cases, whether it is on charges of defaming the president or the judiciary," said Heba Morayef, Egypt director of the New York-based Human Rights Watch.

"The problem is now is we are likely to see an increase in this because criminal defamation is now embedded in the constitution."

Editor summoned

Rivals accuse Morsi, who won Egypt's first freely contested leadership election in June, of polarising society by foisting a divisive, Islamist-leaning constitution on the country.

In the case against the independent daily al-Masry al-Youm, the presidency accused the paper of "spreading false news representing a danger to civil peace, public security and affecting the presidency", the paper said.

The article in question was a report on Saturday on the paper's website which cited "informed sources" saying Morsi was due to visit hospital, without giving a reason for the trip, al-Masry al-Youm said in an online account of the case against it.

The presidency denied Mursi was due to visit hospital. The paper said it had updated its initial story to say the president's visit had been cancelled and instead his wife had gone to the hospital to visit a family member.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201311205458986654.html>

## 6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Riot at Lebanon's Roumieh prison contained**

Prison officials have contained a riot that erupted at Lebanon's largest prison, the Internal Security Forces said Wednesday.

Police said no one was hurt in the riot which saw Islamist inmates set mattresses on fire.

One police officer, who spoke to The Daily Star Wednesday on condition of anonymity, said the riot broke out around 6 p.m. Tuesday after Islamist inmates at Roumieh's Bloc B facility burned mattresses.

"They set a few mattresses on fire. It wasn't a big fire and no one was hurt," the officer said by telephone.

He said the unrest was contained after roughly two hours of negotiations.

Commenting on the prison riot late Tuesday, Interior Minister Marwan Charbel said the disturbance was sparked by a protest over officers tallying the number of Islamist prisoners held at the detention facility.

"During the counting of Islamist prisoners at Roumieh prison, they expressed dismay at the census which resulted in some form of chaos," Charbel told a local radio station.

Islamist inmates have repeatedly rioted at Roumieh and demanded speedy trials.

Lebanon's prosecutor Hatem Madi announced Saturday that the long-awaited trials for dozens of suspected Fatah al-Islam members would begin in February of this year.

Madi attributed the delay in commencing the trials to the completion of the courtroom at Roumieh.

He told The Daily Star Saturday that there are 480 individuals suspected of involvement in the 2007 battle with the Lebanese Army in the northern Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared. Of those, around 200 are awaiting trial in Roumieh, according to Madi. Others are wanted, or have died or escaped from the prison.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jan-02/200514-riot-at-lebanons-roumieh-prison-contained.ashx#axzz2Go0zntup>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **UAE busts cell 'linked to Egypt Brotherhood'**

Security forces arrest more than 10 members of cell with links to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood according to UAE newspaper.

Security forces from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have arrested several members of a cell, including three doctors, linked to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood who recruited members in the Gulf state, according to a report published in the Al-Khaleej newspaper.



"United Arab Emirates security services have arrested a cell of more than 10 people belonging to the leadership of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," the publication reported on Tuesday, quoting what it said was an informed source.

Members of the group held "secret meetings" across the country and "recruited Egyptian expats in the UAE to join their ranks," it said.

They also set up companies and collected "large amounts of money which they sent illegally to the mother organisation in Egypt", the daily said, adding they also gathered secret defence information on the UAE.

The source spoke of "continuous co-ordination" and "secret meetings" between the UAE-based group and the Brotherhood.

"Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood had offered [the cell's members] courses ... on elections and the means of changing leadership in Arab countries," said the source.

No official confirmation of the report was immediately available and no date given for the arrests.

Dozens of demonstrators gathered in front of the UAE embassy in Cairo on Tuesday to protest against the arrests.

During the past year, the UAE has announced it has broken up several cells it said were plotting against its security.

'Deviant group'

On December 26, UAE authorities dismantled a cell of Saudi and Emirati members alleged to have been plotting "terror" attacks in the two countries and other states.

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

Unlike Saudi Arabia, the UAE has never seen attacks by al-Qaeda, but authorities have in past months arrested dozens of Islamists accused of links to the Brotherhood.

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

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

State news agency WAM had said they were also suspected of "rejecting the constitution and the founding principles of power in the Emirates" and of having links with foreign organisations.

Dubai police chief Lieutenant General Dahi Khalfan has repeatedly lashed out at Arab Spring uprisings, accusing those who came to power after the ousting of leaders in Tunisia and Egypt of plotting against Gulf monarchies.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201311151324112664.html>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Afghan negotiator welcomes release of Taliban**

Senior member of High Peace Council says freeing of Taliban leaders by Pakistan will boost efforts to end conflict.

Afghan peace negotiators have welcomed the release of eight Taliban prisoners who had been held in Pakistan, hailing the move as a significant boost in efforts to end 11 years of war.

The High Peace Council, set up to conduct negotiations with the Taliban, said on Tuesday the releases underlined that neighbouring Pakistan was supporting the talks as US-led NATO combat troops withdraw from Afghanistan.

Support from Islamabad, which backed the Taliban's rule from 1996 to 2001, is seen as crucial to peace in Afghanistan after NATO's scheduled departure in 2014.

Nooruddin Turabi, a former Taliban justice minister, was among the eight freed on Monday, adding to 18 others released in November after appeals from Kabul.

Al Jazeera's Bernard Smith, reporting from Kabul, said: "It's been seen as an indication that Pakistanis have taken on board the idea of promoting stability here in Afghanistan."

Afghan officials believe Taliban leaders released from Pakistani jails could help bring fighters to the negotiating table.

"It is a practical step in the right direction," said Ismail Qasimyar, head of international relations for the peace council.

"It shows the Pakistani authorities have opened a new chapter for positive co-operation with Afghanistan.

"Pakistan can play an important role in bringing peace to Afghanistan. We welcome this move and hope those freed will become peace messengers," he told AFP news agency."

'Pakistan has crucial role'

Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai, senior peace council member, told the Reuters news agency that Kabul hoped to transform the Afghan Taliban into a political movement.

Signs are emerging that the Afghan government is gaining momentum in its drive to persuade the Taliban to lay down their arms before most NATO combat troops pull out.

Members of the government, the Taliban and some of their old enemies in the Northern Alliance, which fought the Taliban for several years, discussed ways of easing the conflict during a recent meeting in France.

"I think one consensus was that everybody acknowledged that nobody will win by military [means]," said Stanekzai, who was badly wounded in a 2011 Taliban suicide bombing attack.

Pakistan, long accused of supporting Afghan armed groups such as the Taliban, has sent the strongest signals yet that it will deliver on promises of helping the Kabul government and the US bring stability to its neighbour.

Islamabad's involvement is seen as critical to US and Afghan efforts to bring stability to Afghanistan.

"This is an important step in partnership and co-operation between Afghanistan and Pakistan in supporting Afghan peace process," Janan Musazai, Afghan foreign ministry spokesman, told Al Jazeera.

"I believe Pakistan has crucial role to play because Taliban leadership continues to be in Pakistan.

"The release of prisoners is one element of the crucial and important support Pakistan can provide in facilitating direct contact with Taliban and encouraging their leaders to engage in direct talks with Afghan government."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/01/20131114295871268.html>

*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Sercan DOĐAN**. 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 Ortadođu Uzman Yardımcısı Sercan DOĐAN** tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadođu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*