



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU 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 Güvenliği

Economy News

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Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dışı Aktörler

Relations with the West

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20 FEBRUARY 2017

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1. IRAQ

- **Mosul offensive: Iraqi army resumes advance on IS bastion**

Iraqi government forces have resumed their push towards western Mosul, the last major stronghold of so-called Islamic State (IS) in Iraq. Artillery fire could be heard in the distance, reports the BBC's Quentin Sommerville, who is embedded with government troops.

More details:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39024723>

- **Iraqi forces clear 14 villages in Mosul neighborhood**

Iraqi forces liberated 14 villages in a Mosul neighborhood from ISIL during the first day of the military operation to retake the western part of the city, Lt. Gen. Abdul Amir Rashid Yarallah, the commander of the operation, said.

More details:

<http://en.mehrnews.com/news/123694/Iraqi-forces-clear-14-villages-in-Mosul-neighborhood>

- **Barzani to arrive in Paris for meeting with French President**

Kurdish President Masoud Barzani is scheduled to meet with the outgoing French President Francois Hollande in Paris on Tuesday, their second meeting in two months following Hollande's visit to Erbil in January.

More details:

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/20022017>

- **Sunni Women Tell of ISIS Detention, Torture**

Fighters from the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) are arbitrarily detaining, ill-treating, torturing, and forcibly marrying Sunni Arab women and girls in areas under their control in Iraq, Human Rights Watch said today.

More details:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/20/iraq-sunni-women-tell-isis-detention-torture>

- **Early Advances in Mosul Operation; 151 Killed in Iraq**

The fight for Mosul resumed yesterday and has, so far, been met with light resistance. The same was true in the east, but that quickly changed into a difficult campaign that took much longer than anticipated as forces drew closer to central districts. So far, security forces captured several villages near the Mosul International Airport.

More details:

<http://original.antiwar.com/updates/2017/02/19/early-advances-in-mosul-operation-151-killed-in-iraq/>

- **Iraq claims troops make early gains in operation to retake western Mosul**

Iraqi forces said on Sunday that they had regained territory from Daesh in the western part of Mosul, hours after the launch of an offensive to dislodge the extremist militia from its last key stronghold in the country. Federal police chief Raed Jawdat said government forces had taken control of some parts of the Hammam al-Alil area, as well as the district of al-Lazakah in the south-western part of Mosul.

More details:

<http://www.albawaba.com/news/iraq-claims-troops-make-early-gains-operation-retake-western-mosul-939876>

- **Iraqi government forces make advances on IS in Western Mosul**

Iraqi government forces have seized several villages as they make headway on the last Islamic State stronghold in the country. Thousands of troops and hundreds of vehicles backed by air power are involved in the assault in western Mosul, which was announced by the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Sunday.

More details:

<http://www.rte.ie/news/2017/0220/853905-iraq/>

- **Daesh under siege as Iraqi forces advance deeper into west Mosul**

US-backed Iraqi forces on Sunday launched a ground offensive to dislodge Daesh militants from the western part of the city of Mosul, and put an end to their ambitions for territorial rule in Iraq.

More details:

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1056916/middle-east>

- **Kurdistan Region President to meet with French President on Tuesday**

The President of the Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani to visit France and meet with French President at the Elysee. The Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani is scheduled to visit France on Tuesday and meet with the French President Francois Hollande. Barzani has been officially invited by the President Hollande.

More details:

<http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/db8f2a1c-9693-40ba-8005-512e7401336f/Kurdistan-Region-President-to-meet-with-French-President-on-Tuesday->

- **Will latest Iraqi offensive mean end of ISIL in Mosul?**

The Iraqi army and its allies have begun an offensive to drive fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group out of the most populated western area of Mosul. Haider al-Abadi, the Iraqi prime minister, made the announcement during his appearance in Munich for an international security conference.

More details:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2017/02/latest-iraqi-offensive-isil-mosul-170219200021660.html>

- **Iraq's foreign reserves down to US\$49 bn**

Iraq's foreign currency reserves recorded a drop to US\$49 billion, a decline triggered by falling world oil prices, according to the central bank governor. Central bank governor Ali al-Allaq said in a press conference at the bank's main office that the reserves rely on financial revenues from petroleum sales.

More details:

<http://www.iraqinews.com/business-iraqi-dinar/iraqs-foreign-reserves-us49-bn/>

- **25 Children Starve to Death in Iraq near Mosul**

An Iraqi human rights organisation has called on urgent help to prevent a "humanitarian catastrophe" after it said that approximately 25 children had passed away after starving to death in areas west of Mosul due to a lack of support from the central authorities in Baghdad or the international community.

More details:

<http://www.iraqdailyjournal.com/story-z14818356>

- **SAS spearhead fresh offensive to retake western Mosul from ISIS as four more villages are liberated from the terror group**

SAS troops led a fresh offensive yesterday to liberate Iraq's last remaining city under Islamic State control. The Special Forces, along with US Green Beret and Delta Force commandos, are embedded with Iraqi and Kurdish fighters in western Mosul, the country's second city.

More details:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4239762/Iraqi-forces-launch-push-retake-western-Mosul-ISIS.html>

- **Islamic State landmine kills 3 children in Ramadi**

Three children died late Sunday when a landmine planted by Islamic State militants in Ramadi, according to officials in Anbar. The three kids, aged 9-13 years, were herding a cattle when one of them trod on the landmine at al-Baghdadi precinct, west of the city, the region's mayor, Sharahbil al-Obeidi, was quoted as saying.

More details:

<http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/islamic-state-landmine-kills-3-children-ramadi/>

- **Tehran wants assurance Kurdish independence won't 'threaten' Iran's security, official says**

Representatives of the Iranian government have told a visiting Kurdish delegation that Tehran will "understand" further independence of the Kurdistan Region from Iraq if "it does not pose a threat" to the neighboring Islamic Republic, according to a top Kurdish party official who attended the talks in Tehran last week.

More details:

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/200220171>

- **Defense Secretary Mattis says U.S. forces heavily involved in Mosul operation**

U.S. Special Forces are operating near the front lines in the battle to retake western Mosul from Islamic State, but Defense Secretary James N. Mattis said Sunday during a visit to Arab allies here that there has been no change to rules of engagement regarding U.S. forces' role in the Iraqi operation since President Donald Trump took office.

More details:

<http://www.unionleader.com/article/20170220/NEWS10/170229965/-1/news>

- **US Defense Secretary Mattis: no Plan to Seize Iraqi Oil**

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis says the U.S. does not intend to seize Iraqi oil, shifting away from an idea proposed by President Donald Trump that has rattled Iraq's leaders.

More details:

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_UNITED_STATES_ISLAMIC_STATE?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2017-02-20-02-32-38

2. SYRIA

- **Ambassador says Qatar interested in joining Astana talks on Syria**

Doha shares Moscow's stance that it is only up to the people in Syria to decide on the country's future president, Russian Ambassador to Qatar Nurmakhmad Kholov told TASS on Monday.

MoreDetails:

<http://tass.com/politics/931794>

- **Syria's 'White Helmets' makers get US visas for Oscars**

Rescue workers from Syria's White Helmets - the subjects of an Oscar-nominated documentary - have received US visas to attend next week's Academy Awards ceremony.

More details:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/syria-white-helmets-makers-visas-oscars-170219034008104.html>

- **Syrian government forces press attack on Damascus outskirts: monitors, medic**

Syrian government forces fired rockets at a rebel-held area on Damascus's outskirts on Sunday, pressing an attack that began the day before and has killed up to 16 people, a medical worker and war monitors said.

More details:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKBN15Y08A>

- **Russia Delivers Over Five Tonnes of Humanitarian Aid to Syrians in 24 Hours**

The Russian center for Syrian reconciliation has provided 5.2 tonnes of humanitarian aid to over 5,600 Syrian citizens in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said Monday.

More details:

<https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201702201050850988-russia-5-tonnes-aid/>

- **Syria conflict: Rebels warns truce may collapse after attacks**

Rebel factions in Syria that backed recent peace moves say an intensification of government attacks has put the current truce in jeopardy.

More details:

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39024228?intlink_from_url=&link_location=live-reporting-story

- **Turkey proposed US Special Forces in northern Syria: FM**

Turkey proposed that the U.S. should send its own Special Forces to northern Syria to back moderate opposition forces fighting against Daesh, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Sunday, Anadolu reported.

More details:

<http://en.trend.az/world/turkey/2723047.html>

- **Ignoring “Political Transition” Lowers Syrian Expectations Ahead of Geneva**

Beirut- Few days prior to the new round of talks expected in Geneva this week and after the failure of the Astana meeting to bolster ceasefire in Syria, the opposition was looking with cautious optimism at all the recent developments anticipating the Feb. 23 round of talks.

More details:

<http://english.aawsat.com/2017/02/article55367734/ignoring-political-transition-lowers-syrian-expectations-ahead-geneva>

- **Syria regime shelling ‘bloody message’ before talks — opposition**

The leading Syrian opposition body on Sunday lambasted escalating attacks by government forces as a "bloody message" aimed at sabotaging peace talks that are due to open in Geneva next week.

More details:

<http://jordantimes.com/news/region/syria-regime-shelling-bloody-message%E2%80%9999-talks-%E2%80%9994-opposition>

- **Obama's 'Red Line' on Syria was a 'Colossal Mistake' - Former Security Adviser**

Retired General Jim Jones, the first national security adviser to former US president Barack Obama, has fiercely criticized the president's actions on Syria, calling it a "colossal mistake" to draw a "red line."

More details:

<https://sputniknews.com/politics/201702201050850691-obama-red-line-colossal-mistake/>

- **Syria ceasefire opens door for political solution, UN says**

The UN's envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, says the latest ceasefire in the war-ravaged country is holding better than previous ones and that the pause in fighting should pave the way for talks toward a political solution.

More details:

<http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/19/middleeast/syria-ceasefire-un-peace-talks/index.html>

- **Astana talks: Opposition says Syrian government attacks are sabotaging ceasefire**

Syrian rebel groups who have participated in peace talks said on Sunday that an upsurge in pro-regime army shelling and bombing was wrecking the prospects of maintaining a Russian-Turkish-brokered ceasefire.

More details:

<http://www.albawaba.com/news/astana-talks-opposition-says-syrian-government-attacks-are-sabotaging-ceasefire-939976>

3. IRAN

- **Important Documents to Be Signed in Iran President's Russia Visit**

Mahdi Sanaei, the Iranian ambassador to Russia, recently met Leonid Slutsky, the Chairman of the new Russian State Duma's Committee on International Affairs.

More details:

<http://ifpnews.com/news/politics/foreign-policies/2017/02/important-documents-to-be-signed-in-iran-presidents-russia-visit/>

- **US seeks pressure on independent states**

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said the US has always sought to put pressure on independent countries and does not want peace to be established in different regions.

More details:

<http://en.mehrnews.com/news/123700/US-seeks-pressure-on-independent-states>

- **Iran, Vietnam have positive cooperation in int'l circles: Deputy FM**

Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia-Pacific Affairs Ebrahim Rahimpour said Iran and Vietnam have had positive cooperation in the international circles and will proceed with it.

More details:

<http://www.irna.ir/en/News/82437364/>

- **Saudi, Israel unanimity against Iran 'no coincidence'**

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Ghasemi said the similar anti-Iranian approaches assumed by Saudi Arabian FM and Israeli Minister of War is not a coincidence.

More details:

<http://en.mehrnews.com/news/123695/Saudi-Israel-unanimity-against-Iran-no-coincidence>

- **Tehran provoking war, Yemen complains to UN**

The Yemeni government on Saturday filed a complaint with the UN over Iran's continuous incitement of war and attacking of neighboring countries.

More details:

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1056926/saudi-arabia>

- **Iran's (IRGC) Should Be Punished and the Europeans Need to Limit Their Rush to Trade with Iran**

As the General Michael Flynn's political star sets amidst continued controversy, the Trump administration is facing its first foreign policy tests less than a month after the inauguration.

More details:

<http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/iran-world/22195-iran-s-irgc-should-be-punished-and-the-europeans-need-to-limit-their-rush-to-trade-with-iran>

- **Iran dismisses Canada court ruling as "unacceptable"**

Iran's Foreign Ministry rejected on Sunday a recent Canadian court ruling against Iran as "unacceptable," Tehran Times daily reported.

More details:

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-02/20/c_136068728.htm

- **Saudi FM says Iran main sponsor of global terror**

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister on Sunday rejected Iranian calls for dialogue saying Tehran was the main sponsor of terrorism in the world, a destabilising force in the Middle East and wanted to "destroy us."

More details:

<http://gulftoday.ae/portal/b52132d6-2d2c-4cff-b7b9-abddb57aa99d.aspx>

- **Iran pushes for dialogue with Gulf countries**

Iran's foreign minister yesterday stepped up efforts to improve ties with Gulf Arab states urging them to work with their Shia rival to address "anxieties" and violence across the region.

More details:

<http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/20/02/2017/Iran-pushes-for-dialogue-with-Gulf-countries>

- **Ayatollah Khamenei urges swift action on environmental issues in Khuzestan**

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has called on Iranian officials to immediately address the problems facing residents of the southern Khuzestan Province, who are grappling with difficulties caused by natural phenomena.

More details:

<http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/02/20/511286/Iran-Leader-Khuzestan>

4. ISRAEL – PALESTINE

- **Health Minister to close Haifa nursing home accused of abuse**

Haifa nursing home CEO steps down amid abuse scandal as five staff members arrested, Health Minister vows to close it down entirely. Responding to video footage released last week, Israeli Health Minister Yaakov Litzman (UTJ) on Sunday promised to investigate nursing homes accused of

abusing residents. The footage showed nursing home staff members abusing elderly residents at the Neot Kipat Hazahav nursing home in Haifa

More Details:

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/225315>

- **No understandings with Trump on settlements yet — official**

Israel and the US have yet to come to understandings on the restriction of West Bank settlement building, as requested by US President Donald Trump, a senior Israeli official said Monday. It is thus unclear whether the government will be able to honor Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's promise to residents of Amona — an illegal West Bank outpost evacuated earlier this month — that Israel will build a new settlement for them, the first in 25 years, the official added.

More Details:

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/no-understandings-with-trump-on-settlements-yet-official/>

- **PM Lee: Two-state solution only way to peace and security in Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

Singapore hopes both Israel and Palestine can resume direct negotiations and make progress on a "just and durable solution" to their conflict, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Monday. "We have consistently believed that a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine, however hard to achieve, is the only way to bring peace and security to both peoples and to the Middle East," he said.

More Details:

<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/pm-lee-two-state-solution-only-way-to-peace-and-security-in-israeli-palestinian-conflict>

- **Netanyahu: I Secretly Met El-Sisi, Abdullah II**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu admitted on Sunday he met secretly a year ago with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II in the Southern Jordanian town of Aqaba. Israel's Haaretz daily said on Sunday that the three leaders met in the presence of former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry who pitched a plan that called for Israel to cede land it has occupied since 1967 and allow the creation of a Palestinian state — with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both countries. In return, Israel would get the official recognition from Palestine and other regional powers as a "Jewish state," the newspaper said.

More Details:

<http://english.aawsat.com/2017/02/article55367733/netanyahu-secretly-met-el-sisi-abdullah-ii>

- **A real friend of Israel would stand up for Palestinian rights**

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has invited the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to visit Australia because of "our absolute and enduring commitment to the State of Israel and our friendship". It could be argued that principles of freedom of speech justify the invitation. If that's the case, Palestinian leaders should also be visiting this country.

More Details:

<http://www.watoday.com.au/comment/a-real-friend-of-israel-would-stand-up-for-palestinian-rights-20170220-gugu19.html>

- **Palestinian pedestrian dies after being run over west of Ramallah**

A 55-year-old Palestinian died Monday morning after being hit by a speeding car while crossing the street, on Route 443 in the western outskirts of the Ramallah district in the central occupied West Bank. Israeli police spokesperson Luba al-Samri described the incident in a written statement as a "hit and run," but said that a Palestinian driver responsible for the accident later turned himself in to Israeli police. She said the unidentified driver was from occupied East Jerusalem.

More Details:

<http://www.maannnews.com/Content.aspx?ID=775559>

- **Israeli Soldiers Invade Homes in Hebron**

Dozens of soldiers invaded, on Monday at dawn, several neighborhoods in the southern West Bank city of Hebron, and nearby towns, searched homes and installed roadblocks. The soldiers invaded several neighborhoods in Hebron city, before breaking into and searching homes, and interrogated many Palestinians while inspecting their ID cards.

More Details:

<http://imemc.org/article/israeli-soldiers-invade-homes-in-hebron/>

- **Bishop Munib Younan of Palestine to Get 34th Niwano Peace Prize**

The Niwano Peace Foundation will award the 34th Niwano Peace Prize to Evangelical Lutheran Church Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan of Palestine in recognition of perseverance and compassion in his work to encourage dialogue between interreligious groups in the Middle East and elsewhere. An award presentation ceremony will take place in Tokyo on July 27 at 10:30 a.m. In addition to an award certificate, Bishop Younan will receive a medal and prize money.

More Details:

<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/bishop-munib-younan-of-palestine-to-get-34th-niwan-peace-prize-300409942.html>

- **How factionalism is killing the Palestinian struggle**

In the first month of 2017, Gazans hit the streets to protest against the daily electricity cuts in the strip. Despite the evident cry for action from the streets, political leaders seized the opportunity to blame each other, turning it into a Hamas v Fatah debate. While politicians hijacked the issue, Palestinians in Gaza reported a brutal crackdown on protesters by Hamas, similar to the ones the Palestinian Authority would customarily inflict on protesting residents of the West Bank.

More Details:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/02/factionalism-killing-palestinian-struggle-170216134804805.html>

- **The birth of Greater Israel?**

When Donald Trump launched his thunderbolt about the possibility of a single state for Israelis and Palestinians, he didn't surprise those who have followed events in the Middle East. The new American president's strong sympathy for Israel has long been on display, and Jared Kushner, his son-in-law and senior adviser, is a Zionist sympathiser, and has spent much time in Israel. Standing by Trump's side when he made this announcement was Bibi Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, a man Trump claims as an old friend.

More Details:

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1315770/the-birth-of-greater-israel>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Debt reduction — a practical objective**

Nothing in the government's plans for 2016 or in economic reform programme agreed upon with the IMF said that Jordan's public debt, in absolute figures, must be reduced in 2016. As a matter of fact, the programme is dealing with debt not in absolute figures, but as a percentage of the GDP. All what is required by the programme is for public debt not to rise as a percentage of GDP in current prices.

More Details:

<http://jordantimes.com/opinion/fahed-fanek/debt-reduction-%E2%80%94-a-practical-objective>

- **Israel, Egypt, Jordan secretly talked peace**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met secretly a year ago with the leaders of Egypt and Jordan in a failed attempt by the Barack Obama administration to convene a wider regional summit on Israeli-Palestinian peace, Israel's Haaretz daily said on Sunday. Citing unidentified senior officials in Mr. Obama's administration, Haaretz said Mr. Netanyahu, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Jordan's King Abdullah and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry convened on Feb. 21, 2016 in the Jordanian Red Sea resort of Aqaba.

More Details:

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/Israel-Egypt-Jordan-secretly-talked-peace/article17330244.ece>

- **Jordanian Tourism and Antiquities Minister in Beirut**

Jordanian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Lina Annab, came on Sunday to Beirut on an official visit to Lebanon. The visit aims at reinforcing tourism ties between Jordan and Lebanon and at promoting religious tourism sites. At the airport, the Jordanian Minister expressed her pleasure for being in Lebanon.

More Details:

<http://nna-leb.gov.lb/en/show-news/75504/Jordanian-Tourism-and-Antiquities-Minister-in-Beirut>

- **Tax hikes will have negative effect on growth and investments: Lebanese economic associations**

Representatives of economic associations in Lebanon issued a statement Sunday urging the government to drop the idea of raising taxes in the 2017 draft budget. "Representatives of economic associations believe that any increase in taxes will have very negative repercussions on economic growth and the flow of investments to Lebanon noting that the proposed taxes amount to LL2,400 billion [around \$1.6 billion]," the statement said.

More Details:

<http://www.albawaba.com/business/lebanon-tax-hikes-will-have-negative-effect-on-growth-and-investments-economic-associations-939964>

- **Report: Russia Willing to Help Lebanon with Electoral Law**

Russia is likely to give Lebanon a helping hand in finding a new parliamentary electoral law format acceptable by all political parties, to save the country from "sliding into a political crisis," al-Akhbar daily reported on Monday. "Moscow will possibility make a move to help (Lebanon) find a format for a new electoral law acceptable by all forces, to avoid potentials of a political crisis that could open

the door on an exposed security situation in Lebanon,” sources told the daily on condition of anonymity.

More Details:

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/225716-report-russia-willing-to-help-lebanon-with-electoral-law>

- **Karam: Hezbollah impedes finalization of electoral law for regional calculations**

Lebanese Forces" bloc member, Deputy Fadi Karam, accused on Monday "Hezbollah of impeding the finalization of a new electoral law for regional calculations". He told the "Voice of Lebanon" radio that contacts regarding the new electoral law were still ongoing. Regarding the budget, Karam refused "to secure its resources at the expense of the citizen".

More Details:

<http://nna-leb.gov.lb/en/show-news/75521/Karam-Hezbollah-impedes-finalization-of-electoral-law-for-regional-calculations>

- **Israeli threats to Lebanese sovereignty will meet ‘appropriate response’: Aoun**

Lebanese President Michel Aoun said on Saturday that any Israeli attempt to violate Lebanon’s sovereignty would be met with the “appropriate response,” in a statement released by his office. “Any attempt to hurt Lebanese sovereignty or expose the Lebanese to danger will find the appropriate response,” the statement said.

More Details:

<http://en.abna24.com/news/middle-east/israeli-threats-to-lebanese-sovereignty-will-meet-%E2%80%98appropriate-response%E2%80%99-aoun.html>

- **Jordan hopes resumption of trade exchange with Iraq soon**

Jordanian Prime Minister Hani Mulki on Saturday expressed hope of the resumption of trade exchange with Iraq following the closure of the crossing border between the two countries, the state-run Petra news agency reported. At a meeting with a delegation of Iraqi business people and officials, Mulki said that the relationship between Jordan and Iraq is strategic.

More Details:

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-02/19/c_136066825.htm

- **Irish peacekeepers in Lebanon at risk from 'jihadist threat' says top general**

Irish peacekeepers stationed in south Lebanon is at risk of being targeted by militant jihadists, according to the Irish General who commands the UN force in the country. More than 300 Irish soldiers currently serve in Lebanon and “the biggest concern”, according to United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Major General Michael Beary, is the “jihadist threat”.

More Details:

<http://www.thejournal.ie/irish-peacekeepers-lebanon-3247787-Feb2017/>

6. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Saudi FM says Iran main sponsor of global terror**

MUNICH: Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister on Sunday rejected Iranian calls for dialogue saying Tehran was the main sponsor of terrorism in the world, a destabilising force in the Middle East and wanted to “destroy us.”

More Details:

<http://gulftoday.ae/portal/b52132d6-2d2c-4cff-b7b9-abddb57aa99d.aspx>

- **Saudi warms to solar to boost oil exports**

At Saudi Aramco’s sprawling campus of office buildings, control rooms and suburban-style residential compounds in Dhahran in the country’s east, Saudi Aramco runs the country’s biggest solar plant, a 10 megawatt facility mounted on a parking lot roof. The solar panels atop the parking facility cut the need for the equivalent of about 30,000 barrels of oil and the wind turbines will eliminate demand for about 19,000 barrels, according to Aramco.

More Details:

<http://www.gulf-times.com/story/533549/Saudi-warms-to-solar-to-boost-oil-exports>

- **Yemen’s Houthis say they attacked a Saudi power plant with a ballistic missile**

Yemen’s armed Houthi group said they launched a ballistic missile at a power plant in neighbouring Saudi Arabia. Citing a military official, the Yemen News Agency (SABA NET) said on Sunday that Houthis fired a medium-range ballistic missile at Al-Shuqaiq power plant in Saudi’s Jizan province.

More Details:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170220-yemens-houthis-say-they-attacked-a-saudi-power-plant-with-a-ballistic-missile/>

- **Norwegian Refugee Council staff abducted in Yemen: minister**

Yemeni rebels have abducted a dozen local staff working for the Norwegian Refugee Council in the Red Sea district of Hodeida, a minister and local sources said Monday.

More Details:

<http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/world/norwegian-refugee-council-staff-abducted-in-yemen-minister/article/486243>

- **Ambassador says Qatar interested in joining Astana talks on Syria**

Doha shares Moscow's stance that it is only up to the people in Syria to decide on the country's future president, Russian Ambassador to Qatar Nurmakhmad Kholov told TASS on Monday.

More Details:

<http://tass.com/politics/931794>

- **US defense chief visits UAE in first Middle East trip**

US President Donald Trump's defense secretary arrived in the United Arab Emirates on Saturday for talks with one of Washington's closest allies in the Middle East.

More Details:

<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2017/02/19/US-defense-chief-visits-UAE-in-first-Middle-East-trip.html>

- **UAE signs \$1.2 bn in deals as IDEX arms fair opens**

Abu Dhabi: The four-day International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) kicked off Sunday in Abu Dhabi with the United Arab Emirates announcing 21 deals worth more than \$1.2 billion.

More Details:

[http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/19/02/2017/UAE-signs-\\$1.2-bn-in-deals-as-IDEX-arms-fair-opens](http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/19/02/2017/UAE-signs-$1.2-bn-in-deals-as-IDEX-arms-fair-opens)

- **Australia and UAE to explore deeper ties**

Defence Industry Minister Christopher Pyne and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan have agreed to explore deeper defence ties between Australia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Pyne and Sheikh Mohammed have met on Sunday on the sidelines of the biennial International Defence Exhibition and Conference in Abu Dhabi.

More Details:

<http://www.ibtimes.com.au/australia-uae-explore-deeper-ties-1544179>

- **Parliament Speaker Al-Ghanim arrives in Bahrain on Official Visit**

Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanim arrived in the Kingdom of Bahrain on Sunday on an official visit in response to an invitation by his Bahraini counterpart Ahmad bin Ibrahim Al-Mulla.

More Detail:

<http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2592787&Language=en>

- **Oman economy: Experts point to efficiency in 2018**

Financial experts in Oman have welcomed the projected growth Oman is expected to see in 2018. A combination of a prudent budget, fiscal discipline and structural reforms, together with a growing tourism sector and connected projects, sees an economic forecast that will register a high GDP growth and low deficit as public sector spending is reinstated by 2018, according to a MENA report by the International Institute of Finance (IIF).

More Details:

<http://timesofoman.com/article/103123/Oman/Oman>

7. EGYPT

- **Egypt says committed to two state solution along 1967 borders**

Egypt is doing all it can to see a just and permanent resolution to the Palestinian issue based on the two state solution, the Egyptian Presidency said on Sunday. "Egypt supports the right of Palestinians to have an independent state along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital," presidency spokesman Youssef said in a statement.

More Details:

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/258512/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-says-committed-to-two-state-solution-along--.aspx>

- **Al-Sisi meets with delegation from major American Jewish organisations**

President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi met on Sunday a delegation of the heads of major US-Jewish organisations that are currently visiting Egypt. The meeting aimed to foster relations between the US and Egypt, according to a presidential statement.

More Details:

<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2017/02/19/615738/>

- **Egyptian army destroys major smuggling tunnel under Rafah borders**

Military spokesperson Tamer al-Refaei said Monday that army troops discovered and destroyed a major underground tunnel between Egypt and Gaza strip south to Rafah city. Refaei explained that the tunnel has been used by Takfiri factions in different trafficking operation cross the borders.

More Details:

<http://www.egyptindependent.com//news/egyptian-army-destroys-major-smuggling-tunnel-under-rafah-borders>

- **Al-Azhar supports Grand Imam's call to pay attention to democracy**

Several al-Azhar scholars have their declared support of Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayyeb's call on the necessity of paying attention to crucial issues that occupy the Islamic world and to avoid wasting time with trivial issues. He also urged scholars to renew their visions on political issues such as democracy, as several political forces claim that democracy is a form of disbelief.

More Details:

<http://www.egyptindependent.com//news/al-azhar-supports-grand-imam-s-call-pay-attention-democracy>

- **Egyptian pound strengthens on weaker dollar demand from importers**

The Egyptian pound strengthened on Sunday, reaching a three month high, as importers' demand for dollars at banks eased, bankers told Reuters on Sunday. Banks were selling dollars at around 15.8 pounds per dollar on Sunday, stronger than Thursday's rate of around 16 per dollar.

More Details:

<http://en.aswatmasriya.com/news/details/18488>

- **Egypt jails 21 opponents for life for 'violence'**

An Egyptian court on Sunday sentenced 21 anti-regime opponents to life for allegedly committing violence following the 2013 coup against President Mohamed Morsi, according to a local judicial source.

More Details:

<http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/egypt-jails-21-opponents-for-life-for-violence-/753852>

- **Egypt committed to two-state solution**

Egypt is doing all it can to see a “just and permanent resolution” to the Palestinian issue based on the two-state solution, the Egyptian Presidency said on Sunday, according to the website of the Al-Ahram newspaper.

More Details:

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/225299>

- **Islamic State airs video of Cairo church bomber, threatens Egypt's Christians**

Islamic State published a video on Sunday threatening Egyptian Christians and showing the last statement of a man it said was responsible for the deadly bombing in December of a Coptic cathedral in Cairo.

More Details:

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/02/20/world/islamic-state-airs-video-cairo-church-bomber-threatens-egypts-christians/#.WKqfltSLSmU>

- **Egyptian lawyer files lawsuit against settling Palestinians in Sinai**

A group of Egyptian human rights lawyers have filed a lawsuit to prevent the establishment of “foreign settlements” in the Sinai Peninsula, following reports that Israel was discussing the option of forcibly resettling Palestinians to the Egyptian territory in lieu of establishing a Palestinian state in the occupied West Bank.

More Details:

<http://www.maannnews.com/Content.aspx?ID=775547>

- **Kenya, Egypt agree to remove double taxation on imports**

Kenya and Egypt on Saturday agreed to remove double taxation on imports to boost trade and investment. The move came during Egyptian President Abdel Fatah El-Sisi's visit seeking to boost bilateral relations with Kenya.

More Details:

<http://aa.com.tr/en/africa/kenya-egypt-agree-to-remove-double-taxation-on-imports/753436>

8. NORTH AFRICA

- **Libyan general slams Europe, US for backing terror**

Libyan General Khalifa Haftar has accused several European countries and the United States of supporting terrorist groups in Libya by secretly providing those weapons and training. In an interview aired on the Egyptian ON LIVE radio channel on Saturday, Haftar described France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and the United States as “partners” to the terrorists in Libya.

More Details

<http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2017/02/19/511199/Libya-Khalifa-Haftar-Western-sponsors-for-terrorism-ON-LIVE-interview>

- **Second son of prominent Sudanese religious leader killed in Libya**

Second son of the late leader of Jamaat Ansar al Sunnah in Sudan, Abu Zaid Mohamed Hamzah, has been killed during an air raid against the Islamic State (ISIS) in Sirte town, 500 kilometres east of the Libyan capital Tripoli. Mohamed Khalifa Siddig, an expert on Islamic groups told Sudan Tribune Sunday that Mohamed Abu Zaid Mohamed Hamza, 27 and his wife were killed in Sirte, saying his family received the news and will set up a mourning tent at their home in Khartoum’s twin city of Omdurman.

More Details

<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article61691>

- **Ageela Saleh in “constructive” talks with UNSMIL’s Martin Kobler**

House of Representatives president Ageela Saleh flew from Algeria to Egypt to meet UNSMIL chief Martin Kobler in Alexandria today. No statement was issued after their talks but the irrepressible Kobler later tweeted that the discussions had been “constructive” and dwelt on “concrete” next steps in resolving the paralysis over the Libyan Political Agreement.

More Details

<https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/02/19/ageela-saleh-in-constructive-talks-with-unsmils-martin-kobler/>

- **Algeria Kills 14 in Crackdown on ISIL-Linked Militants**

Algerian security forces killed 14 suspected militants in an ongoing operation in one of the country's last strongholds of suspected militant groups East of the capital, Algiers. Algerian defense ministry said in an statement that the terrorists were killed around Bouira, 100km East of the capital, Algiers, New Arab reported.

More Details

<http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13951201000727>

- **Oil Exploration: Morocco Imposes Environmental Standards on Its Partners**

Partners of the National Office of Hydrocarbons and Mines (ONHYM) are now required to carry out environmental impact assessments before starting their work, in accordance with environmental regulations, announced Director General (DG) of the office, Amina Benkhadra.

More Details

<https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2017/02/208695/oil-exploration-morocco-imposes-environmental-standards-on-its-partners/>

- **Benkirane: 'I am Waiting for the King's Return'**

Morocco's Head of Government, Abdelilah Benkirane, decided to put an end to government formation negotiations on Saturday and stated that he will inform King Mohammed VI upon his return from Ghana. During a meeting with the Central Committee of the young members of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) on Saturday, Abdelilah Benkirane said that the state of stagnancy marking the political scene in Morocco would not continue forever.

More Details

<https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2017/02/208756/benkirane-i-am-waiting-for-the-kings-return/>

- **Mehdi Jemaa: "We want to fight political mediocrity in Tunisia"**

Mehdi Jemaa, former Prime Minister and president of strategic studies centre "Alternative Tunisia" called the current political situation in the country "mediocre", affirming he, and his team, would like to "fight this mediocrity by upholding the principles of work and non-exclusion". Speaking at a

meeting held on Sunday in Mahdia, Jemaa stressed "the absence of a clear vision and strategy in the current political landscape," claiming to have a concrete and applicable political alternative.

More Details

<http://www.tap.info.tn/en/Portal-Politics/8730598-mehdi-jemaa-we>

- **FM heads to Tunisia for Libyan crisis meeting**

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry headed to Tunis on Sunday to take part in a foreign ministers meeting on the Libyan crisis. The ministers of Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia will be in attendance. The meeting will tackle developments in the Libyan crisis, in addition to coordinating efforts to find solutions among Libya's three neighboring countries. The ministers will also discuss the outcomes of the meeting held recently in Cairo among Libyan rival parties.

More Details

<http://www.egyptindependent.com//news/fm-heads-tunisia-libyan-crisis-meeting>

- **Libya's Sarraj sees Russia as possible intermediary with eastern commander**

Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj of the UN-backed government in Tripoli said on Sunday he would like Russia to help overcome deadlock in the country, which is struggling with divisions among militias and an extremist militant threat.

More Details

<http://jordantimes.com/news/region/libya%E2%80%99s-sarraj-sees-russia-possible-intermediary-eastern-commander>

9. AFGHANISTAN – PAKISTAN

- **Cultural diplomacy or nationalist sentiment?**

The despicable attack on the Indian Army camp in Uri by Pakistani infiltrators last September and the incident's precursor at the Air Force base at Pathankot led to a rather piquant situation in the world of art and culture in India.

More Details

<http://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/cultural-diplomacy-or-nationalist-sentiment-1487534623.html>

- **Govt spending public funds at Lahore leaving nothing for rural area: Elahi**

Pakistan Muslim League (PML) senior central leader, former Punjab Chief Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ch Parvez Elahi has said that rulers are responsible for all crises, chaos, violence, terrorism and deteriorating law and order situation in country. He was addressing a huge public gathering mostly attended by farmers, ex-servicemen and laborers at Saida Sharif, a village situated on outskirts of Phalia. He said Mian brothers were spending public funds at Lahore leaving nothing for the rural area.

More Details

<http://pakobserver.net/govt-spending-public-funds-at-lahore-leaving-nothing-for-rural-area-elahi/>

- **Afghanistan asks Pakistan to explain shelling inside its territory**

The Afghan government has asked Pakistan to explain its shelling inside the Afghan territory. The Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement condemned Pakistani missile attacks inside Afghanistan which it said forced dozens of families to migrate to other places. It expressed concern over arrests of over a hundred Afghan refugees in Pakistan and said the neighbouring country should immediately open the border.

More Details

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/187615-Afghanistan-asks-Pakistan-to-explain-shelling-inside-its-territory>

- **Punjab govt orders 'shoot at sight' policy for terrorists**

Security agencies in Punjab have adopted a more aggressive policy against terrorists in the province and the directives of shooting them at sight have been issued. It was decided in the apex meeting that the scope of operation against terrorists in Punjab will be expanded with the help of intelligence agencies to overcome the scourge of terrorism.

More Details

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/02/20/punjab-govt-orders-shoot-at-sight-policy-for-terrorists/>

- **Right balance: Call for revisiting one-language policy**

The one-language policy imposed since the creation of the country is defective and needs to be revised and a balance found between the languages spoken in the country.

More Details

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1332589/right-balance-call-revisiting-one-language-policy/>

- **Pak Army brings heavy artillery at border to ‘shock’ Afghanistan**

The Pakistan Army Monday tightened security at Pak-Afghan border and brought heavy artillery at border to shock Afghanistan, reported a private TV channel.

More Details

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/02/20/pak-army-brings-heavy-artillery-at-border-to-shock-afghanistan/>

- **Afghanistan Among The World Repressed Economies**

Afghanistan has been place among the repressed economies of the world, after becoming a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2016, according to the annual ranking launched by The Heritage Foundation.

More Details

<http://www.bakhtarnews.com.af/eng/business/item/27581-afghanistan-among-the-world-repressed-economies.html>

- **Munich Security Conference; Good Opportunity to Fight Terrorism, Extremism**

President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Mohammad Ashraf Ghani delivered his remarks in the 53rd Munich Security Conference later Saturday evening. President Ghani said that terrorism has combined social networks and virtual networks, using criminal economic networks particularly drugs as a platform for global criminal politics. He said that there is no boundary which terrorism will not cross and no space or social group that it will spare.

More Details

<http://www.bakhtarnews.com.af/eng/politics/item/27580-munich-security-conference-good-opportunity-to-fight-terrorism-extremism.html>

- **Afghan war: Pentagon chief readies Afghanistan proposals for Trump**

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis on Sunday said he is compiling an assessment for President Donald Trump to weigh on Afghanistan, which remains mired in a brutal and seemingly intractable conflict. The Afghan war is the longest in US history but Trump has scarcely given it a passing mention — either while campaigning or since entering the White House.

More Details

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1332644/afghan-war-pentagon-chief-readies-afghanistan-proposals-trump/>

- **The Karachi Literature Festival needs disruption to win back Pakistan's literary heart**

Harris Khalique verbalised my thoughts at the eighth edition of the Karachi Literature Festival (KLF) exactly when, during the launch of his book *Crimson Papers*, he mused, “Why do I write? And what difference will it make?” He revealed this as the question he struggles with endlessly, and it occurred to me how this is what literature festivals ought to examine today. Because as borders become impermeable, as walls go up between people and as bans become common, a conversation about the limits of literature and language to bridge divides — or the new ways in which writing must be appropriated to effect change — becomes essential.

More Details

<http://images.dawn.com/news/1177129/the-karachi-literature-festival-needs-disruption-to-win-back-pakistans-literary-heart>

10.TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST

- **US backs role of Turkey, Russia in Syria cease-fire**

Brett McGurk, a top U.S. official in the anti-ISIL coalition, has voiced support for Turkey and Russia's leading role in enforcing the cease-fire in Syria. Speaking at a panel discussion in the ongoing Munich Security Conference on Sunday, McGurk acknowledged shortcomings of the previous U.S. administration in the last couple of years in de-escalating the violence and brokering a truce in the region.

More Details:

<http://www.worldbulletin.net/turkey/185057/turkish-opposition-deputy-arrested-in-anti-terror-probe>

- **Syrian refugees in camps praise Turkey, express thanks**

Syrian refugees in a Turkish refugee camp expressed deep gratitude towards Turkey, saying it had effectively saved their lives, treating them like brothers and providing for them. “We haven’t seen refugee camps in other countries, but those who did say this place is like a palace in comparison,” Sih Diyah Ferruh, a refugee living in a camp in Gaziantep, Turkey, told Anadolu Agency this week, adding that he prays for Turkey.

More Details:

<http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/syrian-refugees-in-camps-praise-turkey-express-thanks/754305>

- **27 Daesh terrorists killed in counter-terror ops carried out in Syria's al-Bab**

Turkish airstrikes and artillery shelling have killed 27 Daesh terrorists as part of the operation to liberate the northern Syrian town of al-Bab from terrorists, the military announced on Monday. The statement issued by the Turkish military provided up-to-date information on the developments that took place between Feb. 19, 7 a.m. (GMT 4 a.m.) to Feb. 20, 7 a.m. local time.

More Details:

<https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/02/20/27-daesh-terrorists-killed-in-counter-terror-ops-carried-out-in-syrias-al-bab>

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Firuze Yağmur Gökler. 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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