



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

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1. IRAQ

- **Al-Maliki issues a statement addressing Iraqi people - PM warns against politicization of protests, "serving foreign agendas" (Al-Iraqiyah TV)**

Al-Iraqiyah TV, Baghdad, in Arabic 2 Jan 13

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has issued a statement addressing the Iraqi people "to clarify a few important points". The statement said:

"We follow closely the developments taking place in a number of governorates which witness protests calling for the achievement of a number of demands that are legitimate, yet have been mixed with others that fundamentally contradict with the nature of the political system of the country which accordingly compels us to commit to the constitution and law, and not to give the opportunity for the enemies of the political process, including armed and terrorist groups and the supporters of the former regime, to penetrate the protests and control them which might lead to the spread of chaos and disturbances and threatening national

unity and public peace, in addition to dragging Iraq towards sectarian clashes.

"We call on the Iraqi people to pay attention to the fact that the Iraqi Council of Ministers and the prime minister do not have the constitutional authority to cancel the laws that are issued by the parliament, especially the Accountability and Justice Law and the Anti-terrorism Law. The general pardon bill draft has not been approved by the parliament until this moment. This fact raises a serious controversy which raises numerous questions about a number of parties and political figures who cause confusion by calling on the government to cancel these laws, while they are well aware of the fact that it is the responsibility of the parliament. On these bases, the parliament is totally responsible for the cancellation of the Accountability and Justice Law and the Anti-terrorism Law, while according to the constitution, the government is responsible for carrying out what has been approved by the legislative authority. The political blocs, including the Al-Iraqiyah List, which calls for the cancellation of these laws, are capable of proposing a suggested draft law that calls for the cancellation of these two laws, and

propose it for discussion in the parliament which will issue it, in case it was approved.

"Regarding the issue of the detainees, I have called on the chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council in 2012 to accelerate the trials through increasing the number of competent judicial bodies, which was approved, and consequently led to the release of more than 11,000 prisoners during 2012. I have renewed my call for the chairmanship of the SJC two days ago, to accelerate the settlement of the detainees' files, and consequently, 11 new judicial bodies were formed to work on daily basis on settling the files of the detainees and releasing those who were not convicted with the murder of innocent people, and as all parties are aware, a special committee which includes a number of scholars was formed, in addition to a judicial body in order to follow up on the issue of the female detainees. The committee began its work three days ago, and will meet with the chairman of the SJC today, in order to settle the issue of the female detainees.

"We re-stress that the security forces took professional and neutral actions in order to provide the needed protection for the

protestors and the public and private properties. The legal responsibility compels the security forces to stand in the face of all those who attempt to damage the best interest, sovereignty, and unity of the Iraqi people. We warn against politicizing the protests to serve foreign agendas and political interests. The historic responsibility compels all the national political forces to cooperate in order to preserve the unity and sovereignty of Iraq and fulfilling the aspirations of the Iraqi people including freedom, justice, and prosperity."

- **Iraq: Maliki Demands That Protesters Stand Down (NYTimes)**

By CHRISTINE HAUSER

Published: January 2, 2013

Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki told demonstrators on Wednesday to stop their protests or face government action, contending that the protests were being hijacked by groups to harm the national interest. Demonstrations against his Shiite-dominated government erupted on Dec. 21 after a raid by security forces on the office and home of the Sunni finance minister, Rafie al-Issawi, and the arrest of 10 bodyguards. Last week, thousands of

Sunni Muslims took to the streets again, blocking Iraq's main road and trade link to Syria and Jordan. Mr. Maliki told Iraqi state television that some of the protesters' demands were legitimate, like calls for jobs. But he added that the government had been patient long enough, and that protests should not continue indefinitely. In a statement from his office on Wednesday, Mr. Maliki said that "the enemies of the political process, the armed terrorist groups and the remnants of the former regime" were being given a chance to infiltrate the demonstrations, threatening national unity.

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/03/world/middleeast/iraq-maliki-demands-that-protesters-stand-down.html?ref=middleeast&_r=0

- **Protestors in Anbar threaten to go to UN, Arab League if force used against them (NINA)**

Ramadi, Jan 2 (NINA) – Protestors in Anbar province threatened the Central Government that they will go to the UN and the Arab League if force is used against them.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Jan. 2, in response to the threat of Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, that he will use force if they stay protesting, the protesters said that the threat reflects disregard by the authority of citizens' lives and personal freedoms, as well as laws granting freedom of expression.

Protestors pointed out that they do not represent any particular sect, party or area; rather they represent the helpless Iraqi people and that among protestors in Ramadi representatives from provinces in southern and central Iraq.

In an address to the Iraqi people earlier in the day, Maliki warned from making the protest to serve foreign agendas; warning that security forces are ready to protect public and private properties, as well as to preserve public order and national interest.

Anbar and other provinces are witnessing public protests and demonstrations demanding the release of innocent detainees and bring those who raped female detainees before justice, combat corruption, pass Pardon Law and abolish Article 4-Terrorism.

- **Maliki ignites denominational fire - Anbar protesters (Aswat al-Iraq)**

ANBAR, Jan 2 / Aswat al-Iraq: Premier Nouri al-Maliki was charged by Anbar demonstrators with igniting denominational fires, they noted in a statement released today.

Sheikh Imad al-Dulaimi, an organizer of the Anbar sit-in, told Aswat al-Iraq that Maliki's recent statements expose his desire to ignite denominational fires in the country, which "will burn him first."

"Maliki knows that the demands of the demonstrators are legitimate and constitutional, but his government has neglected them and threatened the use of force," he confirmed.

He added that the protesters will write to the United Nations, the Arab League and international human rights organizations to protect the protesters.

Anbar demonstrations began on 22 December 2012, to demand the release of the innocent prisoners and rectifying the political process in the country on a "basis of real partnership."

- **Issawi denies embarking on negotiations with the government to end the current crisis (NINA)**

Baghdad, Jan 2 / NINA /-- Finance Minister Rafie al-Issawi denied what has been recently circulated by some media about having negotiated with the government to end the current crisis.

Issawi said to NINA : "He did not negotiate any governmental side pointing out that what has been attributed to him about this issue is baseless stressing the importance of meeting the protesters clear and legitimate demands.

Issawi stressed: "The negotiation process became a popular task must be assumed by committees conferred exclusively conferred by sitters.

Some media outlets recently indicated that there are negotiations between al-Issawi and the government to end the political crisis.

- **Protestors in Ramadi set their demands to end their protest (NINA)**

Ramadi, Jan 2 (NINA) – Coordination Committee of Ramadi Protest issued a

document stating a number of demands as a condition to end their protest.

The document summarized the demands in release detainees and bring negligent before justice, stopping the execution of death sentences, holding work of Article 4-Terrorism until it is abrogated by Parliament, enacting General Amnesty Law, put Justice and Accountability Law on hold and achieve balance in all of the state's institutions.

The demands included also abolishing operations commands in all Iraq's provinces, ban sectarian slogans, hold general census under the UN supervision, stop random raid and abolish the Secret Informer Law, speed up forming a professional Supreme Court, the return of Relinquish the Sunni's mosques and properties that have been taken over and abolish Law No. 19/2005.

- **Essawi meets with Sheikh Sadi, affirms his support to protestors (NINA)**

Baghdad, Jan 2 (NINA) – Finance Minister, Rafi' al-Essawi, discussed with the religious Scholar, Abdul Malik al-Sadi, issues related

to the demands of protestors in Anbar province.

In his visit to Ramadi, Essawi accompanied by a number of lawmakers from Iraqiya slate and his meeting with the religious scholar Abdul Malik al-Sadi, he asserted the protestors' lawful and legitimate demands, and that it is on the government to pay attention to the protestors and fulfil their demands.

Essawi announced his support to the protestors, stressing that the protests must not be manipulated by any party or political entity; rather for reforming the country's situation.

- **Kurdish MP: Current demonstrations go beyond Issawi's case (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 2 (AIN) -MP Hassan Jihad of the Kurdistan Alliance stressed that the demands of Anbar, Nineveh and Salah il-Din demonstrators are bigger than the issue of the Finance Minister, Rafa al-Issawi.

Jihad told All Iraq News Agency on Wednesday "Anbar demonstrations are ongoing where the demonstrators' demands go beyond the topic of Issawi

which became part of these demands beside the essential demand for issuing general amnesty for all the detainees."

He pointed out that "Among the fundamental demands of the protesters is the appeal for adopting balance in running the state and true partnership among the political components."

It is worth to mention that Anbar, Nineveh, and Salah il-Din provinces witness demonstrations and sit-ins for a week to protest the arrest of the guards of the Finance Minister, Rafa al-Issawi, calling at the same time to release the woman and men prisoners.

- **Hundreds continue to demonstrate in Ahrar courtyard south of Mosul (NINA)**

Mosul, Jan 2 / NINA /--Hindered of demonstrators of and tens of clergy and tribal Sheikhs demonstrated with citizens on the seventh day when demonstrations broke out in Ahrar courtyard south of Mosul today.

The demonstrators demanded the release of the innocent detainees , the abolition

of the law of accountability and balance in state institutions.

- **Politicians cannot use protests to their advantage - clergyman (Aswat al-Iraq)**

BAGHDAD, Jan 2 / Aswat al-Iraq: The renowned Sunni clergyman, Abdul Malik al-Saadi, called on demonstrators currently in Anbar province to not give politicians and parties the ability to use their protests for their own ends, stressing friendship with Shiite clergymen in Najaf.

In a call with semi-official Iraqiya TV, al-Saadi called on all clergymen "not to interfere in Iraqi internal affairs, because the Iraqi people are capable of solving their own problems."

Additionally, he declared that the Minister of Defense and Anbar Operations Command called for the formation of a committee by the demonstrators and protesters to negotiate and transmit their demands to Baghdad for study and implementation.

He called on the demonstrators to call for the unity of Iraqi ranks in all their components, nationalities and religions.

- **Kirkuk Governor threatens to sue leader of 12th Military Division in case of preventing demonstrations (alliraqnews)**

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25905

Kirkuk, Jan 2 (AIN) –The Governor of Kirkuk province, Najim al-Din Karim, threatens to sue the leader of the 12th Military Divisions if he orders to prevent the demonstrations in Kirkuk province.

In a press statement received by AIN on Wednesday, he said "Holding the demonstrations legally and peacefully is an issue that happens in the developed countries and according to the constitution," noting that "We have received a request to hold demonstrations in Kirkuk province and we authorized them where the demonstrations were held peacefully."

"We have received information about preventing holding a demonstration in Rashad district, but we did not receive any complaint regarding this issue," he added, assuring that "Preventing the demonstrations is clear violation to the constitution and in case we receive a complaint about preventing any demonstration, we will sue the leader of the 12th Military Division."

- **Ninewa extends strike till next Monday (Aswat al-Iraq)**

NINEWA, Jan 2 / Aswat al-Iraq: Ninewa's Provincial Council decided to extend the strike of governmental offices until next Monday.

Yehya Abed Mahjoub, member of the council, stated, in a press conference, attended by Aswat al-Iraq, that the council held an extraordinary session to discuss the latest issues in the province and the continuation of the demonstrations and sit-ins.

He added that the governmental strike will be extended till next Monday, because the government did not respond to the demands of the demonstrators.

Last Saturday, the council decided to strike for 72 hours in solidarity with the demonstrations called by clergymen in the province.

Since 27 December, 2012, Ninewa province witnessed a call for demonstrations initiated by clergymen in protest against the policies practiced by the federal government.

- **Army disperses demonstration in Mosul University (Aswat al-Iraq)**

NINEWA, Jan 2/ Aswat al-Iraq: An Iraqi army unit dispersed a demonstration held by Mosul University students and teachers, who called for the release of male and female prisoners.

A number of demonstrators told Aswat al-Iraq that the demonstration was organized within the University's campus.

The demonstrators' demands were to release male and female prisoners, cancellation of the Questioning and Justice, and Anti-terrorism laws, and the departure of the police and the army from the center of the city, as the sources added.

One of the students stated that the army tightened its measures around the university by placing armed vehicles at the entrances and heavy security search,

including prevention of camera-equipped cell phones inside the campus.

- **Sadr, Nijaifi discuss political updates (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 2 (AIN) –The Speaker, Osama al-Nijaifi, and the head of the Sadr Trend, Muqtada al-Sadr, discussed the political updates on Wednesday.

The Iraqiya Satellite Channel mentioned "Nijaifi phoned Sadr to discuss the latest political updates."

Earlier, Sadr launched a fierce attack against the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, accusing him of seeking dictatorship and marginalizing others.

Nijaifi called, Wednesday, to hold an urgent session to discuss the political crisis two days before the scheduled date for resuming parliament sessions.

A statement by the media office of the Parliament cited "Nijaifi called to hold an exceptional session on next Sunday morning to discuss the current crisis."

- **Baghdad makes new proposal to Iraqi Kurdistan Region to solve Kirkuk tensions (NRT TV)**

Nalia Radio and TV website, Sulaymaniyah, in Kurdish 02 Jan 13

Central Iraqi government's senior military officials have suggested a new proposal for resolving tensions in the disputed, multiethnic areas in their latest meeting with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) counterparts, a Kurdish official has said, website of privately-owned NRT TV.

The proposal was made during a meeting between Iraqi military and KRG's Peshmerga Affairs' Ministry senior officials on 2 January in Arbil, the ministry's communication chief, Halgurd Mala Hikmat, told the website.

Hikmat, who described the meeting as "positive", said that the Iraqi delegation "proposed a new mechanism, which we will respond to after studying it." He did not elaborate on the content of the proposal.

The latest meeting is part of ongoing talks to resolve military tensions in the disputed Kirkuk region where both sides have

deployed extra military forces since November. The reinforcements followed a small clash in a town south of Kirkuk in mid November and Baghdad's earlier decision to assign overall security responsibility in the region to the newly-created Tigris Operations Command despite Kurds' objections.

Hikmat added that the two sides would meet again on 13 January.

- **Kirkuk Arab MPs call on Iraqi Government to dismiss Asayish, Peshmerga forces from Kirkuk (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 2 (AIN) -MPs of the Iraqiya Slate of Kirkuk province called on the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki and the Minister of Interior to urgently take action to remove the Asayish and Peshmerga forces from Kirkuk, accusing these forces of preparing a genocide against the Arab component of Kirkuk province.

The MPs: Ibrahim al-Muhiri, Omar al-Jubouri, Abdullah al-Gharb, and Yassin al-Ubaidi, said in a joint statement "A force from Asayish threatened Al Wihda neighborhood through storming their houses then fired in air to delude the

people of a clash being launched with gunmen, as soon as they knew about a woman eyewitness for their crime, the force returned and killed the woman to be added to a murder against three other youngmen."

The statement added "The official security forces in the province were supposed to investigate this incident, but regrettably this crime was left without any attention by the Kirkuk police command."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25890

- **Peshmerga describes its negotiations with security delegation of CG as "positive" (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 2 (AIN) –The Ministry of Peshmerga described its negotiations with the security delegation of the Central Government that visited Erbil on Wednesday as positive.

A statement by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan quoted the media head of the Ministry, Hilkard Hikmat, as saying "The meeting of the Joint Committee of both sides was positive."

"The CG delegation presented its agenda to the delegation of the Kurdistan Regional Government," he added, noting that "After considering the agenda, the Kurdish side is supposed to respond in the next meeting which is scheduled to be held in Baghdad on 13th, January, 2013."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25896

- **Human rights minister denies the existence of secret prisons in Iraq (Shafaq News)**

Shafaq News, Jan 2 / Iraqi Human Rights Minister, Mohammed Shiyaa al-Sudani confirmed that the doors of the prisons in Iraq are open to international human rights organizations, denying the existence of secret prisons in Iraq.

Sudani said in a televised interview briefed by "Shafaq News" that "" the rumors about the existence of secret prisons in Iraq and that what is being said about some parties and political movements or even the government of owning secret prisons are untrue, it comes within the intimidation and disinformation method

practiced by some parties by TV satellites and political figures.”

"Human rights in the new Iraq are considered a new concept after an era expanded for more than 35 years of huge violations of Iraqi human rights and the absence of this concept, whether at the level of institutions or at the level of the laws that govern and regulate these rights."

“Saddam’s regime had practiced clear media blackout on what happened in Iraq and that the worst historical abuses took place during the dictatorial regime against the Iraqi people, noting to the presence of tons of documents chronicling the violations."

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/4591-human-rights-minister-denies-the-existence-of-secret-prisons-in-iraq.html>

- **Esawi: Alliances of PC elections to reflect alliances expected for next parliamentary elections (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Jan 2 (AIN) –MP, Aboud al-Esawi, of the State of Law Coalition confirmed that the political alliances held in next Provincial Councils elections will

reflect the alliances expected in next parliamentary elections.

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The PCs elections will prepare for the next Parliamentary elections and will clarify for the politicians their popularity among the Iraqis."

"The PCs elections will greatly enhance the performance of the PCs by introducing new figures who will correct the situation in the provinces," he emphasized.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25907:esawi-alliances-of-pcs-elections-to-reflect-alliances-expected-for-next-parliamentary-elections-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Qatar Funding Anti-Government Protests in Iraq**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Several regional states, including Qatar, have paid \$100 to each participant in this week's protest rallies in al-Anbar in support of Iraqi Finance Minister Rafia al-Issawi, whose bodyguards have been arrested on terrorism charges last month, security sources revealed on Wednesday.

Iraq's al-Nakhil news agency quoted a security official as saying that after the arrest of Issawi's bodyguards, several groups affiliated to the regional states, specially Qatar, paid huge sums to their sympathizers in Anbar, Salaheddin and Nineveh provinces to stage rallies against the Iraqi government.

Ouraq al-Khalij newspaper has also informed in its Wednesday edition that Doha is staunchly supporting Issawi for taking the leadership of Sunni protestors in Iraq.

The paper said Qatari officials had contacted a large number of their agents and hirelings in Iraq in recent days to coordinate the protests, adding that even the mottoes chanted against Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki government have been dictated by Doha.

Maliki on Wednesday called upon Anbar protesters to end their demonstrations that have led to several days of blockage of a major road in the Western province of Anbar connecting Iraq to Syria and Jordan.

The Iraqi premier said the protesters should "end their strike before the state intervenes to end it." "I warn you against continuing (blocking the highway), because this is against the Iraqi constitution. We have been very patient with you," Almanar quoted Maliki as saying.

The protesters have blocked off the key trade highway since December 23, following the arrest of Issawi's bodyguards on terrorism charges.

The demonstrators allege that the arrests were made on sectarian grounds and demand the release of the detainees.

Maliki, however, says the bodyguards were arrested following an independent judicial inquiry based on the anti-terrorism law.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107132525>

- **Qatar, Saudi Arabia Funding Fugitive Iraqi VP against Maliki**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Doha and Riyadh are spending huge sums to bring back the country's fugitive vice-president, Tareq al-

Hashemi, to the country in a bid to topple the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, informed sources said.



Hashemi, a politician in the Iraqiya bloc, fled Baghdad in December days after al-Maliki's government sought his arrest on charges he ran a death squad.

Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz and Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani have provided Hashemi with extensive backup to fuel ethnic clashes in Iraq, informed sources revealed on Wednesday.

Meantime, Iraq's Al-Nakhil news agency quoted informed sources as saying today that Turkey has also provided Hashemi with a \$4mln budget to stir unrests in Iraq's Western province of Anbar.

The sources noted that Saudi Arabia and Qatar have earmarked huge budgets for

fueling ethnic strife in Anbar and Nineveh provinces.

Security forces revealed on Wednesday that several regional states, including Qatar, have paid \$100 to each participant in this week's protest rallies in al-Anbar in support of Iraqi Finance Minister Rafia al-Issawi, whose bodyguards have been arrested on terrorism charges last month.

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<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107132551>

2. IRAN

- **Arab Analyst: Iran to Play More Active Role in Region in 2013**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran will play a more active role in regional developments and political equations in the new Christian year, while Arab states are going to have difficult times ahead in 2013, an Arab analyst predicted.



Abdelbari Atvan, chief editor of the Arab-language al-Qods al-Arabi newspaper, wrote in an editorial that 2013 is the year of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies.

He noted that Iran has successfully tested its home-made missiles with different ranges in its recent wargames which were conducted in the Southern Iranian waters.

The Arab analyst said that the West has not recovered from the wounds it has sustained in its war against Afghanistan and Iraq. Hence, Washington and its allies cannot think of any new war against Tehran.

He, however, said in case a war breaks out against Iran, several Arab states will join Iran against the West.

Atvan also reminded US President Barack Obama's strong opposition to the Israeli

demand for starting a war on Iran, and said that the European Union has also voiced its opposition to Israeli Prime Minister's warmongering policies in the Middle East, including Iran.

The analyst said that Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf's biggest Arab state, is in a solid and passive state due to its old leaders and lack of proper leadership.

Atvan further noted that the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) is also in a weak position and only two PGCC leaders attended the council's recent summit held in Manama.

A glance at the Persian Gulf countries shows that Jordan is on the verge of bankruptcy and Egypt is facing domestic crisis, Yemen has collapsed, and Syria is crisis-hit, the Arab international affairs expert said, underlining his view about the dim prospects waiting for Arab states in 2013.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107132539>

- **Iranian Army Hunts More RQ-Class UAVs**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Iranian Army has hunted two more advanced RQ type Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), a senior Iranian Navy commander announced on Wednesday.



"The air-defense units of the Army have hunted two enemy drones," Deputy Commander of the Iranian Navy for Coordination Rear Admiral Amir Rastegari told FNA on Wednesday.

"These drones were from 11th series of the RQ class, and one of them was hunted in Shahrivar 1390 (August 21-September 19, 2011) and the other one in Aban (October 22-November 20, 2012)," Rastegari said, adding that the Army research center is now studying the two UAVs.

"Much of the data of these drones has been decoded by the Army's Jihad and Research Center," he said, but did not provide any further detail.

The remarks by the Iranian commander came almost one month after Iran announced on December 4 that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has hunted a US UAV over the Persian Gulf after the drone violated the country's airspace.

The IRGC navy commander announced at the time that the hunted UAV was a ScanEagle drone, adding that "such drones are usually launched from large warships".

ScanEagle is a small, low-cost, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle built by Insitu, a subsidiary of Boeing.

Capable of flying above 16,000 feet, the UAV has also demonstrated the ability to provide persistent low-altitude reconnaissance.

Iran first announced in December, 2011 that its defense forces had downed a US RQ-170 drone through a sophisticated cyber attack.

The drone was the first such loss by the US. American officials have described the loss of the aircraft in Iran as a setback and

a fatal blow to their stealth drone program.

The RQ-170 has special coatings and a batwing shape designed to help it penetrate other nations' air defenses undetected. The existence of the aircraft, which is made by Lockheed Martin, has been known since 2009, when a model was photographed at the main US airfield in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107132519>

- **Iran Starts Using New Home-Made Combat Choppers**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran on Wednesday put into operation a new domestically-made advanced combat chopper.

Two Toufan II (Hurricane 2) combat choppers, produced by the Aviation Industries Organization of the Iranian Defense Ministry, were delivered to the Iranian Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) today in a ceremony attended by the Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi.



Addressing the ceremony, Vahidi said that Toufan II which has been designed and manufactured by Iranian experts is "a new generation of combat choppers and enjoys advanced and updated technology".

The minister further stated that Toufan II also enjoys a series of home-made technologies, including electronic, optic, laser and weapons.

Vahidi said high-precision targeting capability has gifted the chopper a high offensive power.

In May 2010, the Iranian defense ministry announced that it has produced a number of domestically-designed Toufan choppers which are equipped with hi-tech weapons and anti-tank missiles, the defense ministry announced on Saturday.

The combat chopper is equipped with advanced weapons systems, including

anti-tank missiles, rocket-launcher and 20-mm artillery and enjoys high mobility.

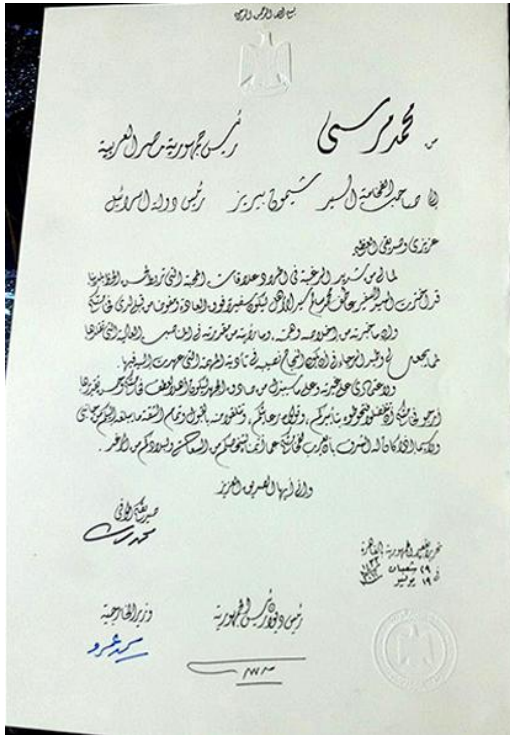
Tehran launched an arms development program during the 1980-88 Iraqi imposed war on Iran, to compensate for a US weapons embargo. Since 1992, Iran has produced its own tanks, armored personnel carriers, missiles and fighter planes.

Yet, Iranian officials have always stressed that the country's military and arms programs serve defensive purposes and should not be perceived as a threat to any other country.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107132413>

- **Morsi too bold to warn Iran in Persian Gulf**

TEHRAN, Jan. 2 (MNA) – The Egyptian President who has lead his country over Saudi Arabian policies exclaimed over what he called Iran's threat for Persian Gulf countries, "the security of the Persian Gulf is tantamount to the security of Egypt."



south of the Persian Gulf, since Iran has always reached a friendly hand to its neighbors and other countries. As a pacifist, Iran has not invaded anywhere in the past 300 years.

It is not clear yet how Mr. Morsi, who keeps friendly, bonds with Israeli regime and sends affectionate letters to Shimon Peres, talks of the Iranian threat to the Persian Gulf countries.

www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1782246

Speaking to reporters at a festival of media activists in Cairo, Morsi said in answer to a question about Iran's threats to the countries south of the Persian Gulf as "Egypt will host the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Summit next February and Cairo will give a spoken message that no one must threaten countries in the region."

A few days ago he had also emphasized before the Consultative Council that Persian Gulf and its southern countries' security meant Egypt's security.

It is not clear, though, what is meant by Morsi's Iranian threat to countries in the

• **Omani FM calls for expanding ties with Iran**

TEHRAN, Jan. 2 (MNA) – Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi has hailed the good relationship between Iran and Oman and called for the expansion of bilateral ties.

He made the remarks during a meeting with Hadi Soleimanpour, head of the Iranian Foreign Ministry department for international research and education, in Muscat on Tuesday.

Soleimanpour, who made the visit at the invitation of Omani Foreign Ministry,

emphasized the necessity of promoting further diplomatic ties between the two countries.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1782009>

- **No need for foreign forces in Persian Gulf: Iranian admiral**

TEHRAN, Jan. 2 (MNA) – A senior Iranian Navy official said on Tuesday that cooperation between the Persian Gulf littoral states will enhance security in this strategic region.

Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, the commander of the Iranian Navy, said Tehran has repeatedly insisted that through the help of the Persian Gulf countries, it can maintain security in this strategic region and that there is no need for presence of extra-regional forces in the region.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1781933>

- **Iran welcomes P5+1 offer for talks: Jalili**



Secretary of Iran Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili says Tehran welcomes the readiness of the six major world powers to hold constructive talks with Iran.

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

The Iranian official, who is in New Delhi on an official visit, said the US cannot impose its arbitrary “less rights and more obligations” model on the Iranian nation in the nuclear issue.

Jalili stated that to serve its interests not only does the US violate the rights of others, but also violates its claims about democracy and free trade by meddling in

the internal affairs of other countries and the imposition of unilateral sanctions.

Iran and the six major world powers -- Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany -- have held several rounds of talks with the main focus being Iran's nuclear energy program.

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

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

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/02/281476/iran-welcomes-p51-offer-for-talks/>

- **'No real determination in P5+1 to resolve Iran nuclear issue'**

Representatives of Iran and the P5+1 take part in multifaceted talks in the Russian capital, Moscow, June 18, 2012.

An Iranian lawmaker says the P5+1 -- Britain, China, France, Russia, and the

United States plus Germany -- lacks the determination to resolve Iran's nuclear issue.



"In the course of nuclear talks, Iran has had maximum cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the P5+1 as well as in expert-level meetings; despite this, it [Iran] does not see real determination in the P5+1 to resolve the nuclear case" Seyyed Hossein Naqavi-Hosseini, spokesman of Iran Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said on Wednesday.

Hosseini rejected claims by the West that Iran has not responded to requests for continuation of nuclear talks, saying Tehran is still waiting for the P5+1 response on its five-point proposal presented during the multifaceted talks in Moscow in June 2012.

The lawmaker stressed that because Iran considers having a peaceful nuclear

program its right and can back its claim with legal documents and arguments it is willing to negotiate with the West

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<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/02/281467/no-real-will-to-solve-ncase-in-p51/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **Fatah, Hamas meet in Gaza ahead of party anniversary**

Palestinians hold torches as they celebrate the 48th anniversary of the founding of Fatah movement in Gaza City Dec. 31, 2012.

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Gaza premier Ismail Haniyeh on Wednesday convened Hamas and Fatah delegations ahead of the first Fatah rally in the Gaza Strip since the parties' bitter division.



Fatah will hold its 48th anniversary celebrations in al-Saraya square, Gaza City on Friday.

It will be the first time that Hamas has allowed Fatah to hold such events since seizing the coastal enclave from the secular faction in 2007. Fatah also permitted a Hamas anniversary rally in the West Bank earlier this month for the first time in six years.

Haniyeh welcomed a Fatah delegation, including senior official Nabil Shaath, ahead of the event to discuss security arrangements.

"This festival and the general environment will prepare for reconciliation and end the split. We gave directions to security services to make the festival successful," Haniyeh told the meeting.

The Fatah and Hamas delegations were briefed by Haniyeh's security chief on the arrangements to secure the festival, as well as preparatory celebrations held this week in Gaza.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri told reporters that his party "are interested in ensuring the success of this festival to secure the completion of this great national occasion."

Shaath stressed no security incident could undermine the conciliatory atmosphere of the festival.

"We have tried negotiations sponsored by Egypt and reached many agreements, but this time it was inspired by the spirit of the masses," Shaath said, referring to popular pressure over the repeated failure of reconciliation talks between the parties.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=552939>

- **Non Aligned Movement Condemns Israeli Settlement Plans, Freeze of PA Money**

NEW YORK, January 2, 2013 (WAFA) – The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) condemned the ongoing provocative, illegal actions by Israel, including settlement plans in the occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and the withholding of the Palestinian tax revenues, Wednesday said a statement issued by NAM.

The Israeli actions have intensified following the United Nations General Assembly updating of Palestine to a non-member observer state status.

The Movement considered all these actions null and void and stressed that Israel, the occupying Power, should immediately rescind these plans and measures and cease completely all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem.

These successive deplorable actions included the announcements by Israel of plans for the expansion of existing settlements as well as the establishment

of new settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and the West bank, in deliberate and grave breach of relevant principles and rules of international law and international humanitarian law, in particular the 4th Geneva Convention which governs situations of foreign occupation, and in blatant contempt of the will of the international community, said the statement.

The Non-Aligned Movement also condemned Israel's decision to withhold Palestinian tax revenues due to the Palestinian National Authority in violation of agreements reached between the two sides and international law.

It said that Israel has declared this decision in retaliation for the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19. Such a deplorable act constitutes a blatant unlawful acquisition of funds and collective punishment.

It is impairing the ability of the Palestinian National Authority to deliver public services, pay public sector salaries and operate governmental institutions. It further aggravates the financial crisis

imposed on the Palestinian National Authority, it added.

NAM reiterated its continuous calls to the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility and take all necessary measures to ensure that Israel immediately terminates all these illegal actions.

“The message must be sent to Israel that it is expected to fully abide by its commitments under international law, uphold the rule of law, cease all illegal measures intended to alter and prejudice the situation on the ground, cease all provocations and incitement, including by its illegally transferred settlers, against the Palestinian people and their leadership,” said the statement.

The Movement reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the question of Palestine at its core, and to the immediate restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21441>

- **Cabinet Confirms Efforts to Confront Financial Crisis**

RAMALLAH, January 2, 2013 (Wafa) - The Palestinian cabinet Wednesday confirmed that the government is exerting maximum effort to confront the financial crisis which reached its peak due to the Israeli piracy of Palestinian funds, according to a statement issued following the weekly cabinet meeting.

The Cabinet also renewed its call on the Arab brethren to assume their responsibilities towards confronting the consequences of the Israeli aggression against our people's livelihoods.

It called on Arab states to activate the Arab safety net and disperse the funds it had pledged, affirming that the National Authority needs 240 million dollars a month to be able to fulfill its obligations, as long as Israel continues to withhold our funds.

In the same context, the Cabinet called on the international community to assume its

responsibility without any hesitation or equivocation, to compel Israel to the rules of international law and relevant international resolutions , and to stop the robbery of our people's resources and income, as well as to stop undermining the National Authority's standing to undermine our people's ability to stay steadfast and materializing the independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital on the borders of 1967.

Furthermore, the Cabinet expressed its wish that the New Year would be the year of freedom, independence and redemption of the occupation, and reaffirmed the National Authority's determination to continue and accelerate the pace towards the realization of national sovereignty on the land of the independent state of Palestine.

The Cabinet also considered that the continuing division remained the biggest and most dangerous failure that continues to confront our nation and called on all officials and civic sectors to rise to the level of national responsibility borne by all without exception to restore unity to the homeland and its institutions in order to

enable them to carry out their responsibilities in serving our people and caring for its interests and reinforcing and strengthening our national capabilities.

It also condemned the continuing acts of aggression by the occupation forces against citizens in the West Bank, especially in Jerusalem, including most recently the Israeli government's approval of constructing 1200 new housing units in the settlement of 'Gilo'.

This, in addition to issuing orders to confiscate hundreds of dunoms in Beit Iksa village northwest of Jerusalem in addition to handing out demolition orders for 10 homes in Hebron as well as the demolition of homes and ongoing acts of displacements against our people, especially in the Jordan Valley.

It also condemned the uprooting of hundreds of fruit-bearing trees by occupation forces and settlers, as was the case in Hebron, Nablus, and other districts as well as escalating settler attacks against citizens south of Nablus and in Jerusalem.

The Cabinet equally condemned Israeli forces for attacking citizens in Tamoun

village, warning noting that all these practices come in the context of targeting Palestinian presence in these areas, which requires the consolidation of all efforts in the battle of national steadfastness to thwart the occupation's agenda.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21444>

- **IDF preparing hospitals for missile and chemical attacks**

Senior military official tells 'Post' Home Front Command preparing hospitals for range of security threats, says chance of chemical attack from Syria is low but defense community planning to prevent, cope with such a threat.

Satellite view of suspect sites in Syria [file]
Photo: Reuters / Handout

The IDF Home Front Command is preparing all hospitals in Israel for a range of security threats, including large-scale missile attacks and chemical attacks, a senior military source told The Jerusalem Post on Wednesday.

The preparations have been planned three years in advance, and bear no relation to current events or recent threat

assessments. Exercises include training hospital staff to deal with conventional missile attacks, mass-casualty incidents and “mega-mass casualty incidents,” – involving 1,000 or more injuries.

“We train a lot for chemical weapons,” a Home Front Command source said. “This is our business, and only ours. There is no room for error.”

The drills form the only basis for dealing with a chemical weapon attack, the source stressed, “since we have no experience with this.”



The threat of a chemical attack from neighboring Syria is very low, but the defense community’s contingency planning includes steps to both prevent and cope with such a threat.

The Home Front Command’s medical department – under the jurisdiction of the

Health Ministry – has been tasked with preparing hospitals for all possibilities.

All 27 hospitals in Israel have undergone intensive chemical weapons incidents drills – including surprise exercises.

The hospitals undergo a total of 25 emergency drills per year.

During the drills, people simulating patients are rushed into hospitals with notes attached to them explaining their particular scenario. On average, hospitals deal with 200 “patients” during the simulations – though on some occasions, the number has been as high as 700.

The Home Front Command has also created underground areas in major hospitals such as Ichilov in Tel Aviv and Rambam in Haifa, so intensive care and pregnancy wards can be transferred there in the case of missile attacks.

During Operation Pillar of Defense, the Home Front Command sent crews to four hospitals to create daycare centers for the children of doctors and nurses, to allow them to focus on treating patients.

According to Home Front Command evaluations, even in the event of wide-scale rocket and missile attacks, a low casualty rate can be expected.

The source noted that the 11,000 rockets fired from Gaza between 2000 and November 2012 (before the Gaza conflict) resulted in 22 casualties.

“That’s a casualty rate of one per 500 projectiles,” he said.

“The more than 4,000 projectiles fired by Hezbollah during the Second Lebanon War of 2006 resulted in 44 casualties in Israel,” he added. “In the 1991 Gulf War, [then-Iraqi leader] Saddam Hussein fired 40 Scud B missiles at central Israel. There was one casualty, from a door blown off a safe room. Some people are fear mongering. The numbers should be studied.”

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=298232>

- **'Wash. Post': Settlements not main peace obstacle**

Newspaper's editorial board says prospective limited expansion of

settlements does not preclude emergence of Palestinian state.

THE AREA in Ma’aleh Adumim known as E1 Photo: Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post

Israeli settlements are not the main obstacle to peace and their prospective limited expansion does not preclude the eventual emergence of a Palestinian state, according to a Washington Post editorial published on Wednesday.

In “Overheated rhetoric on Israeli settlements,” the paper’s editors denounced as “counterproductive” the international community’s incessant criticism of Israeli plans to build thousands of housing units across the Green Line, primarily in Jerusalem, as doing so “reinforces two mistaken but widely held notions: that the settlements are the principal obstacle to a deal and that further construction will make a Palestinian state impossible.”

But the paper’s editorial board came out against any unilateral action, whether on the part of Israel or the Palestinians, which “complicate[s] the negotiations that

are the only realistic route to a Middle East peace.”

With respect to settlement construction in general, the Washington Post’s editors highlighted the fact that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu had adopted the policy of his predecessors by “limit[ing] building [in settlements] almost entirely to areas that both sides expect Israel to annex through territorial swaps in an eventual settlement.”



The paper, citing a study by the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace, said this will enable 80 percent of Israeli settlers to be incorporated into Green Line Israel as part of a peace deal through agreed upon land swaps approximating 4% of the West Bank – or less than the 5% proposed by US president Bill Clinton 12 years ago.

With respect to plans to build in E1 in particular, the Washington Post attributed Israel’s motivation to the desire to “prevent Ma’aleh Adumim – which will almost certainly be annexed to Israel in any peace deal – from being isolated”; which “is the same reason the Palestinians claim that Israeli annexation of the land would cut off their would-be capital in east Jerusalem from the West Bank.”

Accordingly, the paper believes that the status of E1 “is a difficult issue that should be settled at the negotiating table, not by fiat,” and that it is “hardly the ‘almost fatal blow’ to a two-state solution that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described.”

The editorial also emphasizes the hypocrisy of such rhetoric at the same time the Security Council is doing nothing to halt the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians in Syria.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=298171>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Protests in Aswan after man dies in custody**



Hundreds of people from the Ababda and Bashaira tribes staged protests in Aswan after a man from the Bashaira tribe died in the Aswan police station detention room.

The man was arrested with six others and charged with illegally digging for gold. However, he was injured when the police van that was taking him to the station crashed, and later died while being detained for 15 days pending investigation.

Sheikh Awad Hadl of the Bashaira tribe said the police have always mistreated them, and demanded the release of the other six defendants.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/protests-aswan-after-man-dies-custody>

- **Salafi MP: God chose Morsy before the people did**

Protest of salafists to demand the application of Islamic law and denounce the new constitution

Virginie Nguyen

A Shura Council youth committee member said Wednesday that Mohamed Morsy is the right man for president, and that God chose him for president before the people did.

Saeed Ahmed al-Kilany, who is also a member of the Salafi-oriented Nour Party, praised an earlier speech from the president, saying, "I am confident the president will beat the enemies of success in the end."



Salafis have frequently alluded to religion and divine intervention in political affairs, particularly during the run-up to presidential elections this year. Prominent Salafi sheikh Ahmed Nashaat had said in May that "presidential candidate Mohamed Morsy has been selected by God."

Nashaat, a leader of the Salafi-leaning Jurisprudence Commission for Rights and Reform, said that Morsy is the only one capable of applying Sharia and achieving the Islamic project.

"God chose Morsy and He will make the people vote for him," Nashaat said during a rally organized by the commission and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Also during Wednesday's session, Abdel Rahman Haridy, the appointed member from the Egyptian Current Party, said the president's speech and the new Constitution give young people no right to parliamentary seats, even though they comprise 48 percent of society.

For his part, youth committee chairman Mohamed Hafez urged youth to join

political parties rather than form alliances and coalitions.

"Alliances are short lived, parties stay," he said.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/salafi-mp-god-chose-morsy-people-did>

- **Brotherhood party inclined to run in elections without alliances**

Hundreds of members of Muslim Brotherhood protesting in front of High Court of Justice, Cairo, 22 November 2012, to support the presidential decisions and constitutional declaration issued by President Mohamed Morsy Thursday evening.



A source within the Muslim Brotherhood, speaking to Al-Masry Al-Youm on condition of anonymity, said that the

majority of members of the group's Guidance Bureau are inclined to run in the next parliamentary elections without allying with other forces, especially since other Islamist forces have already initiated alliances.

The Guidance Bureau on Wednesday had met to discuss previous meetings that Freedom and Justice Party members and that group's Deputy Supreme Guide, Khairat al-Shater, had held over the past few weeks with other Islamist forces.

The source added that the group said three to five percent of the candidates it will field in upcoming elections are women whose names would appear among the first five names on the lists, as recommended by the National Dialogue Committee.

Hisham al-Dessouki of the Freedom and Justice Party said the Supreme Constitutional Court will decide on the legality of therecommendation before it becomes mandatory, adding that more women would be fielded in urban areas than rural areas for cultural reasons.

Meanwhile, Gamal Heshmat of the Freedom and Justice Party offered to form an alliance with the National Salvation Front if it agreed to participate in the national dialogue that it is boycotting.

Heshmat said the group is trying to prevent a struggle between Islamist and civil forces.

For their part, front leaders on Wednesday denied what the head of the National Dialogue Committee, Mahmoud Mekky, said Tuesday about them attending next week's seventh session.

"President Morsy has no powers," said front member Mohamed Aboul Ghar. "It is the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau that rules."

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/brotherhood-party-inclined-run-elections-without-alliances>

- **Ethiopia says breaks up Islamist militant cell**

Allegedly trained by Islamist rebels in neighboring Somalia, 15 suspected militants who were 'plotting' attacks in

Ethiopia were arrested by the country's police

Ethiopian police have arrested 15 suspected militants allegedly trained by Islamist rebels in neighbouring Somalia and who were plotting attacks in Ethiopia, the country's intelligence agency said on Wednesday.

The arrests were the latest in a crackdown on what senior officials say is a growing threat from militant Islam in Ethiopia, a Horn of Africa nation predominantly comprised of Orthodox Christians and a large minority of Muslims.

The would-be militants were caught following a 20-day sting operation while they plotted to set up cells in the eastern town of Harar and in Kemise in the northeast, the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) said.

"Members of the group were recruited, trained and armed by Somalia's al Shabaab and their aim was to wage Jihad (holy war) and stage attacks inside the country," an NISS statement said, aired by the state-run Ethiopian Television.

Addis Ababa has sent troops to Somalia to help other African countries battling to crush al Shabaab's six-year insurgency.

The suspects, whose nationalities were not disclosed, were said to have crossed into Ethiopia from Somalia and Kenya.

Wednesday's TV report showed police displaying large amounts of arms including rifles and grenades, as well as black flags with Arabic inscriptions. The report said CDs and video tapes of "jihadist messages" were also seized during the operation.

On Tuesday, an Ethiopian court convicted 10 other militants of preparing strikes on political and economic targets in Ethiopia with the help of Somalia's al Qaeda-allied al Shabaab.

Muslims in Ethiopia staged several mass protests last year against perceived interference in Islamic affairs. Several leaders of a committee that led the protests now face trial.

Ethiopia fought Islamist rebels in Somalia in 2006-2009 and sent troops back in 2011 to fight al Shabaab, opening a third front

alongside Kenyan troops and an African Union mission.

The onslaught on rebels in Somalia has gained ground in the past two years. Al Shabaab withdrew from the southern port of Kismayu in September, its last major urban stronghold, heralding its demise as a quasi-conventional military force.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61707/World/Region/Ethiopia-says-breaks-up-Islamist-militant-cell.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Future MP rejects Fouad Boutros electoral law**

Future bloc MP Jamal al-Jarrah on Thursday voiced his rejection of the electoral law proposed by veteran lawmaker Fouad Boutros.

“The Fouad Boutros law is [partially based on] proportionality, and we have already voiced our rejection of proportionality amid the presence of [non-state] arms,” Jarrah said during an interview with the Voice of Lebanon (93.3) radio.

He also reiterated the March 14 coalition’s support for an electoral law based on 50 constituencies, “which in our opinion guarantees the rights of the Christians.”

The Fouad Boutros law stipulates that half of the deputies within a single district would be elected by proportional representation and the other half by majority representation.

Boutros is a veteran politician who held a number of prominent ministerial positions spanning across several decades.

Lebanon is set to elect new parliamentary representatives in 2013, but the country's political circles are divided over the electoral law issue despite the cabinet’s approval in September of a draft law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts.

The new law is supposed to replace the current 1960 law based on simple majority representation.

The March 14 opposition coalition announced in December that it would participate in the parliamentary sub-committee meeting scheduled on January

8, after it had decided to boycott parliament meetings for security reasons.

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

- **Lebanon speaker wants cooperation on electoral law**

Lebanese Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri voiced the importance of everyone's cooperation to produce a new electoral law, the National News Agency reported.

"It is important that everyone cooperates in order to produce a new electoral law that all parties agree on," MPs quoted Berri as saying following the Wednesday parliamentary meeting.

Berri also said that "the work of the parliamentary sub-committee studying electoral law proposals must be accompanied by a calm and positive environment."

Lebanon is set to elect new parliamentary representatives in 2013 amid disputes over the best electoral system to adopt as a replacement for the current 1960 law based on simple majority representation.

However, in December the March 14 opposition coalition announced that it would participate in the parliamentary sub-committee meeting scheduled on January 8 to study electoral-law proposals, after it had decided to boycott parliament meetings for security reasons.

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

- **Future MP backs impartial cabinet**

Lebanon's opposition Future bloc MP Assem Araji said that an impartial cabinet could be formed in the country since Lebanon has many independent people.

"There are lots of impartial people in Lebanon and the government that might be formed will not last long; its only mission will be to hold the [parliamentary] elections," Araji told Akhbar al-Yawm news agency on Wednesday.

Araji also reiterated "the adherence of the March 14 coalition to hold the elections on time no matter what the circumstances were, and even if the

government, which proved its failure, does not change.”

Talks of the formation of an impartial government has been the center of controversy ever since the opposition March 14 coalition announced that it would cut all ties with the current government – spearheaded by Hezbollah – following Internal Security Forces intelligence chief Wissam al-Hassan’s assassination in October.

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https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnewsfuture_mp_there_are_lots_of_impartial_people_in_lebanon

6. SYRIA

• Lebanon MP calls for international help on Syria refugees

Change and Reform bloc MP Simon Abi Ramia on Thursday said that the international community must bear its responsibility and assist Lebanon handle the influx of Syrian refugees into the country.

“Resolving the problems of the refugees issue must be based on a humanitarian approach and making the international community take up its responsibility in this issue,” Abi Ramia told the Voice of Lebanon (93.3) radio.

More than 150,000 Syrian refugees are registered with the UNHCR in Lebanon; some activists, however, say the actual number is much higher.

Regarding the electoral law issue, Abi Ramia said that the Change and Reform bloc would approve a law that secures the right representation of the Christians.

Lebanon is set to elect new parliamentary representatives in 2013, but the country's political circles are divided over the

electoral law issue despite the cabinet's approval in September of a draft law based on proportionality and 13 electoral districts.

The new law is supposed to replace the current 1960 law based on simple majority representation.

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

- **MP says Lebanon will have to recognize Syria opposition**

Lebanese MP Tammam Salam said that his country would eventually have to recognize the legitimacy of Syria's mainstream opposition National Coalition.

“Despite the policy of dissociation adopted by the Lebanese government with regard to the developments in Syria, the Syrian coalition will impose itself sooner or later on the Arab and international scene and Lebanon will be compelled to officially recognize it,” Salam said in remarks published by Kuwaiti daily Al-Anbaa on Thursday.

The MP, who has close ties with the Lebanese March 14 opposition group, also said that the Syrian National Coalition gradually acquired the necessary legitimacy that enabled it to become a fact to be reckoned with.

Salam also slammed the current Lebanese government, saying that it was adopting a “selective” dissociation policy “that meets both its own and the Syrian regime’s interests.”

The government in Lebanon has repeatedly announced that it was dissociating itself from the events in neighboring Syria, while its political landscape is split between supporters of the Syrian regime, represented by the March 8 alliance, and Western-backed forces associated with the March 14 coalition.

Syria is witnessing a violent uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which has so far killed more than 60,000 people since its outbreak in March last year, according to figures released by the United Nations.

The opposition Syrian National Coalition was formed in November in Qatar as umbrella group organizing together a number of anti-Syrian regime factions. A number of Western and Arab countries granted it formal recognition as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people in late 2012.

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

- **Syria death toll surges as clashes rage**

More than 60,000 people have been killed in the Syrian conflict, the UN said on Wednesday, as dozens more died or were wounded when an air strike hit a service station near Damascus.

As the casualties continued to mount, the family of a freelance US journalist, who contributed videos to AFP, revealed that he was kidnapped in Syria six weeks ago and has been missing ever since.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said in Geneva that 59,648 people had died through the end of November in the 21-month conflict, which

began as a peaceful uprising in March 2011.

"Given there has been no let-up in the conflict since the end of November, we can assume that more than 60,000 people have been killed by the beginning of 2013," Pillay said in a statement.

"The number of casualties is much higher than we expected, and is truly shocking," she added.

Pillay said in December 2011 that the UN was unable to provide precise figures on the number of deaths. Since then, media have been relying on the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which put the total on Monday at more than 46,000.

"Although this is the most detailed and wide-ranging analysis of casualty figures so far, this is by no means a definitive figure," Pillay said.

Analysis has shown a steady increase in the average number of documented deaths per month since the beginning of the conflict, growing from around 1,000 in the summer of 2011 to an average of more than 5,000 since July 2012.

The Observatory said a regime air strike in the Eastern Ghuta region of Damascus killed or wounded dozens of people, many of them horribly burned.

"There are 12 bodies that have been found at the scene, including a number of rebels from different local battalions," Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP by phone. "It is not yet clear if the gas station was the target."

The Local Coordination Committees, a grassroots network of activists, estimated that at least 50 people were killed and dozens of others wounded.

It said the toll was likely to rise because bodies were still being pulled from the rubble, adding that "it is extremely difficult to count the dead because most of the bodies have been immolated."



A gruesome video posted on YouTube purported to show the aftermath of the attack, with many of the bodies burned.

It was not immediately clear if the bomb blasts caused the storage tanks to explode, but the scene was engulfed in fire, which suggests that was the case.

"MIG warplane strikes on Eastern Ghuta! Dozens of martyrs!" a man in the video shouted out as he and a fellow cameraman raced toward plumes of smoke to survey the damage.

One man stood wailing to God as he held what was left of his friend, a head and a shredded torso with a bloodied shirt still hanging on flaps of skin.

Another man was still atop a motorcycle in the middle of the fire, his body engulfed in flames.

The Observatory gave a toll of 127 people killed nationwide, including 60 civilians. Among the civilians were 12 members of the same family, most of them children, who died in an air raid in a town southwest of Damascus.

Warplanes also attacked insurgent strongholds in and around the capital and regime forces clashed with rebels in the north of the country, mainly around the Taftanaz airbase in Idlib province, the watchdog said.

The state news agency SANA, quoting an unnamed official, said unit guarding the airbase repelled multi-pronged attacks by rebel fighters, and a resident said jihadists were leading the assaults.

The family of US reporter James Foley, which had earlier asked media not to report his abduction in the hope that a low profile would assist in efforts to free him, broke their silence on Wednesday to reveal his plight.

"We want Jim to come safely home, or at least we need to speak with him to know he's okay," said his father, John Foley. Addressing the captors he said: "To the people who have Jim, please contact us so we can work together toward his release."

Foley, 39, an experienced reporter who has covered other conflicts, was seized by armed men in the town of Taftanaz province on November 22, along with a

driver and a translator who were later released, according to witnesses.

No group has claimed responsibility for the abduction.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/newsyriala-testnews/syria_death_toll_spirals_as_clashes_rage

- **Air raid on petrol station in Damascus suburb kills 30-activists**

Syrian warplanes bombed a petrol station in a rebellious suburb on the eastern edge of Damascus, just as a consignment of fuel arrived and crowds packed the station

At least 30 civilians were killed on Wednesday when Syrian warplanes bombed a petrol station in a rebellious suburb on the eastern edge of Damascus, two opposition campaigners on the scene said.

"I counted at least 30 bodies. They were either burnt or dismembered," said Abu Saeed, an activist who arrived at the area in the Muleiha suburb of Damascus an hour after the raid occurred at 1:00 PM (1100 GMT).

Another activist, Abu Fouad, said warplanes had bombarded the area as a consignment of fuel arrived and crowds packed the station.

Video footage taken by activists, which could not be independently verified, showed a body of a man a helmet on a motorcycle amid flames that had engulfed the site, apparently hit while in a line of vehicles waiting for petrol. A man was also shown carrying a dismembered body.

Muleiha is one of a series of Sunni Muslim suburbs ringing the capital that have been at the forefront of the 21 month revolt against the rule of President Bashar al-Assad, who belongs to the Shi'ite-derived Alawite minority sect.

Government forces control the centre of Damascus and have been pounding the suburbs from the air.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61700/World/Region/Air-raid-on-petrol-station-in-Damascus-suburb-kill.aspx>

- **Syrian rebels attack military airport in northwest**

Al-Qaeda linked Al-Nusra Front, along other Islamist rebel units, attack the Syrian Afis military airport near the main Aleppo-Damascus highway

Syrian rebels, some from Islamist units, fired machineguns and mortars at helicopters grounded at a northern military air base near the main Aleppo-Damascus highway on Wednesday, a monitoring group said.

The al Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front, Ahrar al-Sham Brigade and other units operating in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib were attacking the Afis military airport near Taftanaz, the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.



There was no immediate account of the fighting around the air base from Syrian state media.

Insurgents trying to topple President Bashar al-Assad see his air power as their

main threat. They hold swathes of eastern and northern provinces, as well as a crescent of suburbs around the capital, Damascus, but have been unable to protect rebel-held territory from relentless attack by helicopters and jets.

In recent months, rebel units have besieged several military installations, especially along Syria's main north-south artery from Aleppo, its most populous city, to Damascus.

The Observatory's director, Rami Abdelrahman, said Wednesday's attack was the latest of several attempts to capture the base. A satellite image of the airport shows more than 40 helicopter landing pads, a runway and aircraft hangars.

An estimated 45,000 people have been killed in the Syrian conflict, which began in March 2011 with peaceful protests against four decades of Assad family rule but turned into an armed revolt after months of government repression.

In Damascus, Assad's forces fired artillery and mortars at the eastern districts of Douma, Harasta, Irbin and Zamlaka, where

rebels have a foothold, activists living there said.

Syria's civil war is the longest and deadliest conflict to emerge from uprisings that began sweeping the Arab world in 2011 and has developed a significant sectarian element.

Rebels, mostly from the Sunni Muslim majority, confront Assad's army and security forces, dominated by his Shi'ite-derived Alawite sect, which, along with some other minorities, fears revenge if he falls.

U.N.-led diplomatic peace efforts have stumbled. Western and many Sunni Arab states demand Assad's immediate removal, an idea resisted by Russia, China and Syria's Shi'ite ally Iran.

The rebels say they will not negotiate unless Assad, who has vowed to fight to the death, leaves power.

More than 110 people, including at least 31 of Assad's soldiers and militiamen, were killed in Syria on the first day of 2013, according to the Observatory, which

tracks the conflict from Britain using a network of contacts inside the country.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61674/World/Region/Syrian-rebels-attack-military-airport-in-northwest.aspx>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Southern Yemen Movement Boycotts Reconciliation Talks in Sana'a**

TEHRAN (FNA)- The Southern Yemen Movement renewed its call for autonomy, and said that it will not take part in the national reconciliation talks due to be held in Sana'a in the near future.

Qasim Askar Gibran, the secretary general of the Supreme Council of the Southern Movement in Aden, told Arab-language Aljazeera television network that his movement will not attend the reconciliation talks which has been initiated by the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) and wants freedom, independence, separation of Southern Yemen and its autonomy.

"This initiative is not related to us and it does not resolve the problem of Southern

Yemen; rather it is just a solution to resolve the crisis between the government and the Northern Yemen's opposition forces," Gibran said.

"Southern Movement proposes drafting of a new initiative plan based on the principle of negotiations between the Northern and Southern governments of Yemen and returning of sovereignty to the government of the South," he added.

Many Southerners complain that the Northerners based in the capital Sana'a have discriminated against them and usurped their resources for decades. Most of Yemen's fast-declining oil reserves are in the South, which once was an independent state. The central government denies a discriminatory policy.

The so-called national reconciliation talks, a PGCC-brokered deal led to former Yemen's ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh's quitting in February after a year of protests against his rule and allowed his deputy, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, to take office.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107132537>

- **Oman raises spending in 2013 budget**

Oman announced Wednesday a \$33.54-billion budget for 2013, increasing spending by \$7.5 billion over last year's forecasts, and keeping deficit at five percent of the gross domestic product.

Public expenditure in the oil-producing sultanate in 2013 has been set at 12.9 billion rials (\$33.54 billion), which is 2.9 billion rials more than last year's budgeted spending, Finance Minister Darwish al-Balushi told reporters.

He said that revenues are forecast to reach 11.2 billion rials (\$29.12 billion), up from 8.8 billion rials (\$22.85 billion) last year.

Deficit is expected to amount to 1.7 billion rials (\$4.4 billion), or five percent of the GDP, he said.

The price of oil, which is expected to contribute 72 percent of revenues in the non-OPEC country, was calculated at \$75 per barrel, a conservative estimate that usually allows the Gulf state to enjoy a surplus.

In 2012, an oil price of \$109 per barrel propped revenues up to around 14 billion rials (\$36.4 billion), allowing for an increase in spending to around 13 billion rials (\$33.8 billion), the minister said.

He said that a budget surplus of around one billion rials (\$2.6 billion) will be channeled to fund part of this year's deficit.

Balushi said that current spending represents 63 percent of the budget, including 3.6 billion rials (\$9.4 billion) for defense and security.

The normally sleepy sultanate was caught up in the 2011 protests which swept the Arab world, with demonstrators taking to the streets to demand improved living conditions and reforms.

https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/gulfnews/oman_raises_spending_in_2013_budget

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Pakistan charity suspends work after killings**

Six women and a man, all charity workers, were shot dead in Pakistan's northwest

where the Taliban and other Islamist militants are active

A Pakistani charity on Wednesday suspended its operations for three days after seven staff were shot dead in the northwest, where aid groups demanded better protection.

"The NGO has suspended its activities for three days to mourn the deaths. They will decide after three days whether to start work again or not," said Abdul Rashid Khan, police chief of Swabi district where the attack took place.

The six women and their male colleague were ambushed and shot dead on Tuesday after returning from a local community centre.

"All seven victims of the attack have been buried. Police have started to investigate but we are not yet in a position to accuse anyone," Khan said.

The organisation, Support With Working Solution, runs dozens of health and education projects, including polio vaccinations, in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the

Taliban and other Islamist militants are active.

Tuesday's attack, for which there has been no claim of responsibility, comes days after nine polio vaccination workers were shot dead in a string of incidents in Pakistan.

There are growing concerns about a renewed surge of violence in the northwest.

On December 22 a suicide bomber killed Bashir Bilour, a senior minister in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and eight other people at a political meeting in Peshawar in an attack claimed by the Taliban.

And in October 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai, who campaigned for girls' right to an education, was shot and wounded in an attack also claimed by the Taliban.

On Wednesday, an umbrella organisation of around 200 charities in the northwest held talks on how to secure more protection, said Idrees Kamal, the coordinator of the Pakhtunkhwa Civil Society Network.

"We are here to discuss the situation and to chalk out a work strategy for the future because we need better security," Kamal said.

Other charity workers said Tuesday's attack had heightened fears.

"It has created uncertainty. We were already facing problems," said Imran Takkar, programme manager of the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child.

"How can a state protect its people if it can't protect its ministers?" Takkar told AFP, referring to the assassination of Bilour.

Yasrab Nazeer, provincial programme coordinator of Rahnuma which works on health projects, said the attacks were alarming.

"We are really concerned about such attacks. NGO workers, particularly women workers, feel insecure. The government will have to take steps for our protection," she said.

Imtiaz Iltaf, police chief of Peshawar, said officers were preparing a strategy to protect aid workers.

"We are in a state of war. The whole country is facing an insurgency, so we are revising the present security steps and working on a new strategy," he said.

According to Islamabad, more than 35,000 people have been killed as a result of terrorism in the country since the 9/11 attacks on the United States.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/61694/World/International/Pakistan-charity-suspends-work-after-killings.aspx>

- **Afghan warlord Hekmatyar vows fresh attacks on NATO troops**

To send a warning to others 'waiting to invade Afghanistan', Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar stated in an interview that he will attack as many NATO troops as possible before they withdraw in 2014

Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar vowed in an interview published Wednesday to kill as many Western

soldiers as possible before NATO combat forces withdraw from the country in 2014.

Hekmatyar, a former prime minister who leads Afghanistan's second largest militant group Hezb-i-Islami, told Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper that fresh attacks would send a warning to "others waiting to invade Afghanistan".

"Before the withdrawal of invading forces, the Mujahideen would like to witness with their own eyes a scene that will teach the invaders to never think of coming this way again," he said in a video obtained by the Telegraph in response to questions asked through an intermediary.

Hekmatyar, designated a global terrorist by the United States, warned that Afghanistan could collapse into bloody civil unrest after NATO troops withdraw, 13 years after the US-led invasion.

"The fact is that the government has failed," said the former premier, who is shown in the video with a white beard and wearing a black turban.

"We might have a dreadful situation after 2014 which no one could have anticipated."

NATO is aiming to train 350,000 Afghan soldiers and police by the end of 2014 to take over responsibility for security.

But trust between the two sides has been seriously undermined by "insider" attacks by Afghan forces that killed more than 60 foreign troops in 2012, and the transition process has been beset by other problems including desertions.

Hekmatyar indicated that Hezb-i-Islami, notorious for its bloody siege of Kabul in the 1990s, has softened some of its hardline Islamist policies such as banning women from education.

He condemned the Pakistani Taliban's blocking of girls' schooling, which was thrown into the spotlight in October by its attempted murder of 15-year-old education campaigner Malala Yousafzai on her schoolbus.

He insisted that Hezb-i-Islami "consider education is as necessary for girls as it is

for boys", though they object to combined male and female classes.

The former premier also blasted Britain's Prince Harry, who has been serving in Afghanistan since September as an Apache helicopter pilot, as a "jackal" who was "drunk" while on duty.

"The British prince comes to Afghanistan to kill innocent Afghans while he is drunk," Hekmatyar told the Telegraph.

A spokeswoman from Prince Harry's office at Clarence House declined to comment on Hekmatyar's remarks.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/61681/World/International/Afghan-warlord-Hekmatyar-vows-fresh-attacks-on-NAT.aspx>

- **Afghanistan sets conditions for Taliban office in Qatar**

Dr. Zalmay Rassoul

By Sajad

Khaama Press

January 2, 2013

Afghan foreign minister Dr. Zalmay Rassoul insisted that the Afghan government will not allow to open a liaison office for the Taliban group in Qatar unless the group is not prepared to sit-in for peace talks.

While speaking among the Afghan lawmakers foreign minister Zalmay Rassoul said negotiations between Afghan and Qatar officials are in progress to sign an agreement in this regard.

He said, "The office for the Taliban group will not be opened unless the Taliban group or its representatives do not announce to start talks with the Afghan government. It will be highly risky if the office is opened and secret talks are hold."

Mr. Rassoul further added, "The Taliban group is saying that they are not ready to hold talks with the Afghan government. Who are they going to negotiate with? We will face a big issue if they hold talks with the others and we have witnessed it in the past."

He insisted that the Taliban office in Qatar will be opened for peace talks only and in no case will help the Taliban group to be formally recognized.

“The office will not represent the Taliban group. The office will be used only for talks between Afghan government and Taliban representatives. Afghan government will have the right to close the office at any time if any violations take place”, Zalmay Rassoul said.

He also said that the legal conditions and authorities of the Taliban office members will be specified in the framework of the agreement between Afghanistan and Qatar.

Negotiations over the agreement is in progress between Kabul and Doha, he said adding that, “We should know with whom we are holding talks and it should be clear that the Taliban representatives who are going to visit the Qatar office to which group they belong to.”

He said the Afghan high peace council will have the authority to confirm if the representatives are representing the overall Taliban group or not.

This comes as the Afghan government earlier insisted to open Taliban office in Saudi Arabia or Turkey however talks on

Taliban liaison office in Qatar started following direct talks between Washington and Taliban group.

The Afghan government also reacted negatively towards the Taliban liaison office in Qatar but later agreed with the Taliban liaison office.

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

- **Taliban: US role in Afghanistan similar to Vietnam war**

By Sajad

Khaama Press

January 2, 2013

The Taliban has likened the planned withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan to America’s pullout from Vietnam, calling it a “declare victory and run” strategy.

The group following a statement on Wednesday said the ongoing transfer of security operations from U.S. troops to Afghan forces was merely a retreat similar to the American withdrawal from South Vietnam prior to the communist victory there in 1975.

“They want to flee from Afghanistan just as they turned tail and ran from Vietnam,” the Taliban statement said. “When America faced utter destruction in Vietnam, they came up with the formula ‘declare victory and run’ and want to utilize the formula of ‘transfer security and run’ here in Afghanistan.”

The United States withdrew its combat troops from South Vietnam in 1973, leaving South Vietnamese forces to face the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong who marched into the capital, Saigon, two years later

This comes as the American-led Nato troops are due to pull out of Afghanistan by the end of 2014, although the US will leave a residual force behind and other Nato countries have pledged continuing support of the Kabul government.

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

- **US steps up drone attacks in Afghanistan despite UN condemnation**

Press TV

January 2, 2013

The United States has stepped up its assassination drone attacks in Afghanistan despite the United Nations’ condemnation of targeted killings, Press TV reports.

According to United States military data, Afghanistan was the main target of American assassination drone attacks in 2012, with some 450 strikes, which is more than double the previous year’s number.

Washington claims the targets of the drone attacks are al-Qaeda militants, but local officials and witnesses maintain that civilians have been the main victims of the attacks over the past few years.

“Unfortunately, they think they can win this war by killing civilians. Actually, these attacks are revenges from the loss that the US government has faced in Afghanistan,” Mohammad Daoud Abedi with Afghan Nation Peace Council told Press TV.

This comes while the United Nations has identified the United States as the world’s number one user of targeted killings, largely due to its drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Reports say over 3,300 people, many of them women and children, were killed in US drone attacks in Pakistan between June 2004 and September 2012.

Rights and peace groups opposed to the targeted killings say the US administration has already violated international law by pursuing its assassination drone attacks.

Meanwhile, the UN plans to set up an investigation team in Geneva to probe the American drone attacks, as UN officials are concerned that Washington is setting a legal and ethical precedent for other countries developing armed drones.

The targeted killings started under former President George W. Bush and were expanded by President Barack Obama. In 2012, Obama personally approved the names put on the "kill lists" used in the targeted killing operations carried out by American assassination drones.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are not the only countries targeted by the US assassination drones. The unmanned aircraft are also operating in Yemen and Somalia.

According to a report compiled by the Washington think-tank, New America Foundation, the number of the US drone airstrikes in Yemen almost tripled this year compared with the previous one.

The report said that the United States has intensified its drone strikes in Yemen as well, increasing the number of operations drastically from 18 in 2011 to 53 in 2012 and killing at least 223 people.

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

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanrıverdi O. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

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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