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Turkey 'quit Shalit talks due to Hamas demands'

By Haaretz Service

The Saudi newspaper *Al-Watan* reported on Tuesday that Turkey has ceased trying to broker a deal for the release of abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit due to excessive Hamas demands, Israel Radio said.

The newspaper based the report on comments by diplomatic sources. The sources were also quoted as saying that Israel's "weakness" and lack of support for its efforts had led Turkey to pull out of the negotiations.

They said Hamas' excessive demands had also triggered Turkey's decision to pull out of the negotiations, *Al-Watan* reported.

The report came after Turkish news channel CNN Turk reported in early February that a deal to secure Shalit's release could be reached very shortly. The channel said Turkish officials were holding talks at the time with Hamas officials in Damascus.

Hamas deputy political chief Moussa Abu Marzouk, meanwhile, was quoted by the pan-Arab newspaper *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* on Tuesday as denying a report that he was in possession of a video showing Shalit.

The Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Jarida* reported on Monday that Abu Marzouk had received the tape, in which Shalit was said to appear in good health, during a visit to Gaza.

But Abu Marzouk told *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* that he did not receive such a video during the visit. He was quoted as adding that he did not even meet with any Hamas officials while in Gaza. Shalit was abducted in a 2006 cross-border raid by Gaza militants. He is believed to be still held in the Hamas-ruled territory.

A senior official in the Prime Minister's Office said Monday that Israel does not know anything about the videotape, Israel Radio reported.

The official said Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is using every possible avenue to ensure Shalit's release and will do so up until the end of his tenure.

Meanwhile, Ofer Dekel, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's special envoy in the negotiations over the release of Shalit, arrived in Cairo on Sunday for more talks with Egyptian officials.

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