

Point-Blank Shot at Peace

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Mehr Vision

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Who benefits from assassination of Russian Ambassador?

By: **Hamid Reza Gholamzadeh**

Assassination of Russian Ambassador to Turkey Andrey Karlov was a shock on Monday night the news of which went quickly viral on the web and social networks.

The video of Officer Mevlut Mert Altintas who gunned down the ambassador in cold blood and then began shouting out was extraordinarily confusing as the assailant was a special force supposed to protect the diplomat and now he was crying out for long seconds without anyone interrupting him. What people across the world were watching was totally different from any imagination and previous instances of a terrorist attack; it was showing a shocking reality that in world of politics and in the volatile region of Middle East, you cannot easily trust or believe whatever you see or whatever things seem out there. This, however, has always been the case about international politics, but the heinous assassination of a diplomat by a special force security officer was a blatant and brazen reminder of it.

Ankara and Moscow agreed to form an investigative committee to go after perpetrators of the assassination. The inquiries and inspections of the committee might shed more light on the event in future; but for now it is better to review the situation in the Middle East and between the countries involved in Syria to have a better image of it and find out whose interests are served with this act of terror.

In fact, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan must be the first person to take lessons from his turned-terrorist officer and reconsider whom to trust. It is no secret anymore that Erdogan has taken wrong stances on Syrian crisis in various cases and that he has been trying to enhance his own power in the country and his country's in region regardless of the other players and stakeholders. Once siding with Arabs and US and once turning toward Russia and another time impeding peace process are changing policies



of him. When his country was about to face a coup a few months ago, it was Iran and Russia who warned him and actually helped him to bring the coup to a failed attempt. Yet he followed his insincere policy again and played a dangerous game on Aleppo.

After the failed coup attempt, Erdogan began cleansing all entities and organizations and detained or fired anyone connected in one way or the other to Gulen movement. Therefore, it can be said that the security and military forces in Turkey, and particularly Special Forces, are all loyal to the ruling government and president which can lead to the conclusion that the government has been behind this assassination.

Another way to interpret it is as one of Turkish officials said on Monday after the murder did, connecting him to Gulen movement. But it would translate into the bittering fact that despite all arrests and expulsions and pressures, Gulen still has loyalists as close to the high-ranking officials as Mevlut Mert Altintas. The two conclusions can be good reminders to Erdogan to still be careful in its domestic politics which he has long tried to make as totalitarian as possible.

Yet Turkey and its president don't seem to have any interests by killing Russian ambassador to Ankara.

The answer can be all the way around in the United States and its allies who support so-called moderate fighters against legitimate government of Assad.

On Monday August 8, former CIA chief Michael Morell appeared on Charlie Rose's program where he made controversial remarks. Here is the exact transcript of his words:

Mike Morell: So you don't want to destroy those things, right. You don't want to destroy those things. So here's what I think you want to do. I think you want to covertly, not openly but covertly, but you certainly want them to know, you want to covertly tell the moderate opposition that you're supporting to go after -- this is a big deal -- to go after the Russians and the Iranians who are on the ground. They got to pay a price for what they're doing. Just like we made the Russians pay a price in Afghanistan for what they're doing. We have to make them pay a price. We have to make them...

Charlie Rose: By supporting the Mujahedin.

Mike Morell: Yes. We have to make them to want to go home. We have to make them want to have a deal, right, so that's number one.

Charlie Rose: Now, how do we do that?

Mike Morell: We ask the moderate opposition -- we give the moderate op- ➔

position weapons.

Charlie Rose: What is it they want that they don't have?

Mike Morell: You know, Dave Petraeus could tell you exactly what they want. You know, I'm not a military guy.

Charlie Rose: In Afghanistan, it was military.

Mike Morell: Right. But I'd give them the things that they need to both go after the Assad government, but also to have the Iranians and the Russians pay a little price. When we were in Iraq, the Iranians were giving weapons to the Shi'a militia who were killing American soldiers, right. The Iranians were making us pay a price. We need to make the Iranians pay a price in Syria. We need to make the Russians pay a price. The other thing we need to do...

Charlie Rose: We make them pay the price by killing Russians?

Mike Morell: Yes.

Charlie Rose: And killing Iranians?

Mike Morell: Yes. Covertly. You don't tell the world about it, right. You don't stand up at the Pentagon and say we did this. Here's the other thing I want to do, I want to go after -- I want to go after those things that Assad sees as his personal power base, right. I want to scare Assad. So, I want to -- I want to go after his presidential guard. I want to bomb his offices in the middle of the night.

His remarks was so controversial that Charlie Rose decided to have him back on the program about ten days later; "you know, one of the things that you're taught as a young analyst at CIA is precision of language," Morell said and later continued. "Right. So one of the wars that's going on, right, is the Syrian military, supported by Russia and the Iranians are fighting the moderate opposition. And the moderate opposition is already killing -- is already killing Iranians and Syrians. What I said is that's a good -- that's an OK thing, right, because it puts pressure on Iran and Russia to try to see some value in ending this thing politically. And what I said is we should encourage -- what I wanted to say was that we should encourage the moderate opposition to continue to do that..."

With US presidential elections on the spot and a hot topic all around the world, Democrats and Obama administration began claiming that Russia had hacked into both Democratic and Republican parties, but released only Democrat

party documents to weaken them and help Trump win the elections in US. Just a couple of months after Morell, Vice President Joe Biden talked to Meet The Press to be asked about what Washington intends to do to respond to alleged hackings by Russia.

Chuck Todd: Alright. Final question. When-- I talked with Ambassador, former Russian Ambassador Mike McFaul.

Joe Biden: Yeah.

Chuck Todd: And-- we talked about the idea that every once-- you, you gotta respond when you, when they're hacking. You gotta do something. He described it as a high hard one. Maybe just, you know, sort of like in baseball. You throw a high hard one to send a message. Why haven't we sent a message yet to Putin?

Joe Biden: We're sending a message.

sent. Will the public know it?

Joe Biden: Hope not.

It was in mid-October; only seven weeks before President Obama speaking to NPR on last Friday again turning to retaliation to Russian alleged hackings. The US president said he is waiting for a final report he has ordered into a range of Russian hacking attacks, but promised there would be a response.

"I think there is no doubt that when any foreign government tries to impact the integrity of our elections ... we need to take action," Obama said. "And we will -- at a time and place of our own choosing," he said to the radio host and on the retaliatory measures he asserted that "some of it may be explicit and publicized; some of it may not be."

The remarks by three American figures are not something one can pass by indif-



We have the capacity to do it. And-- the message--

Chuck Todd: He'll know it?

Joe Biden: --he'll know it. And it will be at the time of our choosing. And under the circumstances that have the greatest impact. Look--

Chuck Todd: Will it be enough, do you think, that it'll get him to back off? I mean, how concerned are you that the country is actually gonna question the result of this election?

Joe Biden: I am not concerned. The reason I'm not is we're working very closely with all the departments of elections across the country, number one. Number two, the American people are pretty damn resilient. And number three, the, the capacity to do, to fundamentally alter the election is-- is not what people think. And-- I tell you what, to the extent that they do, we will be proportional in what we do. And-- at the--

Chuck Todd: So a message is gonna be

ferently. The assassination happened only one day before trilateral meeting between foreign ministers and defense ministers of Iran, Russia and Turkey which can be decisive on the fate of current situation in Syria and Aleppo. A closer relation between Turkey and the two other countries can be harmful to the policies the West is pursuing in Syria and Iraq.

So it won't be any surprise if western forces or their regional allies or even their so-called moderate oppositions have been behind the scenes of this terrorist targeting of late ambassador in Ankara to not only have Russia pay the price of its achievements in Syria, but also have Turkey pay the price of getting closer to Iran and Russia.

Hamid Reza Gholamzadeh has done his MA in North American Studies and his focus has been on US policies towards the Middle East. He is also English Chief Editor of Mehr News Agency |

Beyond assassination of Russian amb.; west implicated

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

Assassination of Andrey Karlov in Ankara has been a major enigma; but it is far clear that it had not been the product of an isolated case of overflow of sentimentality.

For the time being, it is assumed that it had been purposeful and there is a method behind the madness. We will collect what is evident in a set to come to an overall image of the situation, just as the detectives in a crime case do.

The scene is well-preserved by the media. An apparently fanatic Muslim young police officer shoots Russian ambassador to Turkey when he was addressing a meeting in a museum. The young police succeeds to implement the plan neatly by virtue of being a police officer in the museum; however, his hysteric words after shooting the ambassador communicate the similitude of a young sympathizer of the people in Aleppo trying to take revenge by his own hands. The media in the west and those supporting Takfirists would rejoice to propagate such an image of a lone wolf acting on his own. Simple as that.

But the scene is replete with evidence to the contrary, especially with the Aleppo liberated; the young assassin clearly declares that he seeks to take revenge of Aleppo on Russia by killing the ambassador. This would be plausible, but only when we ignore the important image of the west now frustrated and angered by the events in Aleppo; that alone would precipitate the harsh reaction in violent attire of an assassination.

The second evident issue is that the west at large and Zionist regime along with their allies in reactionary Arab regimes of the region had been despairing in the prospect of Aleppo. The common denominator of the assassin and Takfirists and their supporters is their consternation of the defeat in Aleppo. This should not be downplayed as a potential contributing factor.

Vladimir Putin of Russia however kept exemplary equanimity upon hear-



ing the news of the assassination; "this assassination manifestly is a provocative act to weaken the nascent process of détente with Turkey and to undermine the peace process in Syria; our response will however be to intensify the battle against terrorism, and the assassins will taste the bitterness of the response," Mr. Putin said resolutely.

The assassination, particularly just days after Syrian army along with Russian support, brought some solace to Aleppo by evicting terrorist fighters, sends clear messages by Washington and its allies to Moscow, albeit with a tinge of violence. The message was received by Kremlin with utmost care. Putin asked Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to have the possible forces behind the scenario identified; he would be naïve if he accepted the lone-wolf scenario, which is at best flimsy in this case. And he did not in practice.

The 'truth-finding' committee of security and intelligence agents are in Ankara to scrutinize the case of Karlov assassination and will definitely shed more light to the some of the darker interiors of the case.

Still in the same vein, the trilateral meeting in Moscow which has a novelty of participating Turkey as one of the staunch supporters of terrorist factions in Syria to a meeting to hit the exact play the west had been performing on Syria; to lure Turkey to a scenario which would bring stability to Syria, where Iran is also a player with better position on

the ground, would be a possible potential cause of the decision to undermine the whole scene in one way or the other. The assassination would serve the assassin and his clique of supporters and ideologues in improving the moral of the terrorists, now in a desperate situation in the brink of annihilation, and also through to hit the improving relations of Turkey and Russia and its possible workings in changing the situation in Syria.

Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Staffan de Mistura will attend a conference the next month; the assassination would be intended to undermine this conference, with the objective being to mount pressures on Moscow to make more concessions on the negotiation table.

The last point which would contribute to the assassination (and probably the most plausible cause) is infiltration in Turkey's police and intelligence forces by Takfirist sympathizers, which has virtually rendered the system weak in responding more agilely to pitfalls and the gaps; the same weakness made perforated borders with Syria for fresh recruited terrorists easy way to infiltrate the country and challenge the security arrangements not quite infrequently.

The upcoming days will be tough for Russia and Syrian government, since the western supporters of Takfirists would be restless to enter action to counteract the Aleppo defeat, with even more effrontery. Only time will show us |

Prof. Entessar:

Salafis, ISIL probably behind Karlov assassination

Interview by: Javad Heirannia

A University of Alabama professor tells Mehr News International Service it is too early to conclude on the possible causes and contributors in assassination of Russian ambassador to Turkey.

Nader Entessar believed that assassination would seek multiple objectives, the most important being to undermine the possible détente between Turkey and Russian. In a hierarchy, Salafis see the Syrian crisis especially in Aleppo gone forever and thus would embark on the retaliation on a player which they believe should be punished, he told Mehr News in a brief interview:

♦ **What would be the possible causes of assassination of Russian ambassador to Turkey?**

This is still an evolving development, and it is too early to pass a definitive judgment on the assassination of Rus-

sia's ambassador to Turkey. Most likely, Russia's policy in Syria and Moscow's pivotal role in inflicting heavy losses to ISIS must have played a role here. It is also possible that those behind the assassination wanted to derail the nascent move towards Moscow-Tehran-Ankara cooperation in the region.

♦ **There is a widespread speculation that Russia-Turkey accord on Aleppo is related to the assassination. How do you think of it?**

As I indicated in my previous answer, this may be a factor in the assassination of Andrey Karlov. Salafis and their backers could have retaliated in this fashion to sour Turkey-Russia relations and the possible cooperation between Moscow and Ankara.

♦ **Would it be the possibility that the assassination sought mainly to deflect the trilateral meeting in Moscow the day after and to exert some impact on possible outcomes of the session?**

Yes, of course. ISIS, the other Salafis



and their supporters will no doubt do their utmost to create havoc and prevent any regional cooperation that may further isolate and defeat them.

♦ **Which group(s) could be implicated as the potential perpetrators and or organizers of the assassination?**

It is too early to identify the culprit behind this terrorist act. But the Salafist must be viewed at this time as prime suspects. However, we should not exclude the possibility of other groups, including those inside Turkey, as being the puppet masters of this act.

Nader Entessar is professor of international relations and chairperson of Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice at the University of South Alabama |





Politics

ISA real threat to JCPOA

By: **Hamid Reza Gholamzadeh**

Renewal of Iran Sanctions Act by US Congress has raised objections in Iran as it is violation of JCPOA, even though President Obama is expected to use waiver rights to cease its implementation.

On Thursday December 1, The US Senate unanimously voted for an extension of Iran Sanctions Act (ISA), which was supposed to end by the end of current year, for more ten years until end of 2026. The motion was passed likewise on November 15 with 419 representatives voting for and only 1 Republican voting Nay for it.

The Iran Sanctions Act was originally introduced in 1996 in Congress to impose economic sanctions on firms doing business with Iran and Libya. On September 30, 2006, the act was renamed to the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA), as it no longer applied to Libya after the country decided to stop its nuclear program, and extended until December 31, 2011.

The act is considered as "additional efforts to deny Iran the financial means to sustain its nuclear, chemical, biological, and missile weapons programs." Meanwhile, Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce (R-CA) who had proposed the motion to pass the two chambers of US Congress emphasized in his opening speech for introducing the motion that "the goal was to stop significant foreign investment in Iran's energy sector – denying the Iranian regime the ability to financially support international terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and missile proliferation. Since then, this legislation has been reauthorized and expanded on several occasions."

Such emphases along with clear mentioning of the ISA in Annex II of JCPOA among sanctions implementation of which was supposed to be ceased first indicate that all in all, it is categorized as a nuclear-related sanction against Iran.

Meanwhile, Article 26 of JCPOA declares that "The U.S. Administration, acting consistent with the respective roles of the President and the Congress, will refrain from re-introducing or re-imposing the sanctions specified in Annex II that it has ceased applying under this



JCPOA, without prejudice to the dispute resolution process provided for under this JCPOA. The U.S. Administration, acting consistent with the respective roles of the President and the Congress, will refrain from imposing new nuclear-related sanctions. Iran has stated that it will treat such a re-introduction or re-imposition of the sanctions specified in Annex II, or such an imposition of new nuclear-related sanctions, as grounds to cease performing its commitments under this JCPOA in whole or in part."

As of the moment news about the 99-0 vote spread, several Iranian officials and figures slammed the United States for re-introducing sanctions by renewing some legislation which was about to fade away in less than a month. Iran sees the move as breach of the nuclear deal which was clinched in 2015. The Americans, though, justify the act by claiming that it is based on a current regime of sanctions already in place. But Ed Royce seems to have a different idea; "After years of bipartisan work in the Congress, the Iran Sanctions Act has served as the statutory foundation of the Iran sanctions regime. Of course, President Obama's dangerous nuclear deal with Iran dismantles it. Indeed, just last week we heard that a major European energy firm is close to investing \$6 billion in Iran to develop its natural gas, which will in turn enrich the regime." Royce admits that the regime has been dismantled by JCPOA.

Another point is that, even if this fact is not considered that this is a re-intro-

duction of sanctions already ceased by JCPOA, another argument in Iran is that according to US political procedures, when a legislation passes the House and Senate and needs Presidential approval to turn into a law, it is considered as a new legislation, thus must be interpreted as imposition of new nuclear-related sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Yet another reasoning from the American side is what the White House officials have announced; that President Obama will sign the Act into law and issues executive orders to waive parts considered in JCPOA. One way to interpret this argument is that it admits that it is re-introducing and re-imposing sanctions against Iran just before being ceased by presidential order.

Another way to face this argument is that according to ISA, where it discusses waiver possibilities, two waiver plans have been considered in the legislation; based on a general waiver "the president may, on a case by case basis, waive for a period of not more than six months the application of section 5(a) with respect to a national of a country, if the President certifies to the appropriate congressional committees at least 30 days before such waiver is to take effect that such waiver is vital to the national security interests of the United States."

On the other hand, president can request "waiver with respect to persons in countries that cooperate in multilateral efforts with respect to Iran. The President may, on a case by case basis, waive for a ➡

period of not more than 12 months the application of section 5(a) with respect to a person if the President, at least 30 days before the waiver is to take effect.”

Both these articles clarify that a presidential request for a waiver must be presented to Congressional committee at least 30 days before the date of effectuality. When signed into law – as White House has stated it will be – it will be effective by beginning of January, less than a month from now; leaving President Obama with less than deadline mandated by ISA act for a waiver request.

As a legal and political document, the JCPOA can be discussed over for days and months and different interpretations might be drawn from it. But from a pragmatic point of view, what is important to Iran and all the 5+1 countries is that the nuclear deal which was achieved after 12 years of hard work, can survive. When President-elect Donald Trump stated during his campaigns that he would tear the

deal, many European countries opposed his positions and considered it against survival of the deal.

Now with less than two months for him to come to office, current administration seems to taking measures putting the JCPOA at risk. It once imposed visa waiver program against people who visited or will visit Iran and has not yet allowed global banking system work for Iran and thus has still Iran's banking transactions under ban in practice. It more seems that Washington is trying hard to irritate Iran over JCPOA, not allowing it to benefit from the benefits of the deal, to force the country into violating it. Iran has always emphasized that it will not be the first to violate the deal it has signed, but if the other side continues to sabotage its commitments, Tehran will certainly return to its pre-JCPOA status in its nuclear program. The risky game Obama administration has already begun since implementation of the deal, can end up in a dangerous destina-

tion considering that the next president of the US is supposed to be a figure as unpredictable as Donald Trump.

Unlike what the American negotiators had promised during negotiations, to make any efforts, to convince the Congress not to renew Iran Sanctions Act, the overwhelming votes in both chambers of the Congress shows that the Obama administration has done nothing in this regard and has been an onlooker. Now, if either the US or other members of 5+1 are serious in saving the JCPOA, they'd better convince the United States to play more rationally and less ambitiously and leave a legacy which can be defended by other European parties, even if Trump's America would be dangerous to it.

Hamid Reza Gholamzadeh has done his MA in North American Studies and his focus has been on US policies towards the Middle East. He is also English Chief Editor of Mehr News Agency |

US attempt to 'bilateralize' multilateral intl. accords doomed to failure

Interview by: Lachin Rezaian

A recognized expert on international business told Mehr News that the US recent act to extend Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) is clear violation of international law and a new effort to harm Iran, for another 10 years.

Following recent effort of US Congress to pass ISA, it is distressing that the Obama White House, after years of talks and intense promotion of the deal, has not raised serious objections against the effort to undermine and mitigate the pact, says Research Director of International Business at the India, China & America Institute Dr. Dan Steinbock.

He described President-elect Trump's push for a new Iran policy is likely to result in one of three possible scenarios: a US withdrawal from the JCPOA, an attempt to renegotiate the deal, or an enhanced enforcement of the deal.

Steinbock elaborated more in his comments addressed to Mehr News correspondent:



Tacit goals of the Iran Sanctions Act

◆ **The US Senate on Thursday unanimously voted to extend the Iran Sanctions Act for one decade after it was easily cleared in the House of Representatives last month. What goals lay behind the extension of Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) and why US is now violating its obligations after months of negotiations?**

The comprehensive nuclear accord (JCPOA, July 2015) offered relief from US, UN and multilateral sanctions on Iran's energy, financial, shipping, automotive

and other sectors. These (primary) sanctions were lifted after the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) certification in January 2016 that Iran had complied with the agreement. Yet, secondary sanctions (on firms) remained in place, along with sanctions applying to US companies, including US banks.

During the past month, there has been hectic activity in Washington to reverse the White House's Iran policy during the two Obama terms. In its November report on Iran sanctions, the Congressional Research Service typically argued that the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) "might not be inconsistent with the JCPOA" and that it is "unclear" whether the position of the incoming Trump administration on the JCPOA and on legislation "might conflict with US commitments in the JCPOA."

As political exigencies have been seized to justify the extension of sanctions, their legal status is questionable even in the US. Reportedly, the new efforts seek to harm Iran, for another 10 years. Between 2010 and 2013, the sanctions significantly hurt Iran's economy contributing to the fall of crude oil ➡

exports from 2.5 million barrels per day (mbd) to 1.1 mbd by mid-2013. That, in turn, was compounded by the plunge in oil prices since early 2014. Furthermore, the sanctions made Iran's \$120 billion in reserves held in banks abroad inaccessible. Before stabilization in 2015, Iran's economy reportedly shrank by 9% in the two sanctions years. Current growth projections are predicated on sanctions relief.

The new strategic objective seems to be thus to harm Iran's economy through a new 10-year long fall in crude oil exports, relatively low prices, and continued obstacles against access to remaining Iranian reserves abroad. Such strategic primacies – whatever their nominal rationale – represent a unilateral move that seeks to undermine a multilateral agreement.

Iran policy amid power transition in the US

◆ **JCPOA is not a bilateral deal between Iran and the US, but in fact a multilateral accord between seven countries and confirmed by the UE and UNSC, which a single party could not block it. Do you think the US can undermine the multilateral agreement, and if so, how do you expect international response?**

In the evolving status quo, Iran should be prepared for all contingencies, including a potential US effort to undermine the multilateral agreement and an accompanying effort to do so with (or possibly without) a tacit support of all or some of its partners.

In the US, the effort to extend sanctions is taking place during the transition of power as alignments are shifting in the White House, among the two major parties, and even the incoming administration. In these circumstances, it is distressing that the Obama White House, after years of talks and intense promotion of the deal, has not raised serious objections against the effort to undermine and mitigate the pact.

During his campaign, President-elect Donald Trump railed against the nuclear pact, while members of the Republican Party have called him to tear up the agreement. Among the critics, neoconservatives play a critical role as they did in 2003 when the Iraq war was legitimized with arguments that were known to be flawed.

Within the Republican Party, Iran ef-

forts reflect both tactical goals, which involve timing, and strategic objectives, which reflect the incoming administration's tenets. These efforts began in the House in mid-November – right after the election in the US – and in the Congress in early December – only a week or so before the Electoral College is due to vote for President and Vice President. From the standpoint of Trump and Republican neoconservatives, the "Iran card" has allowed the new administration to strengthen its position as some anti-Trump Republicans continue to lobby against him before the Electoral College vote. Indeed, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker, also a possible candidate for Trump secretary of state, has said that the renewal ensures Trump can re-impose sanctions Obama lifted under the deal.

However, the JCPOA is a multilateral accord. Earlier in the week, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed that, while the implementation of the JCPOA is a long process and may face occasional obstacles, the deal is "a multilateral agreement endorsed by the UN Security Council, and its implementation must not be affected by any country's domestic affairs."

Any multilateral deal is a compromise. Nevertheless, a deal is a deal.

Democrats' odd Iran reversal

◆ **Given that, the Democrats who supported JCPOA in Congress like Elizabeth Warren, Benjamin Cardin and Harry Reid unanimously voted for ISA claiming that the measure will not lead to the violation of JCPOA, do you think the US is sending a strong signal that any US president would have the ability to snap back sanctions on Iran? Is the extension a shortcut to tear JCPOA up, as President-elect Donald Trump has promised?**

Not all Democrats agreed with the reversal in the Iran policy. When the Senate voted to extend the sanctions against Iran, Senator Bernie Sanders was absent. During his campaign, Sanders portrayed Iran as a major player in the Middle East arguing that diplomatic relations between Iran and the West would be critical for both regional stability and long-term security of the US and its allies. Yet, most Democrats have been surprisingly quick to reverse their longstanding posi-

tion regarding the Iran pact in a matter of weeks, for purely political calculations.

Yesterday, Democrats still accused the Trump campaign for unilateral moves that sought to undermine the multilateral JCPOA and for dragging Washington again into the kind of international quicksand that severely impaired America's credibility in the Bush era. Yet today, Democrats claim the ISA extension does not violate the pact because it continues a sanctions regime that is already in place. Obama is expected to sign the extension and, after failed personal lobbying against the extension, his Secretary of State John Kerry has been marginalized.

The new rationale seems to be that "it is OK to return to primary sanctions, which we agreed to lift, because we never agreed to nullify the secondary sanctions, which remain in place." That's a bad excuse for a flawed argument and a pretext for a new decade for political bullying.

Time for European leaders to walk the talk

◆ **Do you think that European sides of the deal have showed proper reaction to this ISA approval in the Congress? What about other parties involved in the deal, especially Iran's ally Russia? Would they hold any position on the issue to react against the measure?**

As they decided to support the Republican position regarding Iran, Congressional Democrats said they were acting in agreement with US partners. "I have not heard strident objections from our key allies in the JCPOA," Democratic Senator Chris Coons told reporters.

If the Democrats' stated view of US allies' Iran policy truly would be valid, it would imply that all key European partners of the JCPOA would also have reversed their position in a matter of weeks and that they would have accepted at face-value the incoming Trump administration's arguments – after months of serious, public and purposeful criticism of the Trump platform and everything it stands for.

Since the agreement was signed by the US, the UK, Russia, France, China, Germany and Iran, those statements suggest that neither London nor Paris or Berlin had objected to US reversal of the West's long-standing position. In light of past statements, that would be very odd. ➔

After all, since spring 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has urged “unified approach to removal of sanctions against Iran.” UK’s Prime Minister Theresa May just stated that the Iran nuclear agreement “must stand.” After the US election, French President Francois Hollande noted that the nuclear “accord gives us all security....Could the US with Donald Trump put into question this accord? I don’t think so”. In reality, Trump has made up his mind. Now it is up to the key European partners of the JCPOA to walk the talk.

In the past few years, Iran-Russia relations have broadened economically, politically and strategically. While Americans see Iran primarily as a threat, an overwhelming majority of Russians view Iran’s influence positively. During the JCPOA talks, Russia played a vital and constructive role, which is likely to continue. While the world has much to gain from the hoped-for détente between President Putin and President-elect Trump, the former does not share the latter’s inclination to ‘bilateralize’ multilateral international issues. Moreover, Trump has made it clear that US-Russia cooperation could have neutralized much of the jihadist threat, Syrian civil war and migration crises in the Middle East. To gain President Putin’s support, however, Trump, too, should compromise – particularly in the case of Iran.

Avoid bilateral traps, favor multilateral cooperation

◆ **Iranian authorities have slammed the ISA’s extension as a blatant violation of the nuclear agreement, vowing proper counter-measures. How do you evaluate Iran’s retaliatory measures? What is the best response?**

Iran’s concern and strong criticism of the ISA’s extension is understandable and legitimate. If international multilateral accords are ignored after domestic elections, global governance and the West’s international multilateral organizations would be swept by political quicksand. Amid current volatility in international relations, it is instructive to remember the simple metaphor of China’s paramount leader Deng Xiaoping to describe great environmental uncertainty. It is like “crossing the river by feeling the stones.” While it is important to choose one’s steps cautiously, it is equally important

to move ahead.

While President-elect Trump prefers bilateral venues, the JCPOA is a “multilateral agreement”, whose implementation must not be affected by any country’s “domestic affairs,” as China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi has stressed. It is thus vital to ensure the support of the JCPOA’s other signatories: UK, France, and Germany. Some of them have already done so in public rhetoric, but more will be needed in the coming weeks. If Trump will remain true to his campaign pledges, the JCPOA may be one of the first but certainly not the last international agreement that the new White House would prefer to re-negotiate, re-define or reject. As a result, a calm but decisive multilateral and international approach is preferable in the beginning.

Furthermore, the JCPOA signatories remain equally apprehensive about US policies. While US House and Senate have opted for the extension of the ISA, much apprehension remains about Washington’s tactical and strategic objectives. Only a few weeks ago, there were great concerns that the Republican Party could disintegrate. While the Trump triumph changed the status quo, some of the current positioning may be posturing for the Electoral College and to unite the Republicans’ Trump proponents, neoconservatives, Tea Party leaders, Russia hawks and Russia doves, anti-Trump advocates, and so on. Moreover, while President Obama is fading out, President-elect Donald Trump’s rule will officially start after January 20, 2017. And yet, every second American has a very negative view of Trump whose administration choices are likely to reinforce such views in the near future.

Amid these developments, Iran has reacted appropriately. Recently, Iran’s Parliamentary JCPOA Supervising Committee, chaired by President Rouhani, held a meeting to discuss ways for reciprocal measures against the decisions made by US Congress. Similarly, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, a top military aide to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned that “the annulment of the nuclear deal will be a strategic mistake” urging America and its allies to join Iran in creating “regional peace and stability.” During his visit in Tokyo, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif met Japan’s Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida who made clear his

country’s continuous support for the JCPOA.

For now, it is important to push for the timely implementation of the JCPOA through multilateral, international pressure. Nevertheless, it is also important to prepare for alternative and adverse short- and medium-term scenarios.

The right to economic development

President-elect Trump is pushing a new Iran policy that is likely to result in one of three possible scenarios: a US withdrawal from the JCPOA, an attempt to renegotiate the deal, or an enhanced enforcement of the deal.

Since the JCPOA was negotiated and adopted under executive authority in the US, congressional review of the arrangement has been limited. Consequently, the deal can conceivably be reversed by the incoming Trump administration in cooperation with the Republican Congress. Nevertheless, the JCPOA is a multilateral accord rather than a bilateral deal between the US and Iran.

What Iran and the Middle East need today is economic development, not new violations of international multilateral accords. When the US House prepared to vote for the extension of ISA, Foreign Minister Zarif gave a very important speech in which he urged the Islamic world to condemn incompetence and failures and to focus on cooperation rather than conflict to avoid “failed states” in the region. Recently, China, having lifted over 700 million people out of poverty, released a white paper about the “right to development.” It is this focus on economic development that today unites all emerging and developing economies and that is vital to global growth prospects.

If – as it now seems quite clear – Washington will opt for a new Iran policy, it risks not only its own international credibility, as it did only a decade ago. It also risks alienating its allies, which are critical to multilateral decision-making, and its adversaries, which US negotiators in the past have criticized for violating multilateral norms and responsibility.

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Israel ties not in favor of Azerbaijan Republic



By: Kamran Ghaderi Azar

Benjamin Netanyahu's recent visit to Baku has raised questions as to the status the small former Soviet republic would be given in ties with Israel.

The visit, set in a broader context of the region, to which Azerbaijan Republic is an important part as a strategic link between Islamic Republic of Iran and Russian Federation for trade, would be of some consequences for the Republic, the least being isolation by the Islamic world at large.

Officials in Baku would be heedless of the fact that to open the country for Israel would be equally interpreted in Tehran as a step away from the influential front which hinges upon a common animosity toward the occupying regime in the Palestinian territories; as such, they should exercise great care so as not to fall victim to the generalizations Netanyahu's visit would bring for them at the first place: to host leader of a regime self-avowedly seen by Muslims as an enemy by consensus.

Yet part of the debate to which officials in Tehran also belong, are looking to the scene from more strategic perspective; the Republic, naturally in the sphere of influence of its northern border Russia, and its southern, Iran, should (according to this view) work

to invest its lots in détente with these both rather giant neighbors. With Iran they share a deep-seated historical cultural common features. Part of the Caucasus, the Republic was once part of cultural Iran in the 19th century. After the Soviet collapse, the Republic of Azerbaijan, newly-formed as it was, sought to approach to Iran as its friendlier neighbor; the very strategic geography bestows upon Azerbaijan a lucrative business in a role which links Islamic world to Caucasus and Russia. Its historic conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh still profits Azerbaijan, relegating Armenia to a position only marginal to the major routes of trade which cross the Caspian Sea.

Netanyahu's visit however lifts the lead from the Republic's headlong leaders' adventurism; the regime in Israel has been engaged in opportunism amidst the turmoil of the region to strengthen only its own position in a region clearly seeing it as an enemy than an ally. Any intervention by the Zionist regime has only brought disaster and suffering for Islamic world. It is restricted by hostile neighbors and thus has sought to find footprints in Saudi Arabia initially and beyond the Arab world now in Republic of Azerbaijan in misguided attempts to free itself from the pressures it sustains from the Resistance groups.

A détente with Israel, which brings to

the region and Caucasus an enemy state near northern borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran would not be welcomed in Tehran. The Republic will thus face a ready-made suspicion and reappraisal for itself by the world of Islam, and many would start to review relations with the Republic, only to perpetuate the downfall of the country as a strategic trade route in the region. Isolation would await the Republic at best, to which officials in Baku should work to minimize the deleterious effects. Less ties with Islamic countries would also put Azerbaijan open to rise of extremist ideologies like wahhabism in a region already suffering several crises from the Takfiri and Salafi groups of the radical ideology.

A wiser policy for Baku would be to improve relations with the world of Islam and especially the Islamic Republic of Iran and to join the bandwagon of the countries aligned themselves with the Resistance front. A review of ties with Tel Aviv would provide the stepping stone for the Republic of Azerbaijan to take necessary foreign policy path which would lead them to the terra firma of recognition by the Islamic world, a recognition the layman in the Republic of Azerbaijan would welcome as a boon as well as more realistically-minded politicians in the ranks and files of the government. Only time will tell |

Aoun presidency, another rebalancing step in region

By: Parnaz Talebi

29 months of political deadlock in Lebanon ended in October 31, 2016, with election of Michel Aoun as president of the Middle Eastern country.

Lebanon has been suffering a major vacancy in government since Michel Suleiman, the former president, left the office in 2014 as his term ended. Since then all efforts to reach an agreement between different political factions had failed leaving the country sans president in a difficult situation amid all regional tensions.

Election of Aoun, after 45 electoral sessions in Lebanon's Parliament, therefore, marks a turning point in political history of Lebanon indicating somehow a consensus among its different ethnic and political groups after a long period.

Yet, the situation wouldn't be easy for the former General. Aoun has to form a cabinet and this would be very difficult in a government with such a diverse political prospect. According to the Lebanese confessional constitution, in which top government positions are reserved for certain religious communities, president is elected from Maronite Christians, speaker of the parliament has to be a Shia Muslim and the prime minister should be from Sunni Muslims.

Lebanon has two major coalition parties; The March 8 Alliance, which Aoun is now representing, is aligned with Hezbollah and backed by Iran. The rival March 14 Alliance, supported by Saudi Arabia, is represented by Saad Hariri, the former prime minister who have the most chance to ascend to the position again.

That would be no surprise to see Saad Hariri, the leader of Lebanon's March 14 Alliance, serving as the prime minister in Aoun's cabinet. Hariri announced his support for Michel Aoun earlier on 20 October paving the way for Aoun to fill the position. Hariri described his decision as necessary to "protect Lebanon, protect the [political] system, protect the state and protect the Lebanese people."



Hariri's announcement was followed by an immediate visit to Beirut by Thamer al-Sabhan, the new Saudi minister for Persian Gulf affairs, for talks on the "political developments in Lebanon and the region."

But far from all national interests, Hariri's endorsement would also increase his chance to return to the political scenes as the premiere. The so-called Hariri-Aoun deal would help the former prime minister to revive his shrinking political reputation among Lebanese Sunnis for his long absence in tumult country. Meanwhile, Hariri's influence in Saudi Arabia and within the royal family is believed to have dropped since the death of King Abdullah. Endorsing Aoun, Hariri would also make a distance from Saudis whose trace are evident in all major regional tensions including Syria and Yemen and who are losing their influence largely among allies as a result of their destructive policies in the region.

Aoun, on the other hand, is an ally of Lebanon's Hezbollah. It was in February 2006 that Aoun signed an agreement with Hezbollah leader Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah in a church in Beirut. The alliance provided him great support from Lebanese Shia Muslims, the largest bloc of the country, setting the ground for his election as the president. A week before

the elections, Nasrallah called upon all Lebanese political parties to join forces and put an end to presidential crisis during a meeting with Aoun.

Aoun, furthermore, has visited Syria and President Bashar Assad in 2008, signaling mending ties with Syrian government after all tensions the Damascus-Beirut relations were suffering from before. Aoun supports Syria and Assad, against whom some regional states notably Saudi Arabia and Turkey (not to mention the other Arab states within the US-led international coalition), are working hard under the pretext of fight against terrorism, seeking in fact his overthrow.

Aoun, addressing the parliament after the voting, underlined political stability as top priority of his government and said his government would deal with terrorism "preemptively and preventively" until it is uprooted. "Lebanon is still treading through a minefield, but it has been spared the fires burning across the region; It remains a priority to prevent any sparks from reaching Lebanon," he said after presidential oath.

Aoun's close ties with Hezbollah and Syria and his resolved tone of confronting terrorism have raised concerns in international arena. Western analysis, as expected, considers the rise of Aoun →

to presidency as a threat and tries to impose the idea that his term would bring about further crisis and unrest to the country. They argue that Aoun's alliance with Hezbollah means more tensions, and even war, between Lebanese and Israeli forces. War in Syria, according to these interpretations, would last longer receiving support from Lebanese president, putting the neighboring countries, including Lebanon itself, in more trouble. They also argue that Lebanon, under Aoun, would face the spillover of Syrian war as Hezbollah forces are directly engaged in the conflict.

Yet, they fail to realize the other side of the story. Aoun's presidency is a political victory for Hezbollah, Lebanon's powerful Shia group, and the Resistance Front in the region including Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Yemen and Syria. Meanwhile, losing Hariri, Cutting off Saudi Arabia would lose control over Beirut and this means more trouble for the Israeli regime along its borders with both Palestine and Lebanon. The election also indicates the decline of Saudi Arabia influence in Lebanon's political arena and also region. Notably, Iran's ties with Saudi Arabia was severed since January 2016 after an attack by a group of people to kingdom's embassy in Tehran in reaction to execution of Sheikh Nimr, a religious figure, by Saudis. Consequently, Riyadh, in response to Beirut's failure in condemning the attack, canceled a three-billion-dollar aid package for the Lebanese army, reportedly, and this was somehow the start of its disengagement in Lebanon. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia, stuck in wars in Yemen and Syria, is on the verge of losing the game. Yemeni and Syrian crises, thanks to resistant spirit of Yemenis and Syrians, have taken much longer than expected by invaders. The process, particularly, is frustrating Saudi Arabia politically and economically, dwindling its power and influence in the region. With regards to developments, fighting terrorism would also enter a new phase as Aoun has also announced his determination to deal with extremist groups in the region.

Election of Aoun, is therefore, a critical turnover rebalancing the power in the region, where the Resistance Front would have the upper hand, notably diminishing Saudis grip of power.

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Riyadh awarded UNHRC seat for bombing region

By: Maryam Azish

Accused of treating foreign low-paid workers like slaves, treating women worse than animals, meddling in foreign election, supporting terrorism, plaguing by nepotism, bribery and a total lack of democracy, Saudi Arabia has recently managed to be reelected to represent the region on the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) despite criticism from human rights organizations.

For the first time since UNHRC's establishment in 2006, Russia has lost an election to the UN Human Rights Council after being narrowly beaten by Croatia in a vote. Saudi Arabia was successfully reelected.

The move has raised many eyebrows and has stunned global rights advocates and organizations that barely consider taking out the oppressive regime from their blacklists.

Earlier this year, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International in a joint statement lambasted Riyadh for "an appalling record of violations" in Yemen, where it has conducted a bombing campaign against Houthi rebels since 2015, which has resulted in the deaths of up to 4,000 civilians. The two organizations called for Saudi Arabia, a member of the apart from a mandatory year-long break after two terms, to be suspended – to no avail.

Saudi Arabia used its power in the council to block an outside inquiry into the campaign last month, while leading a successful resolution that placed the responsibility of investigating human rights abuses in the hands of its allies, the exiled Yemeni government.

As per to the United Nations, the atrocious Saudi-led war in Yemen

has relocated more than three million people. The country is already on the verge of famine. More than 21 million Yemenis — 80% of the population — are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

Russia Out, Saudi Arabia In

Russia had ended its three-year term and was running against Hungary and Croatia for the two, available seats from Eastern Europe, RT wrote.

Meanwhile, Riyadh won the Asian ballot with 152 votes, and will represent the region on the UNHRC alongside China, Japan and Iraq for the next three years.

South Africa, Rwanda, Egypt and Tunisia were chosen from the African group, Cuba and Brazil from Latin America and the Caribbean, and the US and the UK will represent the Western bloc, which comprises Western Europe and North America.

Apparent War Crime

Saudi officials have repeatedly abused their position on the Council to block any investigations into the atrocities they are responsible for in Yemen and the wider Middle East.

Following an airstrike on a funeral ceremony of Ali al-Rawishan, the father of the Sana'a-based administration's interior minister, Jalal al-Rawishan in Yemen on Oct 8, which claimed at least 10 dead and wounded over 600 other people, Human Rights Watch blamed the Saudi-led coalition of war crimes and also lambasted the US and the UK for supplying weapons to the Saudis.

On October 8, at least two air-dropped munitions penetrated the roof of a hall containing over 1,000 mourners, killing at least 110 people and wounding 610 during the

funeral ceremony of Ali al-Rawishan, the father of the Sana'a-based administration's interior minister, Jalal al-Rawishan.

"A Saudi Arabia-led coalition airstrike on a crowded funeral ceremony in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, on October 8, 2016, is an apparent war crime," Human Rights Watch said, calling the strike "unlawfully disproportionate", RT wrote.

Famine in Yemen

According to the UN reports, more than half of Yemen's 28 million people are already short of food and children are particularly badly hit, with hundreds of thousands at risk of starvation.

Meanwhile UNICEF also has announced that over 370,000 children enduring severe malnutrition that weakens their immune system in Yemen and 1.5 million are going hungry. Food shortages are a long-term problem, but they have got worse in recent months. Half of children under five are stunted because of chronic malnutrition.

A sea blockade on rebel-held areas enforced by the Saudi-coalition supporting the president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, stops shipments reaching most ports.

The sea blockade and daily airstrikes, which have hit civilian targets including

hospitals, are part of a campaign to push rebels out of the capital.

There have been widespread calls for an independent inquiry into the conflict, including from senior British MPs. More than a third of Saudi-led bombing raids are thought to have hit civilian sites, and human rights groups say violations are also being perpetrated by Houthi rebels.

One year on, it still remains blurred who is pleasing the war. Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners claim to have regained control of more than 80 percent of the country, but the Houthis remain in control of the key strongholds of Sanaa, Ibb, and Taiz. Moreover, armed groups such as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State are gaining ground and support in the south and southeast parts of the country, taking advantage of the security vacuum to consolidate their power. One thing is clear: Yemeni civilians are losing the most.

Amnesty International and other organizations have presented compelling evidence over the past year that indicates all parties to the Yemen conflict have committed war crimes. But some countries do not want to see the evidence that is staring them in the face. Flooding the region with arms is akin to adding fuel to the fire.

And yet, Britain, the United States,

and France continue to authorize lucrative arms deals with the Saudi-led coalition — apparently without batting an eyelash.

According to Foreign Policy website, since November 2013, the US Defense Department has authorized more than \$35.7 billion in major arms deals to Saudi Arabia. This includes the announcement of a \$1.29 billion US arms sale to Saudi Arabia in November 2015 that will supply Riyadh with 18,440 bombs and 1,500 warheads. Meanwhile, during his time in office, British Prime Minister David Cameron has overseen the sale of more than \$9 billion worth of weaponry to Saudi Arabia, including nearly \$4 billion since airstrikes on Yemen began.

The fact that Saudi Arabia just got re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council is just another reason why this important institution is in serious need of reform and democratization, in order for it to better live up to the noble and crucial principles of its founding charter.

The UN needs reform at all levels. The UNHRC in particular should set basic standards of human rights which countries must adhere to in order to even be considered for a position on the Council. If this were the case countries like Croatia and Saudi Arabia wouldn't be let near such an organization |



The devil's advocates in region



By: Lachin Rezaian

Since March 26, 2015, Saudi Arabia has led a Western-backed coalition that has rained bombs down on Yemen, claiming the lives of thousands of civilians including defenseless and innocent women and children.

Saudi Arabia invaded Bahrain amid Islamic Awakening or Arab Spring protests in 2010 and 2011 to suppress peaceful and legal protests that were going on there. It has attacked Yemen who has been seeking to have self-determination in terms of who is governing them, rather than a puppet who is appointed by Riyadh.

The blistering assaults against Yemen has been repeatedly condemned in the strongest possible terms by regional and Western countries, top United Nations officials, UN Human Rights Council (HRC), Human Rights Watch and other international NGOs across the world, however, their opposition and condemnations were only on paper and have never been a strategy to prevent the country from raising atrocities in impoverished Yemen, putting the credibility of the UN Human Rights Council at stake.

Saudi Arabia has even blocked attempts to create an international inquiry, which is a betrayal of the people of Yemen who have suffered so much during this conflict. A fully independent international inquiry is the least the people of Yemen deserve.

Instead, Saudi Arabia and its allies,

created a national commission of inquiry in Yemen, which is being carried out by the Saudi-backed government of former Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who fled to Saudi Arabia when the war began.

The commission was deemed toothless, due to its failure after nine months to credibly investigate allegations of war crimes and other serious violations.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon blacklisted Saudi-led coalition for killing children in Yemen in May. After the report was released, Ban's office was bombarded with calls from the Persian Gulf Arab foreign ministers, as well as ministers from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), to remove the regime's name from the list of states and armed groups that have violated the rights of children.

In June, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch condemned the US-backed Saudi regime's breaching of rights, calling on the United Nations General Assembly to immediately suspend Saudi Arabia from the Human Rights Council membership over its "gross and systematic violations of human rights abroad and at home. HRW has documented Saudi Arabia of repeatedly using internationally banned cluster munitions in civilian areas; in 19 different attacks, they have used at least six different types of cluster bombs, which were made in the US, UK and Brazil.

Riyadh threatened in early June to cut Palestinian aid and funds to other

UN programs if the agency keeps the country's name as children right abuser, a threat which made Ban to drop Saudi Arabia from its annual blacklist, only one week after it announced the blacklisting of the regime. Ban called his decision the most painful and difficult due to the fact that millions of other children likely would suffer if funding for UN programs was cut off.

Accusing Ban of giving in to political manipulation by the kingdom, dozens of prominent human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Oxfam, wrote a letter and urged United Nations chief Ban Ki-moon to put Saudi Arabia back on a blacklist for overwhelmingly violating children's rights in Yemen.

"The evidence of grave violations against children in Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition is overwhelming," reads the letter.

They said the UN chief's decision undermined an invaluable tool in efforts to curb violations against children in armed conflict.

Increasing attacks against civilians in Yemen after a total of 180 civilians were killed in one month, raising the death toll to nearly 4,000 since the conflict began in March 2015, and the rise in the number of attacks against civilian facilities including hospitals, markets, and places of worship, has raised concerns among human rights activists across the world and among regional countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran which has played a key role in resolution of regional issues.

Meanwhile, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation led by Saudi regime has repeatedly condemned Iran for what it called supporting terrorism and meddling in the affairs of other countries, the message which fuels division in the Islamic community.

The history proves that Iran has played a constructive role for good of the region. It has military advisory presence in Syria and Iraq at the request of the Damascus and Baghdad government in fighting terrorism.

When ISIL emerged many countries were slow to offer any assistance, however, Iran made a number of requests to →

countries asking for assistance and was the first which sent military advisers to train the depleted Iraqi army and the Kurdish forces.

While Iran is portrayed in Western and Israeli circles as a supporter of terrorism worldwide, there is a less politically convenient reality: that of Iran as a victim of terror.

Thousands of innocent people in Iran have been killed as a result of terrorist operations led by the West and Saudi agents in the country since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Many countries have acknowledged Islamic Republic is trying to help restore peace, stability and security to the region to the best of its ability.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always reiterated that there could be no military solution to the war in the re-

and hitting back to Iran which has been protesting the reckless conduct of Saudi officials regarding the 2015 Hajj tragedy.

Saudi regime has decided not to accept responsibility and not to pay damages and compensation to countries including Iran whose citizens were killed or injured during the Mina incident.

It also adopted an offensive approach towards those calling on it to account.

The regime is not alone; so-called human rights advocate, the UK, supports crimes of Saudi Arabia in Yemen. British support for Saudi Arabia's warmongering policies in Yemen is not a random issue; behind the support, definitely lies economic and power interests.

Saudi money is a key incentive for the UK and other allies to back Saudi friends. When it comes to politics, making money is what comes at the top of

Does the UK Government really care? Only when it suits them or there is economic interests involved. They are notorious for hypocrisy!

It is clear that Saudi war in Yemen has helped British economy through privileged access to cheap oil, sale of weapons in billions of dollars and other economic and trade agreements.

The UK government's claims over support for human rights and democracy is a funny excuse for providing support for the regimes that are repressing and slaughtering the people of Yemen and Bahrain.

Recently, Britain, accused of blocking EU efforts to set up an inquiry into Saudi Arabia's actions in the country, dismissed facts that the reported bombing of international hospitals, schools and wedding parties by the autocracy amount to war crimes.

They have repeatedly claimed that Saudi Arabia is best placed to investigate its own crimes; Saudi Arabian investigations into its own actions have thus far absolved itself of any wrongdoings.

UK government is trying to cover up the Saudi Arabian military's flagrant violations of international humanitarian law.

It even continued military support for the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen after human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT), wrote a letter to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), saying British-made munitions were responsible for the rising civilian death toll in Yemen's brutal war. They also called on UK Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson to end the arms sales and put a stop to the uncritical support that the UK provides for the Saudi regime.

Saudi regime has repeatedly bribed Western countries, including the UK, claiming that their support was in their own interest to prevent Yemen falling into the hands of terrorists.

In early September, Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi Foreign Minister, speaking to the Telegraph, warned if the UK suspends arms sales, there might be even higher risks of terrorism spreading, statement which seems more to be a threat from a country who has a dark history of nurturing terrorism →



gion and has urged an end to hostilities and a peaceful resolution of the conflict through negotiations and the utilization of peaceful mechanisms.

Iran's key role in the region and resolution of regional issues is not a pleasant fact for Saudi Arabian regime. Truth hurts. They say when someone goes down the well he tries to take with him another person: misery loves company.

The saying best suits to the situation of Saudi allegations against the Islamic Republic.

The desperate Saudi regime facing backlash for its crimes in the region tries to shift blame to Iran in an attempt to redeem its battered image globally.

Saudi hostile actions against Iran pursues one important objective: preventing Iran's positive role in the region

the agenda, it doesn't matter whether civilians are being killed with the weapons the West or the US helped provide to another country.

Britain's foreign policy is devoted towards suppressing any form of democracy in the Middle East. And now, in the case of Yemen and despite all the evidence for crimes and suppression that has been gathered in terms of what has been going on, the UK government continues its policies towards Saudi regime.

Historically, the UK government pry into other countries affairs like Iraq, Yemen and Libya under the guise of "humanitarian crisis", overthrowing their governments, killing their rulers, leaving a power vacuum, enabling Al Qaeda and ISIL to take a stronghold.



and extremist ideology. Al-Jubeir on one hand threatens the United Kingdom that if London retreats from supporting Riyadh's invasion of Yemen, it would see Wahhabi affiliate terrorists committing terrorist acts in the European country. Meanwhile, on the other hand, he tries to bribe London by promising billions of dollars of investments after Brexit.

In fact, the West is willing to be bribed and fooled by a rich country. They pretend to be helping fight against terrorism, however, they promote the ever-growing terrorist groups like ISIL, Al-Qaeda, Al-Nusra Front and reversing advances other peace-making countries, including Iran, make to suppress the terrorists and extremists doing atrocities in the region or Western countries.

Saudi Arabia is currently the UK's largest arms export market. The British addiction to money is encouraging it to give billions pounds worth of weaponry to Saudi Arabia. Actually, arms sales to the country breach British and European weapons export laws.

Britain's Committee on Arms Exports Control, comprising 16 MPs from four parties, urged British government to avoid its sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia since they had been used to violate international law, which is suppressed by the government saying it has not seen evidence of Saudi war crimes.

Anger over the Saudi-led campaign and the United States role in the war is also growing in US Congress. In April, a bipartisan group of American lawmakers, representatives Ted Lieu of California, Ted Yoho of Florida, John Conyers of

Michigan and Mick Mulvaney of South Carolina, wrote a letter asking President Obama to withdraw his request for Congressional approval for a \$1.15 billion sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia amid the Riyadh regime's crimes against civilians in Yemen.

They raised concerns that the actions of the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen are as reprehensible as they are illegal. The multiple, repeated airstrikes on civilians look like war crimes, they warned.

The \$1.15 billion deal for weaponry to Saudi Arabia, including over 150 Abrams tanks, reveals more than ever, the blood of thousands of innocent Yemenis dripping from American hands.

The Obama administration has already approved more than \$100 billion in arms sales to the kingdom; however, after a year and a half, the new sale will definitely prove Washington's involvement in a deadly war that the White House has kept largely quiet about.

Obama's pretended distaste for regional proxy wars is not working now. The US gives with one hand and takes back with the other. With words, it touts opposition to terrorism and war crimes, but in practice, sends weapons to the terrorists like Al Saud to kill women and children in Yemen.

Saudi allies, including the US and the UK, are panting for Saudi oil and money. The incentive is enough for them to dash tardily and in the name of human rights and suppression of terrorism make turmoil in the region.

Saudi regime well knows its money-addicted allies. It throws prey in bat-

tleground and directs dogs looking for the prey.

Under the pressure of Saudi regime, US government even obstructed the release of remaining 28 pages of the factual information of the 9/11 report to the public in 2015. The report pointed a very strong finger at Saudi Arabia as being the principal financier of the attack to the North and South towers, and the World Trade Center complex in New York City.

Under public pressure, US government published a censored version of the report with many redactions; however, even after more than fifteen years, a cloud of secrecy hangs over the events of September 11, 2001 which proves the footprints of Saudi regime in the terrorist attacks.

Needless to say, it has been revealed to the world public opinion that the Saudi regime is the axis of support for the terrorist streams in the region and beyond.

Today, all the world has figured out that, MKO, the ISIL, Taliban, al-Qaeda and tens of other terrorist grouplets spread in the geography of Islam and humanity commit the biggest crimes against humanity under the leadership and strategies of the US, the Zionist regime and the regional reactionary regimes with the extensive financial supports of the al-Saud.

The world has learned that Saudi Arabia and Wahhabism, the radical ideology freely preached in the Arab country, are to blame for the violent acts of extremism in the Middle East region and elsewhere |

Article 99 of UN Charter and Ban Ki-Moon's Beleaguered Legacy in ME

By: Abbas Torabi

The UN's first Secretary General Trygve Halvdan Lie, the Norwegian diplomat who never explicitly invoked Article 99 before the Security Council, portrays the post of Secretary General as the most difficult job in the world.

U Thant, Burmese diplomat and the third Secretary-General (SG) of the United Nations from 1961 to 1971, was a strong proponent and practitioner of "preventive diplomacy" the man who practically experienced this most difficult duty, by putting the world deeply in his debt when he played a crucial mediatory role in diffusing Cuban Missile Crisis and abating Congolese civil war. Ban Ki-Moon himself as UN's eighth Secretary General, the South Korean politician who took office on 1 January 2007, and is due to end his second term on December 31, 2016, after being 10 years in this position, describes United Nations a dream which has become a nightmare.

United Nations, a dream or nightmare?

Playing the role of "father confessor" to the UN's Member States, is the next description in which can be utilized for Egyptian politician, Boutros Boutros Ghali, who became the sixth SG of the UN (1992-1996). Conversant and effective notwithstanding, he was caught in a rift between the United States and the United Nations and this led him a controversy between administrative and political. "The greatest, although it is the least advertised of the functions of the Secretary-General is to be a father confessor to the member governments, to be a man in whom they can confide, and who knows, therefore, from continued, private, privileged information, the real position in an international controversy," Walter Lippmann, the author of "Public Opinion" the founding book in American media studies, wrote.

"World moderator", is the other description of this post, which was coined by 32nd United States President (1933-1945), Franklin Delano Roosevelt, many years prior to the UN's creation. This prediction materialized at a time the UN charter alluded to it as "chief administrative officer" in Article 98.



For this style of management, we can name the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations (1997-2006), Kofi Atta Annan a Ghanaian diplomat who can be categorized within President Roosevelt's framework as "world moderator" style Secretary General. Actually, as Roosevelt outlined, secretary-general's schedule is consumed by a mixture of 'futile Diplomatic rituals' that has been outlined in Article 98 and 'urgent crises' which has been detailed in Article 99 of the UN charter. Therefore, the prominent part of the Schedule to this position of SG of the United Nations, which is purely political and is the distinguished part of this post, has been summarized in Article 99 of the United Nations' charter.

Considering this, amongst concise list of articles (97-101) in the UN charter assigning functions to the SG, Article 99 has been considered the most influential article that precisely gives the SG dominant political power. Having regard to the words of Article 99, which announces that "the Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security," it should be noted that, this article permits and grants the Secretary-General the power of 'preventive Diplomacy' to oblige the Security Council

to talk certain crises they may threaten world peace and security.

Secretary or General, that's the question

In the book "Secretary or General", Simon Chesterton and Thomas M. Frank say the holder of this post is occasionally treated as "an errand boy and punching bag," expected to be simultaneously an independent political force and a public servant. Actually, the dilemmatic issue here is about the ambiguous nature of the position of the Secretary-General, because this is a position which is like a path that forked off in two directions: the duty of "Secretary" and "General." "A Secretary-General is like a Supreme Court justice, you never know what you're going to get" Lee Andrew Feinstein, a former senior official in the Obama and Clinton administrations and the United States ambassador to Poland from 2009 to 2012, said. "We should be more modest in our words, but not in our performance" Ban Ki-moon said in his acceptance speech in October 3, 2006. "The true measure of success for the UN is not how much we promise, but how much we deliver for those who need us most" he added.

Article 98 or 99 of the UN Charter?

Since the UN establishment, the Sec- ➔

retary-General responsibilities has often been bifurcated in two separate directions: Article 98 which assigns purely administrative functions to the SG, and Article 99 that is completely political. So, under Article 99 of the charter SG responsibility is to work in conflict prevention and averting tensions into war by the use of his "good offices" with the help of "preventive diplomacy", peacemaking and peacekeeping via helping to restore stability when armed conflict breaks out, and peace building via mediation to encourage lasting peace in communities emerging from years of instability and chaos. In this regard, chapter XV, article 99 of the UN charter, neither grants power to UN Member States nor a group of those states, but it just gives power to the SG to maintain peace and stability to the whole world. But the question is why Mr. Ban didn't formally invoke this article in the case of Middle Eastern war-torn countries (e.g., Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Palestine)? In the United Nations' history, we do have just experienced three times formally invoking of this article. Strictly speaking, article 99 was invoked only triple in the United Nations' history, the first time by visionary Dag Hammarskjöld in 1960, the second time by Kurt Waldheim in 1979, and for the tertian by Javier de Cuéllar in 1989.

Invocations of Article 99 in the UN Security Council

On 13 July 1960, proactive Swedish economist and diplomat, Dag Hjalmar Agne Carl Hammarskjöld, the second secretary-general of the United Nations (1953-1961) - who has been regarded as the best Secretary-General of all the time and was called by the then president John F. Kennedy as the greatest statesman of 20th century - for the first time practically used 'preventive Diplomacy' for the first time, via explicitly invoking Article 99 in order to maintenance stability in the Republic of Congo in response to emergency request of help which was made by the Congolese government to intervene. In this view, Dag Hammarskjöld was the first SG who made a legal case defending this extended interpretation of Article 99. In light of his argument, he said that "Article 99 not only confers upon the Secretary-General a right to bring matters to the attention of the Security Council but that this right carries with it, by necessary implication, a broad discretion to conduct inquiries and to engage in diplomatic activity in regard to matters

which may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security." During Security Council's emergency meeting which took place following day, Member States adopted resolution of 143 in order to launch a massive peacekeeping mission, subsequently, the consequences of this meeting was exactly in line with the wishes of the man who predominantly executed his duties in a visionary manner as Secretary-General.

On 4 December 1979, the UN's Security Council, in response to Austrian politician and diplomat Kurt Josef Waldheim's call - the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations (1972-1981) - adopted resolution of 457, in order to quell the ongoing Iranian-American embassy crisis. This was for the second time since 1960, UN's Secretary-General, utilized his power to invoke Article 99. Waldheim stated that in his opinion, "tension has now escalated to such an extent that a threat has been created not only to the peace and stability to the region but to the entire world." In response, Iranian revolutionary students declared that the US embassy personnels would not be released until deposed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was receiving medical treatment in New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, must be returned to Iran to stand trial. Ultimately, Waldheim's actions in regards to this crisis had precisely been reflected his managerial leadership style, when he declared that "the Security Council be convened urgently in an effort to seek a peaceful solution to the problem in conformity with the principles of justice and international law."

It was August 15, 1989, that the last but not least UN's fifth Secretary-General explicitly invoked Article 99 of the charter in connection with Lebanon's 14 years of civil war and conflict. This explicit invocation of this little-used article for the third time, took place under leadership of Peruvian diplomat Javier Felipe Ricardo Pérez de Cuéllar who served this post as the fifth Secretary-General from 1982-1991. In a letter to the Security Council President, the Secretary-General de Cuéllar noted that violence in and around Beirut "had escalated to a level unprecedented in fourteen years of conflict." He stated his opinion that an effective cease-fire is imperative: "in my opinion, the present crisis poses a serious threat to international peace and security. Accordingly, in the exercise of my responsibility under the charter of the United Nations, I ask that the

Security Council be convened urgently ..." Finally, this civil war ended up after 15 and a half years on 13 October 1990.

Ban Ki-moon and his Beleaguered Legacy

In conclusion, these three historical turning points in UN's history (Congo 1960, Iran 1979 and Lebanon 1989), shows that the UN's main mission in the 20th century was to help crisis-ridden countries and to stop countries from waging war each other. But, the 21th century is totally different from the previous one, at this new millennial the obvious intention is to reinforcement the inter-state system of countries to such a degree that humanity would be able to live in a prosperous world amidst new challenges. Considering this, it deserves very wide attention that, why current SG couldn't bring the Middle East back to Life? Like these triple historical years that mentioned above, the year of 2015 [and 2014] was/were one of the most "troubled and turbulent years in recent history," according to Ban Ki-Moon, which confessed at the start of an open debate in the UN Security Council in New York on 15 September 2016, about "Respect for the principles and purposes of the Charter as a key element for the maintenance of international peace and security." Therefore, the question is why did Ban Ki-moon favour to walk on the Article 98 road, instead of walking in the line of Article 99? At a time, imposed wars ravaging (e.g., Syria, Yemen, Palestine, and Iraq) why did Mr. Ban like most of UN's former Secretary-Generals use the right to negotiate and to engage in hollow diplomatic rituals? Why did SG Ban Ki-moon choose the right to be a 'father confessor' instead of issuing "early warning" statements in Security Council hall for invocation of Article 99 on war-torn nations and countries in the Middle East? It does seem that, acting in the field of administrative functions of this position, and collecting of evidences related to world scale crises and referring these informations to the Security Council (SC) in a more informal way, have become central duties of the eighth Secretary-general. In this sense, we do understand that why does Article 99 have actually been cited only triple since 71 years of founding the UN organization.

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3 Persian Gulf islands inseparable parts of Iran

By: Maryam Azish

Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) dispute over the three islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and the Lesser Tunb in the Persian Gulf is not a new story.

So far, Tehran has frequently announced that these islands are an inseparable part of the Iranian land and repetition of unfounded allegations over the territories would not change "historical facts", reiterating that Arab officials cannot change history by their meddlesome remarks and media stunts.

Lambasting Arab League Statement

More recently, the Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Ghassemi Iran strongly rejected a statement issued by the Ministerial Council of the Arab League about three Iranian islands, warning that such injudicious approaches would intensify divisions in the Middle East resulted in more gaps among regional countries and a delay in purposeful regional collaborations.

Considering it as a blatant example of interference in its internal affairs, Tehran believes that the statement is originated from the Arab League's political motives and its malfunction to understand historical realities.

Touching upon the current regional sensitive situation, Iran has repeatedly announced that its principled policy regarding the Persian Gulf littoral states is the observance of good neighborliness, mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries as well as heeding historical and legal realities.

Last week, the Arab League's Ministerial Council issued a statement and claimed that the three islands of the Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa belong to UAE at the end of its 146th session in the Egyptian capital of Cairo and voiced their support for the UAE's measures to regain its sovereignty over the islands.

Historical Documents

A look at history indicates that the



sovereignty of Iran over these islands have been recorded in many books, historical documents, almanacs, maritime journals, geographical maps, official documents, administrative reports, the officials notes of the British authorities in India and so on.

Home to many small islands, the Persian Gulf is one of the geographical regions that has been interwoven with the millennia-old history and civilization of Iran. It has been years that some attempts to change the name of the gulf have taken place.

Geographically the biggest island in the Persian Gulf is Qeshm Island, located in the Strait of Hormuz. Other significant islands include Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Kish administered by Iran.

In 1903, the three islands of which were historically owned by Iran, temporarily fell to British control and then were returned to Iran based on an agreement in 1971 before the UAE came to existence.

In 550 BC, the Achaemenid Empire established the first Persian Empire in Pars in the southwestern region of the Iranian plateau. Consequently in the Greek sources, the body of water that

bordered this province came to be known as the Persian Gulf.

Considering the historical background of the name Persian Gulf, Sir Arnold Wilson mentions in a book, published in 1928 that: "No water channel has been so significant as Persian Gulf to the geologists, archaeologists, geographers, merchants, politicians, excursionists, and scholars whether in past or in present. This water channel which separates the Iran Plateau from the Arabian Plate, has enjoyed an Iranian identity since at least 2200 years ago".

Importance of Three Islands

Located in a strategic zone near the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, controlling these islands would enable one to dominate the sea-lanes entering and exiting the Persian Gulf, and hence it is understandable why Abu Dhabi are repeating its imaginary claim time after time.

Pointing to the current regional crisis, Arab League should conduct wisely instead of fanning the flames of regional disagreement between Iran and UAE over the disputed islands |

Ambassador:

Pakistan seeking peaceful solution to Kashmir dispute



Interview by Ali Kavooosi

Ambassador of Pakistan has said Mehr News Agency that his country has never used military power to settle the dispute in Kashmir.

Pakistan is one of the Muslim countries and neighbors of the Islamic Republic of Iran which shares a long history and huge cultural commonalities with Iran. Mehr News International Desk correspondent has sit for an interview with Mr. Asif Durrani, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Tehran. We have discussed regional issues including recent conflicts on Pakistan-India border, Pakistan and Turkey relations, commercial and economic relations of Iran and Pakistan, and the implementation of the gas pipeline project between the two countries, reviewed the regional changes and also the relations between Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

Ambassador Asif Durrani, who is from Quetta in Pakistan, speaks Pashtu, Urdu, Dari and also Farsi with a sweet accent. The ambassador of Pakistan joined his mission in Tehran 4 months ago. Earlier he was ambassador to UAE. With 30 years of experiences in the Foreign Ministry of Pakistan, Mr. Durrani had previously fulfilled a mission as the first secretary in a 4-year term 18 years ago at the Embassy of Pakistan. Earlier

he served in Pakistan's missions in Afghanistan, India, England and the United Nation.

Asif Durrani is well familiar with the culture and civilization of Iran and wants to promote the relations of Iran and Pakistan in all fields. Here is our conversation with him:

◆ **After the removal of international sanctions against Iran, what changes have been made in the commercial and economic relations between Iran and Pakistan?**

It has been very heartening that the international sanctions imposed on Iran have been lifted and we must congratulate Iran for being successful by holding negotiations. We hope that problems associated with the implementation of JCPOA will be resolved soon.

Iran and Pakistan have good relations in commercial field but after the international sanctions, the trade between the two countries decreased. Before the international sanctions the trade between the two countries was 1.5 billion dollars and during sanctions the trade volume fell to 500 million dollars. It is hoped that after the removal of sanctions, trade between the two countries would increase substantially.

To increase the trade transactions, there are banking problems and issues, and the bank officials are trying to tackle

these hurdles. The central banks of the two countries are in contact and it is hoped that these barriers would be removed soon. Traders and businessmen of the two countries have shown great interest to increase the trade. H.E Hassan Rouhani, the President of Iran, had a visit to Islamabad in March and held talks with Mr. Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the two sides agreed to raise their trade to 5 billion dollars in the next five years.

We consider our relations as very important. Both can enter into fruitful cooperation through trade. Pakistan is negotiating much needed electricity with Iran. Pakistan has signed the gas pipeline agreement, as it badly needs energy and Iran can meet its demands easily. We could not complete the gas pipeline project because of sanctions on Iran as no international company was willing or would invest in the pipeline project. However, now the situation has changed and work on pipeline would start soon.

Pakistan, in addition to supplying the needed rice to Iran, can export the engineering, industrial and agricultural items as well as medical and surgical equipment. Moreover, Pakistan exports surgical equipment to the western countries as well. Pakistan manufactures world class sports goods and gears for international brands. In the textile and knitting sector, Pakistan had good performance and exported textile and garments throughout the world.

I hope that since Iran and Pakistan have always enjoyed friendly relations, these relations will continue to grow further in the future as well. Both countries should step towards a free trade and increase their trade transactions.

◆ **What are the impediments on the way to implement the peace pipeline between Iran and Pakistan and when this pipeline will be operational?**

Due to the International sanctions against Iran, no company was ready to ➡

invest or participate in the bid for construction of the gas pipeline project. After the removal of sanctions, the government of Pakistan has negotiated with a Chinese company for the construction of the pipeline and hopefully work on the pipeline will be carried out soon. It is hoped that by the end of 2018 the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project will be operational.

◆ **Iran and some regional countries showed their interest to join China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Can any other countries in the region including Iran join the corridor?**

China aims to have access to the markets of Middle East and North Africa through Pakistan and since Mr. Rouhani and Mr. Nawaz Sharif highlighted the importance of connection between Chabahar and Gwader ports, Iran can play an important role in this significant economic project.

◆ **In recent days, we are witnessing conflicts on the border of Pakistan and India in Kashmir. What is the reason of such conflicts?**

After the independence of Pakistan, India unlawfully entered Kashmir and occupied a large part of this Muslim majority state. Then, the opposition of Kashmiris against the government of India began. The government of India took the Kashmir dispute to the UN Security Council. Since the partition plan envisaged that Muslim majority areas would accede to Pakistan and Hindu majority areas to India, it was but natural that Jammu and Kashmir would join Pakistan. But, India breached the partition agreement and contrived an agreement with the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir to annex the state to India. Based on this shady agreement, Kashmir was claimed as its territory by India. After the revolt in the Kashmir state, this issue was brought to the UN Security Council by India which accepted the decision of the Council to hold a plebiscite in the state. But, India initially dilly dallied and later refused to hold plebiscite in total disregard of the UN resolution. UN resolutions on Kashmir dispute were made from 1948 to 1967 and all stress settlement of the Kashmir dispute.

Currently, two important issues are on the UN Security Council's agenda,

one is the issue of Palestine and the other is Kashmir, and both states are considered occupied. We see that people are not satisfied with the current condition in Kashmir which is why there are frequent uprisings in the state where Indian state repression continues unabated to suppress the voice of the Kashmiris to submission.

Pakistan has never used military power to settle the Kashmir dispute and seeks for a diplomatic solution. Pakistan always has tried to settle the Kashmir dispute through peaceful and diplomatic means. Pakistan has never used mili-



tary power to settle the Kashmir dispute and seeks a diplomatic solution. Pakistan is one of the party to the dispute and if India is thinking to put Pakistan under pressure by using state terrorism in occupied Kashmir, it is utterly mistaken.

After the death of Borhan Muzaffar Wani in Kashmir by Indian security forces, people of Kashmir reacted to the action of the Indian security forces. More than 200 thousands of Kashmiris participated in his funeral. Even in the funeral procession, Indian security forces killed and injured many people. For the first time, Indian security forces used pellet guns to blind the people for life.

More than 150 Kashmiris have lost their eyesight due to pellet guns while over 700 are partially blinded. Such brutal tactics can have drastic and deadly outcomes. Since 8 July 2016, Indian security forces have resorted to suppress

the civilians in Kashmir by force. The people of the occupied state have not stopped their protests; they call it the "Second Intifada".

After an attack on the brigade headquarters of Indian army forces in Uri Kashmir, India called it a terrorist act and blamed Pakistan for it. However, it might be possible that India itself had orchestrated such an act in order to divert world's attention on Indian atrocities against the innocent Kashmiris.

Pakistan is one of the victims of terrorism in the region and around 70 thousand people have been the victims

of terrorism in the last decade. India must know that it cannot put Pakistan under pressure by starting shootings on the border. Only solution to Kashmir dispute is peaceful negotiations. On the other hand, since India and Pakistan are nuclear countries in the region, they must take measures to contain the situation from further aggravation.

◆ **The head of the Zionist regime has visited India in last few days and has stated in his meetings with Indian officials that the Zionist regime is planning to celebrate the anniversary of their 25-year relations and this has provoked some Muslim Indians to protest. Would you give some explanations in this regard?**

I cannot comment on this matter as India is an independent country and can have diplomatic relations with any country. In fact, the Indian government used to be a supporter of Palestinian →

cause, but in recent years it has changed its position towards the Palestine issue. The policy of India in the region reminds the English expression of "Running with the hare and hunting with the hounds". On the other hand, India is one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, but it seems it doesn't play a significant role among the non-aligned member states.

If there are 1 billion poor people in the world, half of them are living in India. Indian intransigence would only increase the poverty of its people.

♦ **Last week Turkish president had a visit to Pakistan and delivered a lecture in the Parliament of Pakistan. How will be the relations of Pakistan and Turkey in different fields?**

When in 1920s, the "Khilafat Movement" was started in the subcontinent, the Ottoman dynasty was under pressure from the world powers. Muslim women of the subcontinent sold their jewelries to support the Ottoman Caliphate against British aggression. Muslims of the subcontinent and Turkey have relations much before the independence of Pakistan.

Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan, and we always remember this gesture. Similarly the people of Turkey

have never forgotten this historical support of the Muslims of the subcontinent for the Ottoman Khilafat.

We are proud of our relations with Turkey. Both countries have always stood by each other on various issues. We are grateful to Turkey for always supporting the just cause of the Kashmiri people.

♦ **What is your opinion about making peace and stability in Afghanistan and also Iran joining the negotiating countries on the issue of Afghanistan?**

There are many tensions and insecurities in Afghanistan and all the negotiating parties agree that we must do something to stabilize the current situation in Afghanistan and for a permanent peace in the region. After the 11 September, the use of military power in Afghanistan intensified the insecurities. Pakistan has accepted more than 3 million Afghan refugees in last 37 years, among which half of them are still living in the country illegally.

It cannot be certainly said that Daesh has been succeeded to find a place in Afghanistan. Taliban have some bases in Afghanistan from where they carry out their activities. China's joining the Peace Talks for Afghanistan is a positive development. Iran is one of the neighbors of

Afghanistan and if it joins the negotiations it can contribute to improving the situation.

The government of Pakistan wishes that the problems in Afghanistan should be resolved by its own people through peaceful talks.

On the existence of Daesh in Afghanistan, it can be said that some factions of Taliban are active in Afghanistan under the name of Daesh. But, it cannot be said with certainty that Daesh has established its bases in Afghanistan.

♦ **What do you like about Iran? And have you been outside Tehran ?**

I love and adore Persian carpets. On my second posting to Iran, I first travelled to the Imam Reza shrine and had a meeting with the Governor General of Razavi Khorasan. After that, I went to Tabriz city and in recent days I had a visit to Sistan and Balouchistan and the cities of Chabahar and Zahedan. In this visit I also met the Governor General of Sistan and Balouchistan. From there I went to Gwadar, Pakistan. The purpose of this visit was to explore the possibilities of expanding the commercial and economic relations between the two neighboring countries. Another objective of visiting Sistan and Balouchistan was to promote border trade |



Media war most common Cold War tool to defeat enemies

By: Lachin Rezaian

Analyst Emad Abshenass, Iran Press Editor-in-Chief and the representative for Russia Today in Iran touched upon the media war as the most common tool to kick off a Cold War.

Addressing reporters and media-minded people on Monday, Abshenass said the victory belongs to those who act based on audience demands using trained, professional and prominent journalists.

Touching upon the issue of 'East and West media war', Abshenass referred to the heavy costs involved parties suffer from purchasing weapons, bullets, cartridges, RPG and equipment.

"The cold war, including media war, is the most effective means to defeat the enemies, which suffers no financial damages," he noted.

Emad Abshenass asserted, "while in hot wars high costs are spent for arms, soldiers, ammunition and weapons, media war assigns much lower costs just to employ journalists, writers and provide media equipment."

Pointing to one of the negative consequences of the hot war, he said the loser is waiting for revenge, however, when you defeat the enemy through the channel of media war and cultural ways, in addition to defeating it psychologically, you will be able to attract public opinion of your enemy country having no more enemies.

As in wartime that we need officers, soldiers and forces, for media war we need authors, news writers, reporters, correspondents and anchors who are highly professional and educated, he said.

"When an untrained officer or soldier is easily injured or killed in the battle and consequently his army faces failure, untrained media will also lose against enemies."

Pointing to the issue of concern for Eastern media, Abshenass underlined they lack any strategy or roadmap.



"As the military war needs strategy and plan, media must have a roadmap and avoid arbitrary and scattered acts based on personal interests that would lead to failure," he noted.

Abshenass emphasized that there should be concentration of forces; "when every news media works according to its own strategies, interests and tastes, naturally, there will be a scattering which would provide the grounds for the enemy to easily defeat us in terms of media and soft war."

For example, he added, Russia in order to fight with the enemy, gathered and focused all its outlets, news agencies and state-run media in a single network called Russia Today to well defeat the enemies.

Media should be strong and effective, Abshenass stressed, "the fundamental problem of Iranian media is that they sometimes work against each other; they neutralize each other's activities and efforts lacking any strong and influential output."

The creation of hero in the war and taking advantage of the media brands were other issues Abshenasa discussed

in his address. He deplored that in Iran there is no media brand, personality or figure; these people are put aside, he stressed.

Russian media representative went on to say that media domination still exists, however, the media which well knows its audience and tries to attract its attention and publish news and reports according to its demands, is the winner.

He also touched upon the role of culture in media domination, saying the international media in Iran producing content for international audiences, must be coordinated and familiar with the culture of the target audience; when a media wants to fight with US it should know who it fights, what culture it has and identity its objectives.

Even though media enemies are powerful, we also have strengths, capabilities and power to defeat them, Abshenass emphasized adding, "as Russia Today, Al-Mayadeen and so were able to defeat enemies, although they faced many problems and obstructions in several countries, we can win the war as well." |



Iran Foreign Relations

By: Mina Ahmadi

The implementation of Iran's nuclear deal with the 5+1 group of countries, which is known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and removal of sanctions imposed on Iran is an issue, which will affect Iran's relations with many states.

As a result, economic relations between Iran and the Russian Federation have been offered with many new opportunities in post-JCPOA era and the deal will be an end to an eight-year period in which trade exchanges between the two countries were in decline.

Shortly after the landmark nuclear deal between Iran and six global powers, Russian President Vladimir Putin traveled to Tehran and pledged to deepen their economic and political ties in the post-nuclear deal era.

More signs also indicate that Russia is already working on what may be a special economic alliance with Iran and is preparing a road map for dozens of joint economic projects with Iran.

In an indication of Russia's goodwill to promote cooperation with its neighboring country, Iran, the Russian Federation Council chief Valentina Ivanovna, heading a high-ranking delegation, arrived in Iran on Nov 13 for a two-day official visit.

The visit of the head of the Russian Federation Council to Iran was part of visits between Tehran and Moscow following the implementation of JCPOA and would mark a significant landmark for fostering the level of trade transactions, as well as parliamentary, economic and security cooperation between the two nations.

In an interview with Rossiya Segodnya News Agency prior to her visit to Iran, Ivanovna underscored that relations between Tehran and Moscow will regularly continue at the highest level possible as a token of close cooperation between the two countries, adding the parliaments of the two countries enjoy constructive and active cooperation as well.

Touching upon successful outcomes of fostering ties between the Iranian and Russian parliaments, she stressed that the visit is another step forward to consolidate bilateral relations which is of high significance for the whole region.

Clear testament to Tehran-Moscow deep ties



While in Iran, she discussed variety of issues including ways to improve parliamentary cooperation and reinforce convergence in the Middle East to fight terrorism in Syria in the talks with senior Iranian officials including President Hassan Rouhani, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

"Clear testament" to Tehran-Moscow deep ties

In a meeting with Ivanovna, President Rouhani stressed that Iran-Russia's relations are at their uppermost level in recent decades, adding the two countries need to make use of the post-nuclear deal situation to further strengthen cooperation in economic, cultural, scientific and technological arenas.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is resolved to expand relations with the Russian Federation in all fields," President Rouhani said, adding the two countries' cooperation on peaceful nuclear energy activities a "clear testament" to Tehran-Moscow deep ties, and welcomed the development of energy and nuclear cooperation with the Eurasian country.

"Russia played a constructive role in the nuclear agreement and even today, it can be very effective in helping other parties to the deal to implement their commitments," he added.

Rouhani further called for facilitation

of banking transactions, customs-related issues, visa issuance process, promoting free trade, joint academic activities, as well as cooperation in the fields of aerospace and new technologies.

Rouhani also noted the strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia to fight terrorism, stressing that such cooperation will continue until the eradication of terrorism in the region.

The chairperson of Russia's Federation Council, for her part, highlighted Moscow's call for an all-out cooperation with Iran in various fields of combating terrorism, trade transactions, energy and peaceful nuclear activities; "the JCPOA has opened new horizons for cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, and Russian companies active in the field of energy are keen on participating in Iranian projects," she added.

She also expressed hope that the two countries' joint economic commission will be formed in the near future to further facilitate joint cooperation.

Boosting mutual strategic ties

Zarif and Ivanovna also called for further efforts to reinforce strategic ties between Tehran and Moscow.

The two sides called Iran-Russia relations strategic and stressed the need for further development of bilateral ties including the move towards abolition of visa requirements.

During the meeting, they touched upon different range of issues, including holding joint economic commission, the need for cooperation to develop faster Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, advancing parliamentary relations, bilateral cooperation, increasing convergence on the Middle East, especially the fight against terrorism in Syria, ways to implement the agreements already signed by President Rouhani and President Putin, cooperation on energy, the South-North corridor, construction of thermal and nuclear power plants and supplying electric trains to Iran by the Russian companies.

Tehran-Moscow trade soaring

Talking to Ivanovna, Larijani expressed satisfaction with the soaring trend of economic and security cooperation between Iran and Russia, describing the two countries' parliamentary

ties as very close and friendly.

Describing his meeting with senior Russian official as constructive and fruitful, Larijani said at the presser, "she had some good proposals and suggestions for regional and security cooperation between the two countries."

He stressed that the recent developments on the international scene and joint cooperation with Russia in the region had led to constructive talks and negotiations between the two nations.

The Russian senior official, for her part, commended Iran's nuclear deal, saying "the 5+1 agreement has provided proper conditions for expanding cooperation in various fields of industry, science and culture, and we should use this potential to the benefit of both countries."

She went on to add, "as of now, the complex and problematic conditions on the international scene give even more

momentum to the development of relations between Iran and Russia."

She further stressed that the economic and trade relations between Tehran and Moscow are growing rapidly.

Various extents and outcomes of Moscow's will to expand ties with Tehran can be also surveyed within framework of Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy strategy and its pivotal regional role.

During the past few decades, Tehran's regional approach and strategy have been traditionally focused on significant regional issues and interaction with partners on the basis of security-building, stabilizing and expediency-oriented tendency.

Unquestionably, the fresh round of collaboration between Tehran and Moscow is a natural response by Iranian and Russian foreign policies in the face of new regional and global developments |

Iran, China deepening military ties

By: Mina Ahmadi

Since the triumph of the Islamic Revolution 38 years ago, Beijing has always been Tehran's economic, political and security partner and has never halted its cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

The growth in the Sino-Iran relations in recent years has been satisfactory and the two countries have always put development of friendly ties at the top of their foreign policy agenda.

During the process of nuclear negotiations between Tehran and 5+1 group of countries, China also played a pivotal role in helping the deal to be signed and a compromise on Iran's peaceful nuclear activities to be reached.

While the two countries are trying to reinforce mutual defense, military and security cooperation in the new post-sanctions atmosphere, China's Defense Minister General Chang Wanquan recently traveled to Tehran at the formal invitation of his Iranian counterpart Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan.

It goes without saying that the trav-

el of General Chang to Tehran, which is the first visit of its kind by a Chinese defense minister to Iran, would well serve as evidence to the influential role the Islamic Republic of Iran has in fostering Asia's defense and security.

Many consider that the visit would open a new chapter in the long-term strategic defense cooperation between the two countries.

While in Iran General Chang, reviews the latest bilateral, regional and inter-

national issues.

with Iran's high-ranking political and military officials including President Hassan Rouhani and Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan.

Tehran-Beijing Profound Ties

In a meeting with General Chang, President Rouhani underscored that terrorism and interference of certain powers in domestic affairs of other states are the two serious threats and that Tehran is keen on cooperation with →



Beijing to help promote regional security.

Emphasizing the need to upgrade Tehran-Beijing ties on the basis of mutual respect and common interests, President Rouhani noted that deepening ties with China as a major country in Asia and Iran's ancient friend is of higher significance.

President Rouhani said that the Islamic Republic of Iran makes efforts to safeguard regional stability and security and fight against terrorism and that Iran and China should boost cooperation to counter the big threat of terrorism.

President Rouhani highlighted Iran's existing capacities and the Chinese advances in science and technology, saying that a suitable atmosphere has

the two countries is significant.

Mutual MoU on Defensive Military Ties

The defense minister of the two countries also signed an agreement to boost defense-military cooperation and fight terrorism and reviewed issues of mutual interest along with regional and global developments.

Dehghan also emphasized that all countries in Asia and the Oceania shoulder the responsibility to maintain peace and stability adding the development of Iran's long-term defense-military relations and cooperation with China is among the top priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran's defense diplomacy the two countries' defense-military cooperation would guarantee

defense-military cooperation.

Dehghan had traveled to China in May 2014 to negotiate mutual visits and personnel training cooperation between the two countries.

Back in April 2015, the Iranian and Chinese defense ministers, who were in the Russian capital to attend the fourth Moscow International Security Conference, held a meeting and discussed Tehran-Beijing relations as well as the issue of the ISIL Takfiri terrorists and the extent of their activities in East Asia.

Iran-China Joint Military Drills

Meanwhile, the chief of staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Major General Mohammad Bagheri in a meeting with General Chang voiced Iran readiness to hold joint military drills with China.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is completely ready to expand and deepen defense-military cooperation between the two countries including holding joint military maneuvers," Baqeri said.

He hailed China's constructive role in international equations and called on the country to continue with its part in order to counter the hegemony and aggression of the arrogant world powers.

Pointing to the cordial relations between Tehran and Beijing, the Iranian commander stressed the importance of improving strategic cooperation on regional and international developments.

For his part, the Chinese defense minister described the relations between Tehran and Beijing as bright and very promising.

In recent years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has made major breakthroughs in its defense sector and attained self-sufficiency in producing important military equipment and systems.

Without doubt, strengthening of mutual cooperation between Iran and China would assure establishment of peace and stability in the region and across the globe.

Thanks to implementation of the nuclear deal, the Tehran and Beijing should seize the opportunities created in the post-sanctions era to ever expand their relations.

Touching upon the rising trend of extremism, terrorism in the region, it seems that China and Iran need to join hands and expand relations to address such issues |



been created for mutual cooperation in the fields of energy, defense, economy, nuclear and other sectors following the implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

General Chang, for his part, said that his country will continue cooperation with Iran as the first regional power on the common goal of regional security and stability.

Evaluating Iran-China relations as excellent, the Chinese minister stated that sense of friendship and amity prevails between the two nations and the two countries' military officials, adding that Iran is the biggest and most influential Muslim country in the region; therefore fostering mutual cooperation between

regional and international peace and security.

Commenting on the emergence of terrorism and its spread throughout the world Iranian Defense Minister said today, foreign meddling and lack of respect for the national sovereignty of countries have turned the Middle East region into a hotbed of crisis and insecurity in the world, PressTV wrote.

For his part, the Chinese defense minister said Iran has an important position in the region in political, economic, security, military and cultural fields.

He added that the two countries have common interests in many regional and global issues which have prepared the ground for the expansion of

Iran-ASEAN ties flourishing

By: Maryam Azish

Following the nuclear deal all ASEAN members have thrown their weight behind Tehran over the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy program.

Following the removal of sanctions against Tehran, the trades between Iran and other countries have been thrived and this new economic development presents enormous opportunities for the Islamic Republic and its trade allies.

From mid-January 2016 onwards, the huge frozen assets of Iran in other countries are flowing back inside the country; undoubtedly fuel the trading activities for mega infrastructure development spilling across all sectors of industries including like oil and gas, railways, minerals, etc.

In a meantime, in the current systems, intentional organizations are creating stability and paving the way for fostering relations among governments.

In this regard, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plays a pivotal role as one of the foremost regional organizations in terms of political, economic and security trends and can offer economic and welfare goals in the region through achieving its basic goals.

Following the nuclear deal clinched between Iran and the 5+1, all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have thrown their weight behind Tehran over the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy program.

The foreign ministers of the ASEAN countries, along with Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, in a joint statement hailed the move as an "important resolution" the finalization of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by Iran and the P5+1 – Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany – in the Austrian capital, Vienna, on July 14.

Since its inception in 1967, ASEAN which is considered as the most significant multilateral group in Asia for the past forty-five years, has largely achieved its initial purpose of preventing South-east Asia from further outbreaks of war following the Indochina Wars.

The bloc that includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and



Vietnam has also accomplished several notable achievements in the economic and nonproliferation realms.

Iran's Foreign Policy

In spite of ASEAN relationship with other non-member countries and its ties with Iran, the role of the organization in Iran's foreign policy is foreseeable for the economic and welfare needs and political influence in the region.

Thanks to its geopolitical position, Iran is considered as a major regional country that enjoys amicable relations with Asian countries.

In a meantime, Iran always has announced its determination to open a new chapter in cooperation with ASEAN and considers expansion of ties with this economic bloc as a priority for its foreign policy.

In an indication of fostering relations between Iran and this powerful economic bloc, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is slated to visit Laos on Sept 6 to sign a document on Iran's accession to the Treaty of Amity & Cooperation (TAC) in ASEAN which is considered as a peace treaty among Southeast Asian countries established by the founding members of this geo-political and economic organization.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been agreed to join to ASEAN's TAC which highlights a step further to tackle Iranophobia.

TAC was signed by founding countries Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore in 1976.

Other ASEAN members joined the TAC later to promote the treaty to an agenda for ASEAN member states to regulate their conduct through a general emphasis on peaceful settlement of differences and the principle of noninterference. The purpose of this Treaty is to promote perpetual peace, everlasting amity and cooperation among their peoples which would

contribute to their strength, solidarity and closer relationship.

The signatories of the treaty extend cooperation in different fields further especially in economics and peace and stability, while respecting independence, territorial integrity and national sovereignty, equality, and national identity of member states. The Article 18 of the treaty provides the possibilities to other countries (than members) to join the treaty; two amendments to Article 18 in 1987 and 1998 were steps to centralize ASEAN in regional and international developments, and made accession by other countries provided that member states agree the accession.

In addition to 10 member states of ASEAN, 22 countries and the EU has joined the treaty. In Laos meeting in June 2016, 4 other countries joined to make the members 36 countries.

Iran's Request for Acceding to TAC

In July, Iran's request to accede to TAC was approved by the ASEAN in the 49th Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, Laos.

In their joint communique, the ASEAN foreign ministers hailed the 'growing interest of other non-ASEAN Member States to accede to the TAC', adding the interest 'reflects their political will and commitment to cooperate with ASEAN in the furtherance of peace and security in the region.'

In all, the economic relations between Iran and the ASEAN countries could be considered as a step toward making a regional economic system, hence, the Islamic Republic's relations with the members of this largest union in Asia are considerable.

Thanks to the cultural and religious commonalities with Iran, the ASEAN members enjoy good opportunities for mutual interaction with the Islamic Republic |

By: Maryam Azish

Tehran and Hanoi are seeking peace and stability for the Middle East and East Asia regions.

New chapter of ties between Iran, Vietnam

At a time when world's doors are open to Tehran after the landmark nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), a suitable opportunity has been provided for consolidation of relations between Iran and the regional states.

Indisputably, the consolidation of relations between Iran and Asian states, especially regional economic powers, would mark a new chapter in Iran's further prosperity.

In an indication of fostering ties between Iran and regional countries, Asian in particular, President Hassan Rouhani launched his three-nation East Asian tour early October 5 aimed at enhancing relations with the southeastern Asian states.

President Rouhani's visits to Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand started on October 5 with his arrival in Hanoi. As the government of President Rouhani has so far been playing a pivotal role in promoting mutual relations between Tehran and other countries of the world, the visit would pave the ground for more co-operation between Iran and the south-eastern Asian states.

During his visit to Hanoi, he held talks with President Tran Dai Quang and Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong.

Two agreements on IT and removal of visa for special and service sectors applicants were also signed during Rouhani's visit to the country. The two countries also agreed to hold Joint Iran-Vietnam Commission in Tehran soon.

Other agreements on boosting economic, banking, financial, tourism and commercial cooperation were also inked during the trip.

Expansion of Iran-Vietnam Trade

President Rouhani believes that his visit to Vietnam would be considered as a turning point for Tehran-Hanoi relations.

In a meeting, President Rouhani and his Vietnamese counterpart agreed to raise the value of mutual transactions to more than two billion dollars and pave



the way for the central banks of the two countries to sign a deal for promotion of banking relations.

As long as Iran and Vietnam enjoy 'very close' stances on certain key international issues, President Rouhani stressed that "Tehran and Hanoi are seeking peace and stability for the Middle East and East Asia regions."

Citing Vietnam as "a strong nation who opposes foreign aggression, favors independence, supports developments and is hardworking," Iranian President said both sides believed that there are very extensive grounds for bilateral economic and commercial relations, especially in the field of investment, and their economies can be complementary to each other.

According to President Rouhani, there is "a very good opportunity available" in the field of energy for export of oil, LNG and petrochemicals from Iran to Vietnam, tourism, parliamentary domain, exchange of professors and students, technology, water transfer, road and highway construction, technical and engineering services, culture and modern industries and Vietnamese companies are ready to invest in the Iranian oil and gas projects.

Promotion of Peace

Voicing Vietnam's supports from

President Rouhani's WAVE initiative for elimination of extremism and violence at the international level, he added Iran and Vietnam support promotion of peace both at regional and international levels.

Dai Quang also hoped that Tehran and Hanoi would cooperate for establishment of peace and peaceful settlement of differences in the region and for restoring peace which is a requisite for economic development.

Tehran-Hanoi Visa Waiver Program

Iran and Vietnam also have signed an agreement for lifting visa issuance for special and servicing purposes as holders of such passports will have no problem with visiting in either country.

The document was signed by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif and his Vietnamese counterpart Phạm Bình Minh.

The two countries established relations in 1973 and since then the two countries have increased political and economic cooperation through exchange of visits by senior officials from both sides.

Iran opened an embassy in Hanoi in 1991 and Vietnam opened its embassy in Tehran in 1997.

Following up Previous Mutual Agreements

In a meeting between President Rouhani and Phuc, the two sides agreed to follow up the agreements previously inked between the two capitals.

Rouhani underscored that reinforcement of relations with Southeast Asian countries, and specifically Vietnam, has always been a top priority for Iran.

Iran believes that Vietnam could become a base for Iran's trade activities in the region. To the same effect, the Iranian president added, Vietnam can access a market of 400 million people through Iran.

Rouhani said the removal of sanctions against Iran has already prepared the grounds for the two countries to enhance their economic ties. He added that Tehran and Hanoi need to strengthen their banking relations first in order to facilitate any step toward the expansion of commercial relations.

Phuc, for his part, emphasized that his country is determined to increase the level of trade with Iran to above \$2 billion.

He added that Hanoi wants to expand relations with Iran in all areas and that it is prepared to move toward the establishment of a mutual free trade mechanism between the two countries.

Successful Mutual Cooperation

President Rouhani in a meeting with Fu Trong described the broadening of mutual cooperation between Iran and Vietnam as successful.

The Iranian president reiterated that the grounds are properly paved for the further expansion of relations between the two countries, especially in the post-sanctions era which expedite the deepening of economic cooperation.

President Rouhani said that broadening of cooperation between the Iranian and Vietnamese private sectors, especially in energy, modern technologies, banking, agriculture and fishery fields is being heeded to.

He underlined the need for developing banking relations in pace with political and economic relations, and said, 'Preferential trade and then free trade can create good grounds for bringing about economic development in the interest of the two nations and the region |

Iran, Belgium ties at a new turning point



By: Maryam Azish

The July 2015 Vienna Agreement and its implementation in January 2016 raised hopes in the Islamic Republic of Iran that there would be an urgent influx of foreign investment which would soon enhance the economic situation in that country.

The implementation of the historic nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has paved the ground for luring more foreign investment and a large number of foreign companies from different countries, European in particular, have voiced the willingness to made investment in Iran.

Iranian officials are facilitating the investment process in Iran aimed at attracting more investors because they believe that luring the domestic and foreign investments is considered as key for settling the country's economic problems.

In an indication of fostering ties between Iran and the Europe, Belgian Minister-President of Flanders Geert Bourgeois heading a delegation traveled to Iran late October to amend cooperation between the two countries.

While in Iran, Bourgeois held talks

with Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh and took part in Iran-Belgium Trade conference attended by 200 representatives of 140 Belgian firms in Tehran.

Conditions for Trade Transactions

In a meeting with Belgian visiting minister, Nematzadeh said post-sanction era has created a proper conditions for development in Iran, the imports and exports activities in particular.

He also underscored that the two countries should focus on the long-term strategic cooperation, stressing the Iranian producers and industrialists are ready to employ the technical capabilities of the Belgian companies.

Emphasizing the need for removing the obstacles hindering expansion of cooperation, he said the Belgian side should facilitate trade exchange and develop banking cooperation to ease activities of their tradespersons.

For his part, Bourgeois said that 140 trade officials from the Belgian companies have accompanied him during the Tehran visit which is an indication of Belgium's enthusiasm to broaden ties with Iran in different arenas.

Brussels, he said, attaches great im- ➔

portance to improving inter-banking relations as one of the Belgian banks has started cooperation with the Iranian banks.

Iran-Belgium Banking Cooperation

Speaking in Iran-Belgium Trade Conference, Bourgeois announced that despite some problems remaining in financial cooperation and investment in Iran, two Belgian banks have expressed readiness in this regard.

Bourgeois said that no contract has yet been inked between the countries but it is hoped that trade ties will be sustainable and long-term.

Bourgeois had earlier said on October 30 that Belgian trade office could be opened in Iran.

Speaking in same gathering, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and trade Mojtaba Khosro Taj underscored that Iran-Belgium trade exchange hit 300-400 million dollars per year and attempts should be made to boost the figure to over \$1b.

Cooperation with Iran Valuable

Meanwhile, Managing Director of Flanders Investment and Trade Claire Tillekaerts said in Iran-Belgium Trade Conference that cooperation with Tehran is valuable for Brussels, adding Iran enjoys a suitable scientific capability and prestigious researches have been done in the Islamic Republic.

Tillekaerts expressed interest to develop cooperation in infrastructural, medical, clean technologies and tourism fields.

Touching upon the good relations between Iran and Belgium, saying that the trip aimed at bolstering economic cooperation which experienced fall due to the imposed sanctions on Iran.

Iran-Belgium Sign MoU on Trade Ties

Iran and three economic regions of Belgium inked a MoU in Tehran on trade cooperation.

The MoU aims to broaden scientific, technological and infrastructural cooperation between Iranian and Belgian firms.

The MoU has made a framework on developing investment and trade cooperation between the two countries.



New Chapter in Bilateral Cooperation

Back in August, President of the Senate of Belgium Christine Defraigne and her accompanying delegation traveled to Tehran for talks on expansion of bilateral relations with senior Iranian officials including Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, President Hassan Rouhani, Expediency Council Chairman Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Head of the Strategic Research Center of the Expediency Council Ali-Akbar Velayati, Presidential advisor and Head of the Woman and Family Affairs Center Shahindokht Molaverdi and Senior International Affairs Advisor of the Judiciary Chief and Secretary of the Human Rights Headquarters.

In a meeting with Defraigne, Larijani underscored that Iran and Belgium enjoy long-standing diplomatic ties and the two countries have had trade cooperation too, adding the visit of Belgian parliamentary delegation to Iran has opened a new chapter in bilateral cooperation.

The two sides also underlined expansion of parliamentary relations, activation of friendship group and establishment of foreign policy commissions, regional situation and menace of terrorism.

Defraigne said that the two countries have had long-standing ties in different fields of culture, economy and politics and now considering new situation the two states favor expansion of relations, adding the international cooperation is necessary for anti-terrorism fight and in this concern constant exchange of information is very important.

She maintained that public diplomacy coupled with parliamentary diplomacy could have good function and Belgium intends to develop such relations.

Iran Willing to Develop Ties with EU

Talking to Defraigne, President Rouhani said Iran is ready to expand international, regional and bilateral cooperation with the European Union (EU) countries, including Belgium.

Referring to the positive role the EU played during the nuclear talks that led to July deal, Rouhani described the nuclear agreement as the start not the end of the way.

On Iran-Belgium relations, Rouhani said the opportunities created in the post sanctions era should be taken to develop bilateral cooperation in trade and economic fields.

There is no hindrance to widen Tehran-Brussels ties, said Rouhani, adding the two can plan for joint economic activities in the entire region.

Iran welcomes Belgian investors, entrepreneurs and private sectors for cooperation in the post sanctions conditions, he added.

For her part, the Belgian official said her country is willing to open new chapter in its relations with Iran.

Referring to Iran as a country that ensures security in the region, Defraigne appreciated Iran's stance on fight with terrorism.

Defraigne also urged all sides to nuclear talks with Iran to do their best for removal of obstacles on the way of execution of JCPOA.

Defraigne called for expansion of Tehran-Brussels relations in all areas particularly pharmaceutical, medical and space.

All countries should be bound to their obligations to international agreements and Brussels will remind US officials that they should be committed to the nuclear deal with Iran, the official added.

Belgium will do its best to remove obstacles on the way of execution of JCPOA, Defraigne said.

Undoubtedly, the atmosphere created after the JCPOA is a good opportunity for the country's exporters and producers to cooperate with foreign companies and the reputable brands.

Nobody can deny the positive effects created by the nuclear deal because it has provided safer and more secure ground for foreign countries to engage with in Iran, the Belgian in particular |



Tehran, Bangkok set for 'New Page' in ties

By: Maryam Azish

Iran believes that expansion of cooperation with the countries in the Southeast Asia is pivotal for the future of the country's economy.

Thanks to removal of the anti-Iran sanctions in January 2016, the obstacles on the way of Iran's ties with other countries, particularly in the Southeast Asia region, have been eliminated.

In an indication of the great significance Tehran gives to promote its relations with that region in all aspects, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani President Rouhani started a three-nation tour of Southeast Asia on October 5, which took him to Vietnam, Malaysia and finally Thailand.

During Rouhani's two-day stay in Hanoi, two agreements on cooperation were linked by the two countries' officials.

Also in Malaysia as the second destination of his Asian tour, Rouhani and the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak stressed importance of boosting mutual ties in the political, cultural, scientific and economic arenas.

After arriving in Bangkok, the Iranian President and the senior Thai officials held talks on different issues, voicing readiness to open a fresh chapter in mutual cooperation.

The Iranian President, during his address to the second Summit of the Asia

Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) in Bangkok, stressed that Asia's power is dependent on self-confidence and a shared will for convergence.

New Chapter of Ties

In a meeting with Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha, President Rouhani said that Tehran and Bangkok governments are determined to open 'new chapter' in ties.

Citing Thailand as Iran's economic communication bridge in east of Asia, Iranian president also indicated resolve of the two governments to help access of one another to the markets of east, west and central Asia to Europe, adding the governments of the two countries are fully determined to expand close relations in political, economic, cultural and scientific arenas.

Describing the Islamic Republic of Iran is as the most secure country in the region with transport facility to regional market of 400 million people, he added the country could serve as a gate for trade of East Asia and Thailand with the central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe as well.

Describing terrorism, violence and extremism as the global dilemma, Iranian president call for expansion of co-operation among all countries to tackle terrorism.

Meanwhile, Chan-o-cha said that the Thai government is determined to amend close relations with Iran, adding

Thai companies are fully ready to cooperate with the Iranian firms.

Chan-o-cha also called for implementation of all agreements inked between the two countries, expressing hope that cooperation on science and culture would develop in parallel with economic cooperation.

Shared Will for Convergence:

Addressing the second Summit of ACD in Bangkok, Iranian President said that Asia's power is dependent on self-confidence and a shared will for convergence.

'We must open our markets, engage in greater economic interaction, start domestic structural reform, move towards greater transparency and engage in extensive coordination on setting policy; and by doing so, take long strides to improve the quality of life for our citizens and elevate the standing of Asia on the world stage,' President Rouhani said.

He reiterated that today, all acknowledge that no global issues could be addressed without close cooperation of Asian powers.

In recent years, the Southeast Asia has been experiencing constant progress and the entire world, including Western nations are seeking to secure their foothold in East and Southeast Asia.

Given the fact that attention to the East is among the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei's strategic policies, Iran should not stay behind in amending relations with Southeast Asia.

'Asia plays a pivotal role in global efforts aimed at resolving such major issues as climate change, environmental crisis, social problems, including refugees, illiteracy and poverty; and the role of Asian states in promoting collective security is indispensable,' Rouhani has said.

Citing the long and rich history of Asian civilizations as a priceless heritage, President Rouhani said greater contact and cohesion between our nations translates into greater cultural growth, which is vital for the long term security and stability of the continent.

Iran is an integral part of Asia and a gateway that connects East to West, President Rouhani said, adding: "We have our roots in Asia and our history, culture and arts have been shaped by this ancient continent. We are committed to remain with Asia and continue to define our identity as Asians."

Slovenia after fostering ties with Iran

By: Maryam Azish

Islamic Republic of Iran's trade tie with the European countries were Tehran's are experiencing a revival thanks to JCPOA.

For decades before sanctions were imposed against the Islamic Republic of Iran, the European countries were Tehran's trading partner. The gap in Iranian imports from Western countries was filled by Chinese, Korean and Middle Eastern competitors, and now thanks to the removal of nuclear-related sanctions against the country, economic collaboration between Iran and the Europe have been enhanced.

Up to now, several numbers of the European officials have voiced their willingness to persist supporting the implementation of agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action throughout the lifetime of the agreement, as well as the UNSC Resolution 2231.

Thanks to being the safest and the most secure country in the region, Iran considered as a promising trading partner, eye-catching and lucrative market for European countries like Slovenia.

The Iranian officials are trying to pave the ground for luring the domestic and foreign investments which is considered as key for settling the country's economic problems.

In a sign of nurturing ties between Iran and the Europe, Slovenian President Borut Pahor heading a high ranking politico-economic delegation arrived in Tehran in late November to amend co-operation between the two countries.

As long as Iran is a country with plenty of economic advantages in the region and Slovenia is a gateway for European Union, so the advantages would be enough to draw the best roadmap for future cooperation and economic outlook.

For sure, presence of Slovenian President and accompanying delegation indicates that economy is a main route to access macro political goals in development of a country.

While in Iran, Pahor held talks with several high ranking Iranian officials including Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, his counterpart Hassan Rouhani, Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, Energy Minister Hamid Chitchian as well as Head of Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture Gholamhossein Shafei and took part in Iran-Slovenia Trade Commission attended by representatives of 50 Slovenian companies in Tehran. Slovenian embassy which was closed in 2012, because of economic austerity policy of the country, also was reopened in Tehran in presence of Pahor.

The visit also resulted in inking three cooperation agreements in economic, information and communications technology (ICT) and bionano arenas.

According to the official statistics, trade between Iran and Slovenia fell down in the past several years from 96 million euro in 2011 to 46 million euro in 2012 and 25.5 million euro in 2013.

Slovenia seeks 5+1 commitment to JCPOA

In a joint press conference attended by President Rouhani, Pahor expressed pleasure with fruitful outcome of the landmark nuclear deal signed between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the world six major countries (US, Britain, Russia, France and China plus Germany) in July 2015 and urged the G5+1 member states to remain committed to their pledges on sound implementation of JCPOA.

He said that the nuclear talks proved that diplomatic means is the best way for settlement of international disputes.

Slovenia believes that settlement of disputes through diplomatic means and restoring Iranian relations with the international community should be regarded as a suitable opportunity for Slovenia to bolster its economic and political ties with Iran, he said, adding normalization of ties between Iran and the international community is a suitable opportunity for Slovenia to revive its ➔





relations with Iran at the highest level.

Iran's determination for promotion of ties with EU

In a meeting with a top-ranking Slovenian delegation led by President Pahor, President Rouhani said Iran is resolved to expand relations with friendly countries, particularly those in the European Union, citing the visit as a turning point in the history of relations between the two countries.

Underlining the need for joint banking and insurance cooperation as a key step to develop Iran-Slovenia trade and economic relations, the president noted that banking and insurance relations serve to regulate trade and commerce between the two nations.

Iran, Europe should trust each other

Addressing the Iran-Slovenia Trade Commission held at Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture in Tehran, President Pahor said that Iranian and EU governments and nations should trust each other and expand trade relations.

'We are here to find a solution for problems at the beginning of trade ties between the two countries after a long halt,' the Slovenian president said.

Iran has successful experience in peaceful dialogue for a complicated nuclear dispute so that the experience may be used for settling the other international disputes, Pahor said.

Iran-Slovenia trade commission convenes

On Nov 22, Iran-Slovenia Trade Com-

mission convened on in presence of President Pahor and Chitchian as well as representatives of 50 Slovenian companies.

The companies were involved in businesses ranging from aerial transport, energy, banking and monetary, tourism, communications and information technology equipment, to electronic devices and machinery for construction, agriculture, medicine, food industries, industry and mines.

Slovenian president addresses Iran's Parliament

On Nov 23, President of Slovenia attended open session of Iran's Majlis (Parliament) becoming the first foreign head of state who has ever addressed the Iranian MPs.

He stressed Ljubljana's willingness to promote bilateral economic and political ties with Tehran, noting that there are good potentials for mutual cooperation between the two countries.

President Pahor added that cooperation between Iran and Slovenia can help promotion of peace and security in the world.

Terrorism common concern of region and world

In a meeting with his Slovenian counterpart, Karl Erjavec, and his accompanying delegation, Zarif said that terrorism and extremism are common concerns of the region and world, requiring comprehensive campaign from cultural and intellectual job to military undertaking.

Describing presence of Pahor and senior officials in Iran as a positive step

and good prelude for new period for bilateral ties, Zarif said that there are numerous capacities for promoting cooperation.

Zarif listed energy, financial and banking, tourism, visa facilities and culture as suitable areas of cooperation, saying, 'We have common viewpoints and concerns in regional and international developments.'

Erjavec, for his part, expressed pleasure with his visit to Tehran, saying a new chapter has opened in Iran-Slovenia ties.

He said that Iran-Slovenia Joint Economic Commission will be held in Ljubljana in 2017, adding that the Slovenian job generators and businessmen are very interested in cooperation with Iran's state-run and private sectors.

Lack of political will to tackle terrorism

In a meeting with Slovenian president, Larijani said that the bitter experience of terrorism has roots in lack of firm political will at international level in fight against it and adoption of improper method in the campaign.

'Iran welcomes expansion of parliamentary, economic and cultural cooperation with Slovenia,' Larijani said, adding some good measures have been taken to ease domestic and foreign investment and the Iranian parliament supports the move.

The bitter reality with the region is the existence of terrorism in the region, which has been mounting in recent years and requires a collective contribution and firm political will at international level to uproot the improper methods, Larijani said.

Slovenian president, for his part said the Islamic Republic of Iran is regarded as a very significant country in the region, leaving impressive impact on regional and global developments.

No doubt, reopening Slovenian embassy in Tehran will shed light on prospect of Iran-Slovenia relations, he said.

Indisputably, the atmosphere shaped after the JCPOA is a good chance for the country's exporters and producers to cooperate with foreign companies and the reputable brands.

Nobody can deny the positive effects created by the nuclear deal because it has provided safer and more secure ground for foreign countries to engage with in Iran, the Slovenia in particular |

Tehran, Caracas eye boosted ties in future

By: Maryam Azish

Among the Latin American states, Iran has always attached significance to expansion of bilateral ties with Venezuela although geographical borders between them are thousands of miles away.

The two countries have always forged amicable relations based on their aversion to colonial US policies and determination to preserve their independence.

Iran-Venezuela close relations also have paved the way for adopting common views towards global political and economic developments.

The Venezuelan president began his four-day visit to Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar and Azerbaijan on October 20 as a plunge in global oil prices has negatively affected his country's economy.

As part of his tour of various oil-producing countries to help stabilize the international oil market, Maduro traveled to Iran aimed at fostering economic and political relations between the two countries on October 22.

The Maduro's visit to Tehran occurred approximately a month after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's tour to Venezuela in mid-September.

On Sept 17, President Rouhani traveled to Venezuela to attend the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and hold separate talks with Maduro.

Iran who had the rotating presidency of NAM during 2012 to 2016, handed over the alliance presidency for a period of four years to Venezuela that enjoys the world's largest oil reserves.

While in Tehran, Maduro held talks with his Iranian counterpart and Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and discussed the ways for fostering all-out mutual cooperation.

Stabilizing Oil Market:

In a meeting with Maduro, President Rouhani said Iran would safeguard any measures aimed at stabilizing the oil market and cited coordination and technical cooperation among the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries



(OPEC) and non-OPEC producers as crucial.

Touching upon the unique situation of Latin American countries, Venezuela, in particular in Iran's foreign policy, President Rouhani reiterated that Tehran attaches great importance to expansion of mutual relations with Caracas, adding Tehran supports the fair price and the equitable share of the producers in the oil market.

Citing terrorism as a global dilemma, President Rouhani emphasized the need for forging consultation with all countries aimed at tackling terrorism, reiterating that the instrumental use of terrorist groups by global powers would backfire.

Maduro, for his part, underscored that Caracas is keen on expanding its all-out ties with Tehran, calling for expansion of cooperation among the OPEC and non-OPEC producers, reiterating that a new mechanism should be considered for stabilizing the oil price.

US Invincibility Big Fault

Receiving Maduro, Ayatollah Khamenei underscored that it is a big mistake to think that the United States is undefeatable, adding that Washington is severely paralyzed and vulnerable in the region as a result of its repeated mistakes during the past 15 years.

'Rational resistance against the US

and exercising prudence in facing its policies is certainly going to bring victory,' the Leader said.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution said Venezuela's influence on the anti-arrogance movements across Latin America points to the country's high potential, urging Caracas to exploit the potential while the country holds the rotating presidency of NAM.

'The West does not like the Non-Aligned Movement to make progress,' he said, adding: 'But independent countries should go against the will of the West, and if they manage to do this, the future sure enough is going to be better than the past.'

The Venezuelan President, on his part, praised Iran's robust resistance against the US hostilities.

'While the Iranian people are living in peace and security, many of the regional countries are overwhelmed with wars, divisions and vulnerabilities,' Maduro said.

Hailing Iran as an Emerging Power

Back in August, Maduro in a joint press conference following a meeting with visiting Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in Caracas, described Iran as an emerging power across the globe, underscoring that the Islamic Republic employs its capacity to bring about peace for other nations.

Maduro added the Islamic Republic of Iran managed to resist foreign pressure and economic sanctions and now has turned into a role model for other countries.

Commenting on the late president Hugo Chavez' viewpoints towards Iran, Maduro said the late Chavez had correctly predicted Iran's role as an emerging power in the 21st century both in the region and the entire world, underlining the need for strengthening all-out strategic ties with Tehran.

He added the Islamic Republic uses its power to promote peace, stability and development in other countries, unlike the US and Western states that take advantage of their influence to wage wars and loot the resources of other nations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran greatly values its relationship with Latin American nations, including Venezuela, and has put fostering relations with such countries on the agenda of its foreign policy.

Latin American countries are significant for Iran due to political and cultural commonalities and congruity at international organizations and circles, particularly NAM.

As long as Tehran is determined to preserve its flourishing relations with Venezuela, which is a legacy of the founder of Tehran-Caracas ties late Chavez, two nations could reinforce their ties through closer economic cooperation.

Iran as an emerging power in the world believes that the two countries enjoy vast warm and cordial ties, which are rooted in the resilience and pro-independence policies of both nations and the two sides should chase deeper, more strategic and more serious cooperation.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has such a position that it can pick its political friends and trade partners and does not have to cooperate with a specific country or region in the world.

Iran and Venezuela as the founders of OPEC, have always attached great importance to expansion of mutual cooperation and Caracas' oil policies have been of great importance to Tehran and is in line with that of Iran's.

Providing that Venezuela is considered as a large economic market for Iran, expansion of economic cooperation would serve the interests of the two nations.

As a result the Iranian enterprises can make use of their technical, engineering, financial and trade capacities in Venezuela in the positive atmosphere created after last year's nuclear agreement between Iran and the 5+1 group of countries, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) |

Achievement of Zarif's Lebanon, east Europe tour

By: Maryam Azish

Iran has always considers a balanced approach to all countries and geographical regions and in addition to fostering ties with neighboring and Muslim countries, which has always been among the priorities of the country's foreign policy, the reinforcement of all-out ties with East European countries, has always been on the agenda of Tehran.

Following the implementation of the nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), foreign countries are very keen to reestablish ties with the Islamic Republic.

The recent visits of the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to Lebanon and three East European countries, which are considered to enter the European Union for Iran, are considered as the top of the country foreign policy developments last week.

The present high-profile trip by Zarif is going to well serve as evidence to the decisive role Iran has in promoting ties with East European countries.

Zarif's Historical Visit to Lebanon

As the first high ranking foreign political figure to visit Beirut after the election of Michel Aoun as the new president following a long political stand-off in the country, Zarif started his four-leg tour on Nov 7, heading to Lebanon prior visiting Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Iranian officials have always attached great importance to expansion of all-out cooperation with Lebanon and also believe that the Islamic Republic of Iran could

reach African markets through Lebanon as that country affects all economic activities in Africa.

While in Lebanon, Zarif held several meetings with a number of senior Lebanese officials including the president, the prime minister, the parliament speaker as well as the Hezbollah Leader Hassan Nasrallah during his two-day stay there. During the meetings, he discussed regional issues as well as bilateral relations with the Lebanese politicians.

The Iranian foreign minister also attended a gathering on Iran-Lebanon economic opportunities as he was leading a top 30-member economic delegation to the country.

Outlining the outcomes of his conversations with Lebanese officials, he said he was optimistic about the prospect of ties with Lebanon because he saw relations with Beirut as beneficial to both nations as well as the whole region.

He also said Iran is keen on cooperation with the Lebanese incumbent government and the next government due to be formed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, adding the Zionist regime and extremism posed threats to Iran and Lebanon.

Zarif also conferred with Lebanese Prime Minister Tammam Salam on settlement of the humanitarian crisis in Syria and the regional disputes, underlying the necessity to expand cooperation between the two countries in new era after election of President Aoun.

Expansion of Tehran-Bucharest Cooperation

From Lebanon, the foreign minister flew to Bucharest, Romania, where he signed two documents on mutual cooperation with his ➔



counterpart.

Zarif also explored ways of promoting all-out bilateral relations during meetings with a number of top Romanian officials including President Klaus Iohannis, Speaker Florin Iordache and Prime Minister Dacian Julien Ciolos.

In a joint press conference with his Romanian counterpart, Zarif said US has to stay faithful to its commitments towards the JCPOA advising the US president to understand the real meaning of today's world and try to go in harmony with international developments.

Zarif said it is customary with Iran not to interfere in other countries' internal affairs.

When in Romania, Zarif commented on the election of Donald Trump as the new American President, saying the results took many by surprise because they were to face the realities of the world and realized that contrary to their assumptions political apparatus were no longer able to determine the future.

According to Romania's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIR), the level of commercial exchanges between Romania and Iran were standing at 166.6 million euros on October 2015.

Call for Expansion of Iran-Slovakia Relations

Arriving in Slovakia from Romania, he held meetings with ranking officials and attended the Iran-Slovakia economic and trade meeting.

Talking to Slovakian President Andrej Kiska, the two sides reviewed ways for

expansion of mutual cooperation, the political and economic ties in particular.

Slovakia is a country that could boost its share in Europe's economy after its detachment from Czech Republic on the basis of the growth and development of small and medium-sized companies to big and multinational companies.

Speaking to his Slovakian counterpart Miroslav Lajcak, Zarif stressed that the large economic entourage accompanying him demonstrate the will of both the public and private sectors in Iran to develop ties with Slovakia.

Lajcak also said that bilateral relations between Iran and Slovakia have been good from the very beginning, adding since his visit to Iran in 2015 everything tends to be promising and improving.

He also voiced his readiness to enhance Slovakian embassy's operations in Iran, especially the mission's economic operations, and said that there are plenty of opportunities for economic cooperation between the two nations.

Promoting investments and banking cooperation were among other fields for bilateral cooperation between Tehran and Bratislava, Lajcak said.

Slovakia's economic growth rate this country lies within European standards and Bratislava as Slovakia's capital is the sixth rich island of the Europe.

Iran Keen on Fostering Ties with Czech Republic

Heading to Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, as the last leg of his East

European tour, Zarif conferred with political officials on regional crises especially situation in Syria, fighting terrorism and ties with the European Union and discussed expanding trade and economic relations between the two countries in such areas as energy, banking and tourism.

In a joint conference with his Czech counterpart, he stressed the need for all parties to abide by their commitments to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The Iranian foreign minister described the deal as an important international deal which came as the end of successful diplomatic process.

He also signed documents with the Czech officials on bolstering political exchanges.

It goes without saying that more engagement between Iran and East European countries is going to guarantee peace and stability in the European continent, as well.

Without doubt, Zarif's East European tour would be considered as a turning-point in development of Iran's political and economic relations with Europe.

At a time when world's doors are open to Tehran after the landmark nuclear deal, a suitable opportunity has been provided for consolidation of relations between Iran and the East European states.

Indisputably, the consolidation of relations between Iran and East Europe would mark a new chapter in Iran's further prosperity |

Iran expanding cooperation with emerging economies



By: Maryam Azish

At a time when world's doors are open to Iran following the milestone nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), a suitable opportunity has been created for enhancement of consolidation of relations between Iran and other countries, including Asian states.

Consolidation of relations between Iran and Asian states, especially regional economic powers, would mark a new chapter in Iran's economic cooperation with the outside world.

As long as the world is moving towards multi-polarity in the political, economic and cultural arenas, the Southeast Asia countries, in particular, as a cradle of emerging economies are moving towards sustainable economic development.

In an indication of fostering Iranian ties with the regional countries, Asian in particular, President Hassan Rouhani launched his three-nation East Asian tour early October aimed at enhancing

relations with the southeastern Asian states.

President Rouhani's Southeast Asia Tour

President Rouhani's visits to Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand started on October 5 with his arrival in Hanoi. As the government of President Rouhani has so far been playing a pivotal role in promoting mutual relations between Tehran and other countries of the world, the visit would pave the ground for more co-operation between Iran and the southeastern Asian states and strengthen strategic cooperation with the region.

In light of the plan to proceed with national sustainable economic development, the Islamic Republic of Iran believes that it should foster closer economic ties with the Asian emerging economies including Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Iran's Acclaimed Position in Middle East

The Southeast Asian countries are also well aware that Iran can play a piv-

otal role in the competition between world powers and emerging powers.

Southeast Asian nations are fully aware of Iran's strategic location and this is evident from the invitations extended to President Rouhani by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak and Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and Vietnam President Tran Dai Quang.

Addressing a top level gathering for Iranian delegation, the Malaysian prime minister stressed immediate action to boost mutual banking cooperation, urging for the two countries' central banks immediate action to find mechanisms for shortening the time needed for banking transactions.

Referring to dimming bilateral economic cooperation between Tehran and Kuala Lumpur in the time Iran was under sanctions, Razak said that the country's minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industries will visit Iran in the near future to explore ways of developing mutual cooperation.

He added Malaysia is interested in ➡

Iran's oil and gas sector, auto industry and road construction while it seeks to cooperate with the Islamic Republic in field of tourism.

The Malaysian minister also called for further cooperation among the Islamic countries for establishment of peace and stability in the Islamic World.

Also, Vietnam president voiced the country's supports from President Rouhani's WAVE initiative for elimination of extremism and violence at the international level, he added Iran and Vietnam support promotion of peace both at regional and international levels.

Dai Quang also hoped that Tehran and Hanoi would cooperate for establishment of peace and peaceful settlement of differences in the region and for restoring peace which is a requisite for economic development.

Meanwhile, Chan-o-cha underscored that the Thai government is determined to amend cordial tie with Iran, adding Thai companies are fully ready to cooperate with the Iranian firms.

Chan-o-cha also called for implementation of all agreements inked between the two countries, expressing hope that cooperation on science and culture would develop in parallel with economic cooperation.

Thailand prime minister also underlined Iran's role in the east of Asia and presence of Thai economic sector in the Middle East region, adding, and "Iran can connect Thailand to central and west Asia and Europe, while Thailand can become a gateway for linking Iran to

the east of Asia."

Indisputably, such statements by top Southeast Asian officials indicate Iran's acclaimed position in the Middle East that connects East to West.

Iran a Gateway to 400-Million-Strong Market

As long as the Islamic Republic of Iran is considered as a gateway to the region's market of 400 million people, the country has lured the Southeastern Asian states thanks to its rich oil and gas reserves, various geographical potentials and huge investment opportunities in road construction, petrochemical industries, tourism sector and hotel construction.

During his address to the second Summit of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) in Bangkok, the Iranian President stressed that Asia's power is dependent on self-confidence and a shared will for convergence.

'We must open our markets, engage in greater economic interaction, start domestic structural reform, move towards greater transparency and engage in extensive coordination on setting policy; and by doing so, take long strides to improve the quality of life for our citizens and elevate the standing of Asia on the world stage,' President Rouhani said.

He reiterated that today, all acknowledge that no global issues could be addressed without close cooperation of Asian powers.

'Asia plays a pivotal role in global ef-

forts aimed at resolving such major issues as climate change, environmental crisis, social problems, including refugees, illiteracy and poverty; and the role of Asian states in promoting collective security is indispensable,' Rouhani has said.

Citing the long and rich history of Asian civilizations as a priceless heritage, President Rouhani said greater contact and cohesion between nations translates into greater cultural growth, which is vital for the long term security and stability of the continent.

Iran is an integral part of Asia and a gateway that connects East to West, President Rouhani said, adding: "We have our roots in Asia and our history, culture and arts have been shaped by this ancient continent. We are committed to remain with Asia and continue to define our identity as Asians."

In recent years, the Southeast Asia countries as the emerging economies are on course towards the sustainable economic development and are seeking to create new opportunities and capacities for economic cooperation, so that the Western nations are trying to secure their foothold in the markets of the region.

Given the fact that attention to the East is among the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei's strategic policies, Iran should take initiatives to advance the strategy by developing economic cooperation with member states of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) |





Economy

By: Maryam Azish

Iran's petroleum industry is considered as the main generator for national economy following the implementation of Iran's nuclear agreement with 5+1, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Energy plays a pivotal role to provide financial resources for Iranian public services and the industrial sector and the deal has paved the way for removal of sanctions on Iranian's oil sector and benefited the country, the top oil producers and exporters as well as the oil consuming countries.

The absence of Islamic Republic of Iran's from global markets during sanctions era had caused major problems because some countries were not able and ready to replace country's oil from other states due to the lack of infrastructure.

The petroleum industry and petrochemical structure of some countries were compatible with Iran's crude oil and any change for compatibility with other countries would have proven difficult and costly.

However, the implementation of JCPOA created a new opportunity for Iran, oil companies and consumers so that they could recommence their trading like in the past.

Thanks to the JCPOA, the foreign countries and big oil companies have had an immense opportunity for investment in Iran's oil sector and buying oil from the Islamic Republic.

Following the implementation of the JCPOA in January, the European countries resumed oil imports from Iran or began negotiations for imports of oil from the major oil producer and a new blow has been breathed in Iran's oil sector which would be materialized in the short-term and some others in the long-run.

The international relations of Iran which is known as the fourth largest oil and the second largest gas reserves in the world have undergone major change following the implementation of JCPOA, and its icy relations with other countries seems to be thawing in the years of sanctions.

From the early days of clinching the JCPOA, a large number of directors of

JCPOA serves Iran's interest as oil supplier



international companies active in oil industry have traveled to Tehran along with their respective country's economic delegations and voiced their willingness to resume the ties cut-off for years.

Thanks to new model of oil contracts, dubbed as the Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC) which aimed at attracting foreign companies and investments in Iran's oil and gas development projects, a large number of officials of the most reputable European oil companies, Total SA of France, the world's fourth major oil company, and Royal Dutch Shell, the Anglo-Dutch firm in particular, have so far held talks with Iranian side aimed at amending mutual cooperation.

Iran's Oil Export to Europe Up

Recently, National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) announced that Iran's oil exports to Europe, which had nearly stopped during sanctions, has risen to 700,000 b/d and the country's oil exports in October stood at 2.44 million barrels per day.

The Executive Director for International Affairs at National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Mohsen Ghamsari has announced that Iran's volume of oil exports would rise by 150 thousand barrels per day (bpd) within months, stating that the daily amount of 600 to 650

thousand barrels of crude oil are being deployed to the European countries.

Touching upon Iran's exception to OPEC's quota and the possibility to boost crude exports from the country, Ghamsari underscored that a daily average of 2.2 million barrels of oil is now being deployed to world markets, adding that under present circumstances, the consumption volume in domestic markets and refineries stands at about 1.8 to 1.85 million barrels per day.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic of Iran is also seeking to achieve 13 percent of the production share at OPEC and the feasibility of boosting production by 500 thousand bpd after the oil freeze deal.

Meanwhile, so far Iran has announced several times that it would spare no effort to increase crude exports to 2.35 million bpd in a few months in order to reach pre-sanction levels.

Iran's oil sales to Asia up 92%

On Oct 2016, Iran's Ministry of Petroleum reported a dramatic jump in its oil exports to Asia, emphasizing that its supplies to the world's largest consumption zone are now much closer to pre-sanctions levels.

According to the Ministry's report, Iran's exports of crude oil to Asian clients for August stood at around 1.7 →

million barrels per day (mb/d). The figure showed an increase of 92 percent year-on-year, adding the Asian countries currently comprise 63 percent of Iran's oil export destinations.

Iran's Petroleum Minister Bijan Zanganeh said in mid-October that Iran's oil production had already reached close to pre-sanctions levels. Zanganeh emphasized that the country is currently producing about four million barrels of oil per day, PressTV wrote.

Earlier, Reuters quoted market data as showing that Iran's oil sales to Asian clients for July stood at an average of 1.6 mb/d, adding that the figure showed an increase of above 60 percent compared to the same period last year.

China imported 0.56 mb/d which was the largest volume of imports among the four Asian clients of Iran's oil, Reuters said. India was the second biggest importer of Iranian oil at 0.52 mb/d followed by South Korea and Japan each respectively with import volumes of 0.29 mb/d and 0.25 mb/d.

In mid-January, a series of economic sanctions that had been imposed on Iran for multiple years were removed after a deal between the country and the 5+1 – the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany – was implemented.

The sanctions barred foreign investments in the Iranian oil industry and also imposed a low ceiling of 1 million bpd on the country's oil exports among a series of other economic restrictions.

The aforementioned points illustrate that the historical nuclear deal has not only benefited the Islamic Republic of Iran but also has provided advantages for many oil companies and consumers.

The deal has paved the way for major oil companies to make investment in Iran's development and exploration projects.

Additionally, fostering production capacity and enhancing the rate of recovery from oil and gas fields and reinforcing Iran's share of oil and gas markets will benefit consumers and guarantee their energy supply security.

JCPOA key for import of hybrid vehicles, reducing air pollution

By: Maryam Azish

Iran's pollution, a decades-old problem, has progressively increased in recent years, claiming several lives each year and damaging healthy lungs.

Economic activists believe that the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has opened a new horizon to promotion of economic situation in Iran and has paved the ground for importing of electric vehicles to the country which are considered as a zero-emissions.

An electric car is an automobile that is propelled by one electric motor or more, using electrical energy stored in batteries or another energy storage device. A hybrid vehicle is a vehicle that uses two or more distinct power sources to move the vehicle.

Iran's most recent official statistics indicates that air pollution in Tehran has claimed lives of 412 citizens in the October 22 to November 13 period, forcing schools in the capital city to be shut down for several days.

The geographic situation of Iran's big cities—most significantly, mountainous Tehran—is only one of the roots of this problem. The overwhelming number of vehicles has largely contributed to this dilemma.

Recently the representatives of Tehran in Majlis have sent a letter to President Hassan Rouhani calling on him to pay special attention to the issue of air pollution in the capital. 35 Tehran representatives in Majlis out of total 290 lawmakers in the parliament have called on the President to order the related organizations to find due solution to the air pollution question and make serious decisions about it.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), air pollution is one of the leading causes of cancer. The fact is that people are more exposed to air

pollutants in industrialized areas and metropolises where exhaust gas and auto-industrial emission can create a hazardous situation. This has increased health problems such as cardiovascular diseases, heart attack, stroke, asthma, allergy and cancer.

While Iran is fully determined to end its relying on heavily-subsidized fossil fuels through the implementation of a targeted subsidy plan known as 'subsidy reform plan', it has concentrated efforts to put CNG cars and electric vehicles on its roads.

Up to now, the Iranian transportation and fuel management employees have tried to replace gas and diesel vehicles with CNGs vehicles to great success, especially in the public transportation sector.

But such replacements seem to be insufficient as the air pollution is getting worse particularly in major cities, and the main culprit is low-standard gasoline as well as overproduction of cars by domestic manufacturers.

To settle the problem, Tehran municipality has planned to bring hundreds electric motorcycles and hybrid taxis to the streets of the capital.

Iran supports import of hybrid transportation systems

On Feb 2016, Deputy Head of the Department of the Environment (DOE) Saeed Motesadi underscored that Iran would support import of electric and hybrid transportation systems in a bid to preserve the environment and reduce pollution in big cities.

Motesadi reiterated that current circumstances are favorable for the import of electric and hybrid cars and all commercial and customs charges on their imports have been removed in Iran, adding that the electric cars have been produced that can run up to 400 kilometers by only one charge that can be a major help to ridding of pollution in megacities.

Regarding DOE's foundation policy to remove sources of pollution, the official stressed that, the department endorses import of electric and hybrid cars into the country.

JCPOA's key role for import of eco-friendly electric cars

Meanwhile, Managing Director of Datis Khodro Co., Milad Alinaqi believes that the implementation of JCPOA has opened a new horizon to promotion of economic situation in Iran and has paved the ground for importing of electric vehicles to the country.

The veteran expert in hybrid cars, Alinaqi, added that environmentally-friendly vehicles produce zero emission, adding, "It is not so far-fetched that with their emergence in the country we would experience less pollution nationwide."

Alinaqi considers the utilizing the green vehicles are considered as a practical solution for settlement of the country's air pollution.

He believes that lack of information about the Hybrid cars' state-of-art technologies in Iran is the main reason behind meager employment of such vehicles across the country.

Managing Director of Datis Khodo Co., reiterated that the demands for

electric vehicles would gradually increase as necessary centers for delivering after-sales service be established across the country.

Citing Iranian market as an "active and dynamic", Alinaqi stressed that the country enjoys huge untapped potentials for entrance of foreign investors in private sector, auto industry in particular.

Alinaqi also expressed hope that the ground could be properly paved for entrance global automakers in Iran and they could produce the products in the Islamic Republic.

Eliminates electric, hybrid vehicle import tariffs

In May 2014, Iranian government announced that it had eliminated import tariffs on electric and hybrid cars with engines of 2500cc and smaller. This surprise move shocked both local and foreign car fanatics, with some even commenting on how an "Oil producing country would even be interested in electrics and hybrids."

Iranian Deputy Industry, Mine, and Trade Minister Valiollah Afkhamirad stressed that this is the first time Iran has dropped import tariffs on electric and hybrid class cars.

The astounding move which is still

unknown to most is to "to boost domestic production and make the auto industry competitive" again.

This resulted in, various people believe, a deterioration of quality of the locally produced cars and allowed three major car manufacturers to form an effective oligopoly between them.

In conclusion, air pollution in Iran stems from various factors including great number of cars as well as the clunkers, motorcycles, sand mines surrounding the city, and occasional dust storms originating from hotspots which used to be wetland and are now dried up due to mismanagement of the water resources.

To tackle all these problems different organizations must get involved to formulate coherent policies to reduce this persisting predicament.

As carburetor motorcycles are responsible for a great deal of harmful emissions replacing them with electric motorcycles would play a significant role in mitigating the air pollution.

For a metropolis like Tehran, where at large number of people dies each year from diseases caused by air pollution, there are no other options but to put aside the vehicles with internal combustion engines and shift to the vehicles with zero emissions |



Global oil giants return to Iran

By: Maryam Azish

The international relations of Iran which is known as the fourth largest oil and the second largest gas reserves in the world have undergone major change following the implementation of JCPOA, and its icy relations with other countries seems to be thawing in the years of sanctions.

From the early days of clinching the nuclear deal, a large number of directors of international companies active in oil industry have traveled to Tehran along with their respective country's economic delegations and voiced their willingness to resume the ties cut-off for years.

Now, months after the deal went into effect in January, the US continued to maintain some sanctions on Iran, scaring off companies from resuming trade with the country and consequently some international banks still shy away from financing trade deals and processing transactions with the Islamic Republic fearing American penalties.

Thanks to new model of oil contracts, dubbed as the Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC) which aimed at attracting foreign companies and investments in Iran's oil and gas development projects, a large number of officials of the most reputable European oil companies, Total SA of France, the world's fourth major oil company, and Royal Dutch Shell, the Anglo-Dutch firm in particular, have so far held talks with Iranian side aimed at amending mutual cooperation.

IPC Endorsement

On Sept 17, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani endorsed the new model of oil contracts after a special committee in parliament approved the conformity of terms and conditions of the new contractual framework with Iran's upstream laws and regulations.

According to media reports, the outlines of IPC, which is aimed at attracting foreign companies and investments in Iran's oil and gas development projects following years of limited or no cooperation with multinationals and inadequate investment due to the international economic sanctions, were approved by the government in August shortly after it got



the backing of so-called Resistance Economy Headquarters, a top government economic advisory body, after some amendments.

A large number of Iranian officials including Head of the Oil Contracts Revision Committee in Ministry of Petroleum Mehdi Hosseini believed that IPC is flexible in nature and any delay in its enforcement will cost the country eight to 10 billion dollars in damage a month.

Hosseini also assumed that speedy investment in projects for development of the oil and gas fields and recovery is essential in order to make up for any backwardness in the joint oil and gas reserves and avoid more violation of rights of Iranian nation.

NPC-Shell MoU

On Oct 9, Royal Dutch Shell inked a memorandum of understanding with Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) on expanding cooperation in the key petrochemical industry, preparing the ground for the coming back of the Anglo-Dutch firm to the Islamic Republic.

Some Iranian officials hope that the oil giant, which was involved in the development of Iran's Soroush and Norouz oil fields in Persian Gulf waters, makes preparations for direct investment in Iran.

Director for Investment of NPC Hossein Alimorad expected that the mutual MoU could be focused on the half-finished project of producing natural gas products.

Forced by sanctions to end trade with Iran in 2010, Royal Dutch Shell that was also planning to develop a gas liquefaction project, resumed purchases of Iranian oil in June and took 130,000 tons of Iranian crude in July from the Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf to Europe under a spot contract.

In March, Royal Dutch Shell paid €1.77 billion (\$2 billion) it owed the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), settling

debts after the sanctions removal in mid-January.

NIOC-Total Deal

On Jan 28, French energy giant Total announced that it has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with NIOC to have access to the technical data of certain Iranian oil and gas projects to assess their development potentials. The MoU was signed during the visit to Paris by the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

The two also signed a framework agreement which will allow Total to take between 150,000 and 200,000 barrels of crude from Iran a day for delivery to French and European refineries.

Several months later, Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh in a meeting with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who visited Tehran to "revive relations" after the finalization of nuclear talks between Iran and the 5+1 group of countries, said Iran welcomes Total's return to the resource-rich country amid Tehran's drive to step up oil and gas development projects after the elimination of sanctions.

Zangeneh also added Total which has been present in Iran's oil projects for more than 20 years and in view of the intent expressed by the French, a new door is supposed to open for the expansion of the company's activities in developing Iranian oilfields.

Total which ignored the 1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of US Congress to participate in Iran's energy projects, has so far ran a gas project in Iran from 1995 to 2000 together with Russian and Asian partners to develop Phase 2 and 3 of the South Pars field at a cost of more than \$2 billion.

The giant French company also developed Iran's offshore Balal oilfield along with Italy's Elf and Canada's Bow Valley in 1999 in a deal worth \$300 million.

A big country and an influential player in energy for enjoying giant oil and gas reserves, Iran, has always been open to foreign investments.

Indubitably, the new contract model unveiled by Iran's Ministry of Petroleum for investment in its oil and gas sector, is more eye-catching to foreign investments providing longer-term commitment from both sides

Schlumberger enters Iran again

By: Maryam Azish



From the early days of finalizing the historical nuclear deal, a large number of directors of international companies active in oil industry have traveled to Tehran along with their respective country's economic delegations and expressed their enthusiasm to recommence the cooperation cut-off for years.

Thanks to new model of oil contracts, dubbed as the Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC) which aimed at attracting foreign companies and investments in Iran's oil and gas development projects, a large number of officials of the most reputable European oil companies have so far negotiated with Iranian side aimed at fostering mutual cooperation.

NISOC-Schlumberger MoU

On Nov 2016, Iran said it has inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Schlumberger – the world's largest oil field services company - over the development of several southern oil fields.

The MOU was signed between Schlumberger and the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) – a subsidiary of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) – which is mostly in charge of the developments of prospects in Iran's oil-rich Khouzestan province.

Accordingly, the French company would be required to study the formations of Shadegan, Parsi and Rag-e Sefid oil fields in Khouzestan. The projects would be carried out within the framework of Iran's new generation of oil con-

tracts.

According to Press TV, Schlumberger would be the second giant energy corporation to win a deal in Iran's oil industry. Earlier, Total signed a contract to develop a major gas project in Iran's South Pars gas field. Total and Schlumberger now appear to have provided France with a strong foothold in Iran's oil industry given that both companies are headquartered in Paris.

Earlier, Italy's Eni also announced that it is looking into Iran's post-sanctions investment prospects, but emphasized that it had to first wait for Iran's outstanding payments over its previous investments in the country's oil industry to be settled.

The southwestern province of Khouzestan which borders Iraq is generally considered as the heartland of Iran's oil industry. A province in which the world's first commercial oil field was brought on stream back in the 19th century today hosts over 45 major oil fields and is responsible for around 80 percent of Iran's total crude production.

IPC approval

On Sept 17, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani endorsed the new model of oil contracts after a special committee in parliament approved the conformity of terms and conditions of the new contractual framework with Iran's upstream laws and regulations.

According to media reports, the outlines of IPC, which is aimed at attracting

foreign companies and investments in Iran's oil and gas development projects following years of limited or no cooperation with multinationals and inadequate investment due to the international economic sanctions, were approved by the government in August shortly after it got the backing of so-called Resistance Economy Headquarters, a top government economic advisory body, after some amendments.

A large number of Iranian officials including Head of the Oil Contracts Revision Committee in Ministry of Petroleum Mehdi Hosseini believed that IPC is flexible in nature and any delay in its enforcement will cost the country eight to 10 billion dollars in damage a month.

Hosseini also assumed that speedy investment in projects for development of the oil and gas fields and recovery is essential in order to make up for any backwardness in the joint oil and gas reserves and avoid more violation of rights of Iranian nation.

NIOC-HOA deal

In November, NIOC signed a \$4.8 billion heads of agreement (HOA) deal with French Total, China National Petroleum Corp and Iranian Petropars company for development of the phase 11 of South Pars joint gas field.

Once the project is implemented, 56 million cubic meters will be added to Iran's gas extraction capacity from the field which is shared with Qatar.

Under the agreement, the contrac-

tor will finance the project, thus luring billions of dollars of investment for the country.

Development of phase 11 of South Pars gas field the within framework of the new model of oil contracts underlines high share of Iranian companies in various divisions of operations.

Iran has pitched some 50 upstream oil and gas projects under the newly revised framework of its oil contracts that is hoped to sweeten the previous not-anymore-popular buyback deals.

Eni returns to Iran

On Nov 25, Italy's oil giant Eni, which was involved in the development of several oil and gas projects in Iran before a series of US-led sanctions barred international oil corporations from investing in the country, announced that it has serious plans to return to Iran's oil industry in a yet

another indication of the growing interest of global energy corporations to approach the country's post-sanctions business opportunities.

Eni CEO Claudio Descalzi told Reuters that his company would start working again in Iran when it has been repaid investments previously made and when it understands the type of contracts Tehran will be offering.

"We are still in Iran... we never left... because they owe us a load of money and we are trying to recoup it ... We'll come back when we will have recouped all our money and we know the contracts," Descalzi said.

The projects that the Italian energy giant was involved in Iran included the development of Phases 4 and 5 of the country's South Pars oil field as well as the development of Darkhovin, Doroud and Balal oil fields.

Descalzi visited Tehran in April 2015

for fresh investment talks with Iranian officials who included Petroleum Minister Bijan Zangeneh.

The deal – which Iran signed last summer with the US as well as other members of the Security Council plus Germany – envisages the removal of a series of economic sanctions against Iran in return for steps by the country to restrict certain aspects of its nuclear energy program.

The removal of the sanctions against Iran – that took effect in January – means that international companies will be now allowed to invest in the country's oil and gas projects among other privileges outlined in the deal.

Indubitably, the new contract model unveiled by Iran's Ministry of Petroleum for investment in its oil and gas sector, is more eye-catching to foreign investments providing longer-term commitment from both sides.

Report: Germany's Hermes in Iran

By: Maryam Azish

Iran always has been considered as an eye-catching and money-spinning market for several European countries like Germany offering not only 80 million people it has but also a 400-million-people marketplace it can provide access to.

Thanks to being the safest and the most secure country in the region, Iran enjoys significantly high number of young population and educated people which make it a promising trading partner and market for foreign investments.

Following the termination of the nuclear deal between Iran and great powers, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the European Union countries, Germany in particular, are trying to foster their economic cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

For decades before sanctions were imposed, Germany, which enjoys the largest economy in Europe with a nominal gross domestic product in 2016 of \$3.5 trillion, was Iran's major trading partner.

This is while the gap in Iranian imports from Germany and other Western countries was subsequently filled by Chinese, Korean and Middle Eastern competitors, and now thanks to the removal of nuclear-related sanctions against Iran, economic ties between Tehran and Berlin have been flourished.

Germany's Hermes returns to Iran

On Nov. 15, Director for Investment of National Petrochemical Company (NPC) Hossein Alimorad reported on an agreement with Germany's Hermes Insurance Company to provide insurance

coverage for investment projects in Iranian petrochemical industries.

Hermes cover is a common way of referring to an export credit guarantee (ECG) by the German government. These guarantees are an important part of German foreign trade policy and protect German companies in the event of non-payment by foreign debtors. The export credit guarantees of the Federal Republic of Germany offer an array of insurance options which are mainly targeted at exports to developing countries and emerging markets.

Alimorad described the most major



plans for attraction of investment to the country's petrochemical industry saying "a contract has been recently inked with Japan's Marubeni Corporation to reopen a 320-million-euro Line of Credit (LOC)," adding new negotiations with yet another Japanese firm to reopen an LOC worth 640 million euros asserting "talks with the Japanese side are in final stages of drafting the contract which is estimated to be sealed within weeks."

He also pointed to the visit of an Iranian delegation to Berlin at the invitation of Iran's Embassy in Germany; "the trip aims to launch a fresh round of negotiations with banks, insurance firms as well as companies willing to make direct investment in the Iranian petchem industry."

"Final agreement has been reached with Germany's Hermes Insurance firm in the course of recent talks," stressed Alimorad noting that the German side has agreed to take out insurance against new investments in petrochemical industries of Iran.

The NPC official also touched upon the held talks with German banks on attracting investment to the industry stating "a short-term scenario has been finalized based on which investment attraction will be performed under the guarantee of NPC as the government's representative."

In response to a question on the amount of investment by German companies, NPC's director for investment said in the first step, agreement has been reached on reopening three billion euros of LOC while three to six more billion euros are expected to be opened in the second phase.

"Negotiations have also been conducted with German firms on making 12 billion euros of new investment in Iran's petrochemical industry in addition to the three-billion-euro Line of Credit," reiterated Alimorad adding "two senior officials of a giant German petchem company will soon travel to Tehran in order to finalize earlier talks as well as to evaluate NPC's proposed economic projects."

Iran's debt to Hermes cleared

June 20, 2016, Islamic Republic's ambassador to Berlin Ali Majedi said Iran has paid its debt to the German Euler Hermes credit institution, adding there



are no more barriers on the way of German banks and companies' cooperation with Iranians.

According to media reports, Iran owed Germany about €500 million (\$578.90 million) under so-called Hermes covers.

Iranian banks and companies faced difficulties for transferring money during the sanctions' era and foreign credit insurance agencies had to cover Iranian banks' and companies' due payments and now the government has to settle all the outstanding debts to foreign firms.

Debts to foreign insurers like Sace and Coface and Hermes had stopped them from opening new credit lines for Iran.

Germans eye economic boost with Iran

On Nov 8, Visiting Minister of Economy in German state of Lower Saxony, Olaf Lies said the bilateral ties between Iran and German nations are beyond economic relations and the JCPOA has paved the way for broadening and deepening the relations between the two countries and these opportunities for cooperation should be seized.

Lies maintained that the Islamic Republic of Iran was one of the economic powers of the Middle East which had expansive trade ties with Germany and Lower Saxony before the imposition of anti-Iran sanctions.

"We are eager to continue and develop the trend of relations with Iranian companies and this feeling is reciprocal as the Iranian partners are also willing

to cooperate with German companies," he added.

Lies articulated that the victory of the JCPOA has created high expectations and the consequential merits of the deal should be taken advantage of.

"One of the big and important issues after the JCPOA is restoration of financial routines and banking transactions which need joint cooperation and endeavor to be resolved," said Lies, adding the German and the Iranian sides are after proving the benefits of the way undertaken for brokering the JCPOA and the valuable results of it.

Without doubt, the implementation of the historic nuclear has paved the ground for attracting more foreign investment and a large number of foreign companies from different countries, European in particular, have voiced the willingness to made investment in Iran.

Iranian officials are facilitating the investment process in Iran aimed at attracting more investors because they believe that luring the domestic and foreign investments is considered as key for settling the country's economic problems.

The situation created after the JCPOA is a good chance for the country's exporters and producers to collaborate with foreign companies and the reputable brands.

Nobody can deny the positive effects created by the nuclear deal because it has provided safer and more secure ground for foreign countries to engage with in Iran, the Germany in particular |

Saudi Arabia OPEC spoiler by reneging on vows

By: Hossein Azari,
Mohammad Ali Zamankhani

On the eve of OPEC Meeting, Saudi Arabia has officially declared a war on oil prices by releasing a tactical letter as well as applying pressure on certain OPEC members.

On the verge of the 171st Ordinary OPEC Meeting to convene on November 30 in Vienna of Austria and at a time when the world's major producers and exporters of crude oil are preparing to adopt one of the most historic decisions on freezing oil prices, Saudis seem to have reneged on earlier promises.

During the earlier informal meeting of OPEC ministers in Algeria in late September, members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) reached a consensus on putting a cap on production levels and the session urged participants to prepare for freezing or even reducing OPEC's aggregate oil output to 32.5 million barrels per day by holding expert meetings and forming a common working group.

Over the past few weeks, several meetings at expert level were held among member states in different parts of the world and even non-OPEC states like Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Oman voiced readiness to stabilize or decrease their production levels.

Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia has questioned all agreements and negotiations on freezing oil prices by publishing a political and planned letter ahead of the forthcoming OPEC meeting.

Accordingly, Saudi Arabia, in an official letter to OPEC, has announced that it will not take part at the lower-tier talks on Nov. 28 in Vienna ahead of the OPEC ministerial meeting on Nov. 30 since



“OPEC ministers first need to agree on cutting output and inform non-member countries about their agreement.”

In time with the tactical retreat on Saudis from attending the joint meeting of OPEC and non-OPEC members on Monday, Russia has also announced that it will not participate in the session in order to make any comprehensive deal literally impossible.

Apparently, under the pretext of lack of agreement among members, Saudi Arabia refuses to attend the Monday meeting, while in fact, Saudis, as OPEC's largest oil producers plan to apply pressure on certain countries in order to dictate their policies to the member states.

On the other hand, it seems that even in case of a consensus among all member countries, including Iran and Iraq on a Saudi proposal to reduce production quotas, still, Saudi Arabia, with political backing of some of its princes, seems to be applying new tactics to disturb convergence of OPEC in achieving a comprehensive agreement on oil production.

In the past 12 years, Saudi Arabia and Iraq have enjoyed the lion's share in crude production among all OPEC members to the extent that both countries, Saudi Arabia in particular, have taken over shares of other states by exploiting turbulent conditions like Iran's oil sanctions, Libya's internal conflicts, technical issues in Venezuela's oil industry not to mention ongoing disputes in Nigeria.

According to secondary sources, Saudi

Arabia's production share in OPEC has risen from 29.1% in 2004 to 31.5% in 2016 and the figure for Iraq increased from 6.5 to 13.2 per cent in the same period.

Moreover, share of the UAE rose from 7.7 to 8.8 and for Kuwait from 7.6 to 7.8 while the figure for Iran dropped from 13% in 2004 to 8.6% in the present year even though the country's production soared following implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The aggregate total of oil output in Saudi Arabia has reached 10.525 million barrels per day (bpd) indicating a rise of over one million bpd as compared with the year 2014. Iraq's crude oil production also rose from 3.11 million to over 4.776 million bpd in the same time span.

Iran's output level, however, stands at about 3.92 million bpd still lower than pre-sanction levels which were over four million bpd.

In other words, Saudi Arabia has, in one sense, seized shares of other OPEC manufacturers during the past decade and, once again though this time with a politically-motivated and non-economic plan, Saudi princes intend to wage a full-blown psychological war against Iran and a number of other OPEC members in order to prevent achieving a comprehensive agreement on reduction of oil output so that they could maintain the highest production capacity while ignoring interests of other members.

No doubt in the remaining hours be-

fore the OPEC meeting, Saudi Arabia will resort to some Western media to launch a new psychological war against Iran's oil industry in order to virtually direct attention of market activists from its own uncapped and high output levels to countries like Iran, Iraq and other OPEC countries.

In the meantime, it is worth recalling that due to the sharp decline in global oil prices from \$100 per barrel to lower than \$50, any decline in oil market will undoubtedly bring about the greatest loss to Saudis, with a production of over 10.6 million bpd, than it would do to Iran who produces less than four million bpd.

In the first ten months of the post-JCPOA era, Saudis have remained as the absolute losers in their rivalry against Iran in the oil market.

The Arab country has opted for several tactics to cause disturbance in return of Iranian crude oil to the global market including official reduction of oil sale prices in Asia and Europe, imposing sanctions against Iranian oil tankers as well as forcing the Egyptian government to prevent Iran from using the Sumed pipeline.

Despite all measures taken by Saudis, Iran has reached a record high in oil sales by deploying 2.442 million barrels of oil per day to global markets, marking an unprecedented figure in the past two decades.

Moreover, Iran has recently managed to find a place in emerging markets like Poland, Hungary as well as some states in the Eastern Bloc of Europe.

Also in Asia, Iran has taken over the place of Saudi Arabia turning into the largest supplier of crude oil to India and statistics reveal that in October, Iran shipped 789 thousand barrels of crude to the Asian state remaining ahead of Saudis who exported 697 thousand barrels in the same time period.

The question remains whether Saudi Arabia will manage to attain its political objectives in the oil market by waging a new oil war on the verge of the OPEC meeting in Austria in order to postpone the plan to freeze OPEC's oil output |



Corruption, cronyism and flawed supervision: banes of banking system

By: Samad Habibi,
Mahdiyeh Mohammadi

Tehran Prosecutor General has said strict supervision over banking activities would prevent unnoticed corruptions and shed some light to darker corners of the banking interactions.

Abbas Jafari Dowlatatabadi told a meeting of the inspecting bodies of private and public banking on Saturday that improved supervision and monitoring activities would prevent violations of the law, where the inspecting bodies should attend to their duties with much zeal and enthusiasm; "however, a lapse in such preventive activities brought banking corruptions to the headlines of mass media and other social networks, with news stories of arrest of high-ranking officials of banks, effectively depriving the public of their confidence to the financial system and casting doubts on the health of the banking at large," he emphasized. "In all dossiers on corruption, banking sector has been directly and indirectly involved, inter alia, are Kerman's Tejarat Bank, Sarmayeh, Dey, and other banks."

"Banking has been a safe haven in all such cases for corruption to incubate, with high-ranking management turning

a blind eye on the corruption underway in inner organizational levels and or actively participating to gain their illicit interests," he warned.

Jafari Dowlatatabadi also said that two high-ranking officials have been indicted in the case of Sarmayeh Bank. He ascribed the alleged corruption and the consequent circumlocution by the banks themselves of the cases to the culture of rentier economy and cronyism dominant in the financial system, where the system had been pliable vis-à-vis special privileges granted to individuals with contacts and affiliations to higher places to which banks felt indebted. "The case is further exacerbated when all these cronies file for insolvency and thus easily remaining exempt from further punishment; today, banks are centers of economic power, immense resources, which will definitely lead to corruption and other sorts of abuse. Money brings political power as well and where money-laundering is detected in drug trafficking and smuggle of goods, banks have a hand providing the bedrock for illicit activities under cover," he emphasized.

He called all healthy banks to distinguish themselves from the contaminated banking system and stand apart

through effective supervision and monitoring which rules out the corruption and possibilities of abuse.

"The majority of the resources received as loans from banks had been invested in projects other than that specified in the agreement. This squanders public money, frustrates production sector and fosters a culture of corruption. A lump sum is potentially a source and impetus for the corrupt customer to bribe others easily," Jafari Dowlatabadi told the meeting.

"The indictment process of many of these cases had been underway; but a tactic was effectively adopted, apart from filing for insolvency, is to claim, by the bank debtors, that they should be dealt merely as bank debtors and should not be indicted in charges of corruption and abuse of public money; a second problem which contributes to the situation sinking to the lower priorities, is that banks would not accept as repayment of debts as physical assets," he lamented. "11 banks had paid a sum of \$ 2.5bn, with 1287 individuals filing for insolvency; the deadlock to be solved requires three fundamental approaches; the first remains with banks to adapt stricter roles and criteria for granting loans; the bank directors should be in the frontline of the fight for corruption; no run-of-the-mill entrepreneur should receive inordinate amounts without putting in stake enough guarantees; cronyism should be abolished and unqualified evidence should not be lent credence as individual's credentials as receiving loans," he recommended.

"Access to public accounts should be restricted to few high-ranking officials and should remain confidential; only the owner of the account or a court order should find access to accounts; banks in dealing with this important issue should comply with rules, which posits that only individuals with serious charges and corruption should be subject to investigation of their accounts; providing access to bank accounts for personalities other than those specified in the law is strictly forbidden," Dowlatabadi asserted.

Prosecutor-general also called for more coordination of banks and the Bank and Monetary Court; "any report of financial corruption to banks' inspection systems should be communicated through the Court; the Court has refrained from appointing a representative in banks out of fear of parallel struc-

tures with intermingled duties which would have negative effect on transparency; this however would not rule out the necessity to provide the Prosecutor's office of cases of corruption; transparency should be the guiding principle in any activity, where the inspecting bodies would work with ease," he said.

Farshad Heidari, CBI's Deputy for Supervisory Affairs also addressed the meeting; "currently, more than 200,000 staff serve in more than 23,000 branches of banks and credit institutions, the majority of whom enjoy high degree of integrity and morality; the source of corruption comes from customers with contacts in high places in the power ladder, along with insufficient transparency and bad legislation; with banking interactions now using more sophisticated technologies, corruptions and swindle cases have declined significantly," he told the meeting.

He believed that covering of violations and avoiding report to higher echelons are major contributors to ever-increasing lawsuits to address the issue; "in fiscal year ending March 21, 2016, banking system carried out 35 billion transactions; the major pitfalls include engagement of corrupt and convicted individuals and individuals specifically referred to banks by people on high places and generally lacked the necessary credentials; there has been considerable amount of concert between public sector and private sector banks in reemploying of retired personnel, which is clear violation of the law stipulating that personnel should receive promotions according to prescribed rules, and that banks should report this to Central Bank," he emphasized.

The meeting where Tehran's prosecutor-general addressed leaves still important matters of the independence of the Central Bank. This is the cornerstone of a healthy financial system where central bank acts independent of the government to regulate the system as the sole body capable of making critical decisions which would affect the lives of nation. In a free market economy, this is the invisible hand of the market and the forces inside the market that decides to where an economy should go and which decisions should be made. In Iranian setting however, much of the economy is unsupervised and as many observers believe, the hidden part or underground part of the economy is not regulated even by the government itself.

In such a situation, Central Bank is merely one of the players in the economic terrain, wielding no significant role in bringing into order the economic movement and dynamics of the much of the economic sectors goes unnoticed by the CB.

In a rentier economy, the privileges are granted to government- and power-affiliated people with little or absolutely no qualities to any economic activity which would be productive. Iran's banking system is not an exception, and the mushrooming of the private banks and institutions provide testimony to this state of malady where unauthorized individuals enter economic activities with sole objective of making profits in environments lacking transparency and supervision; in such settings, the system lends itself to diverse sorts of corruption including money laundering.

Jafarabadi's lamentation that the banks are run without effective supervision are well grounded, to which the Central Bank should be alert; however, it has largely been an onlooker, only occasionally providing to the media statistics of illegally run banks and financial institutions which, assured of their unsurmountable place, mock the banking system and the workings of the CB.

The ever-increasing number of banks and credit and financial institutions following the post-War years when the Construction era of Hashemi Rafsanjani's 8-year incumbency had expanded the economic sector without necessary regulatory bodies monitoring these institutions and credit financiers to which were channeled large amounts of money, earned legally or illicitly; Central Bank however did not retain its key position and became the governments' wallet and a player among others. The situation has recently been addressed as the corruption surfaced in scales unheard of before and when a rentier economy, having enjoyed almost no regulatory supervision and thus evaded accountability, fostered cronyism. The internal mechanisms of the banking system should be self-sufficient in a transparent organizational setting in preventing corruption, and only in extreme cases should the judicial system interfere in the economics of the banking, to which Mr. Dowlati Jafarabadi clearly alludes in recommending the banking high management that they should pioneer efforts to restore health to the banking system |



Culture

Director of Tampere filmfest: **Tehran Short filmfest. brings together diverse perspectives**

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Jukka-Pekka Laakso, Director of Finland's Tampere Film Festival, says the most distinctive element about Tehran International Short Film Festival is the wide spectrum of perspectives that filmmakers bring there.

The 33rd Tehran International Short Film Festival (TISFF) was held on 8-14 November at Charsou Cineplex in the heart of Iran's metropolis. The Cineplex, which has already made a successful job in holding the latest edition of Fajr International Film Festival back in April, offers a great venue for these types of cinema events with its 5 modern well-equipped auditoriums housing 900 seats in total, and a food court located on the 5th floor, ready to serve guests, journalists and the audience with a wide range of food options from Persian cuisine to Italian dishes.

The TISFF now comfortably in its 33rd year, is already well-established as a reputable and highly-esteemed short film event in the world. This year, the festival received over 5,000 submissions from Iran and 117 other countries, which according to the director of the international section, Mr. Dezvareh, places the number even higher than what a more eminent, Oscar-qualifying festival such as Tampere has so far received – an international short film event which together with the short film festivals in Oberhausen and Clermont-Ferrand, is among the most important European short film festivals.

Making short films only sounds an easy task on the surface, as attested to by Director and President of the Board of Directors of Finland's Tampere Film Festival, Jukka-Pekka Laakso, who was enjoying his second time as a member of the international jury panel to the TISFF. Making short films will neither bring fame nor money, and you will have a hard time finding a proper venue



to put the film on display (many short filmmakers nowadays make good use of the Internet, but that experience is hardly satisfying). This is where film festivals gain momentum: They give aspiring short filmmakers the best venue for screening their creations to a large number of audience and film critics, and a chance to get noticed by other festivals.

The TISFF is making good progress in bringing diverse points of views in film creation hailing from countries such as Italy, Germany, Sweden, Japan, Russia, the US, Chile, Argentina, the UK, Turkey and Kazakhstan. The festival is annually organized by the Iranian Youth Cinema Society (IYCS) in Autumn, and is considered one of the oldest film festivals not only in the Middle East, but across the globe as well. Throughout the years, the festival has also hosted International well-known festival directors and cineastes from around the world including Andrzej Bednarek (Poland), Matthias Flugge (Germany), Seigo Tonodi (Japan), Gipsy Chang (Hong Kong), Julliette Duret (Belgium), Anna Henckel (Germany), and Jukka Pekka Lakso from Finland, who I managed to catch after his conference on Tuesday for a short interview.

Jukka-Pekka Laakso (born 1959) is the Festival Director and President of the Board of Directors of the Tampere Film Festival, Finland. He has been involved with the selection and programming

since 2000, taking up the directorship in 2002. Laakso is also a member of the National Film Council of Finland and European Film Academy. He was part of the international jury panel to the 33rd TISFF.

The following is the MNA's interview with him:

◆ Seeing as this is your second time here, what do you find distinctive and special about Tehran International Film Festival that you haven't seen in other film festivals you have attended so far?

This year, I haven't seen almost anything at the new venue, but I was here ten years ago and I think that special element about Tehran Short Film Festival which sets it apart from other festivals of this kind is much about what Iran is as a country. Iran is situated between Europe and the East and the possibility of meeting people from this dynamic spectrum is exciting. The festival brings together all these people with diverse cultures and point of views and I get a chance to look at the films through their eyes and my own eyes and discuss them together. So I would say, the possibility of learning their perspective of the world is unique. Besides films, I'm also interested in history and I find Iran a very interesting place in many ways, seeing as it sits between the East and the West and not being understood at all in Europe. ➔

The possibility of being here, seeing the Iranian films, and meeting with directors is what I like the most about this festival.

◆ **So in what ways would you say short film festivals like Tehran or Tampere help the film industry in general?**

First of all, we present the possibility to filmmakers to have their films shown on the big screen, and give them a chance to be seen and have their films seen by a wider audience. It is important for them that they can watch the films with an audience. This way, they can feel how people feel about their creations, because cinema is a very social medium in which you witness firsthand how the audience react to your films. In addition to that, they can also meet people from other countries, as well as other filmmakers from their own country where they can talk about the films and hopefully get good critique on what they have done. You can also meet people that you might cooperate later, so you form this kind of bonds with people that think the same way as you do. That Film festivals bring in people from different countries is important as you get a wider perspective on the short film industry throughout the world. A lot of young filmmakers think that they are the only ones in the world who live in a place that doesn't appreciate what they're doing. Attending film festivals educate them on that. And of course, if you get your film into the program of Tehran Film Festival or in Tampere, it always gets noticed again by some other festivals so you might get invitations to another festival and meet even more people there. So, short festivals like these help educate young filmmakers and help them with finding new connections and people who might prove helpful in furthering their career later on.

◆ **Seeing as this is a short film festival with a focus on brevity, if you could describe short film in one word or sentence, what would that be?**

Freedom.

◆ **I was reading your interviews on the Internet and in one of them you were asked to name one of your favorite movies and I was really surprised to read that it was 'The House Is Black' by Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad. What**



aspect of the film had fascinated you so much?

The fact that it is about people who are basically hidden from other people due to their deformity. It is a documentary but it almost feels like a horror film because the people are so horribly mutilated due to leprosy. But then she manages to transform those people into something else, normal human beings who just look different. Then, there is an element of really not trying to do a film in a normal way, like looking at those people from the outside. She actually manages to put the camera on their level and look at their lives as they see themselves, which is really rare, especially at that time. She was truly amazing. Of course, like the way it is with many things, this is what I have analyzed for myself later, but the main aspect of my fascination with the film is the memory of the first impact of seeing it. I've seen it several times but the first time deeply touched my heart.

◆ **This got me wondering, how did you get introduced to the Iranian cinema in the first place? What was the first Iranian movie that you watched and became interested in?**

I can't actually remember the first film, but probably my first exposure to Iranian cinema was short films. Because when I started working for the film festivals it was in the 80s and I had a chance to basically watch the whole program at Tampere film festival for a few years. At that time, there were already a few Ira-

nian short films submitted to the festival, since the Iranian cinema movement was strong already in the 80s. So I saw the films there and discovered the kind of special quality that they had. I would say that later in the 80s, I got to see films by Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf. But it really came through short films.

◆ **What about the most recent movies being produced in Iran? Do you have any favorites?**

I recently watched an Iranian film about 20 minutes long, but unfortunately I can't remember the name right now. We were just discussing it at the festival yesterday about how very special it was. It had very little happening in it, but it was a really good Iranian short film. When it comes Iranian-styled films, I also just watched a film about a girl who goes to Germany to marry. The director is German but her parents are Iranians, so she has this whole Iranian background.

◆ **Did you also get a chance to watch Asghar Farhadi's latest film, 'The Salesman'? It has gotten a lot of international attention after winning two awards at this year's Cannes.**

No not yet. I have this problem that half of the year I solely concentrate on short films, so I miss quite a lot of feature films. Also it hasn't yet been screened in Finland, maybe it will later this year or next year. But I did watch "A Separation" and liked it a lot. It actually ran for a long time in our cinemas and you could see that people were really appreciating it.

◆ **So what aspect of the film would you say was most fascinating to the Finnish audience?**

The fact that it is about ordinary things, not the spectacle. It's about the relationship between people and this is something that I think you can easily relate to – it's different but the same. The environment is different, and there are certain aspects in life that we don't have in Finland, but in the basis, it's really just about two people going through difficulties in life. One of the most difficult themes to make a film about is something that you feel in your heart which is quite ordinary but you live with it all the same |

Islamic music has still long way to go: Danish Muslim singer

Interview by Hamid Reza Gholamzadeh

Danish Muslim singer Ali Al Hadi who is participating Islamic Unity Conf. in Tehran visited Mehr News Agency's HQ to sit with our reporters for a friendly talk on art and Islamic Unity.

Ali Al Hadi is a Danish Muslim musician and singer at age of 25 which promises a bright future ahead of his career with the success he has already achieved so far. As a Muslim singer, his concern is to contribute to and promote Islamic music to be consumed by especially the young generation of Muslims.

While the annual Islamic Unity Conference gathers here in Tehran hundreds of scholars, figures and activists from all over the world who work to help unity among Islamic sects, this year the event was different in the way that they invited Ali Al Hadi to sing a special song on the occasion of birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad. Here is our inter-

view with the Danish-Lebanese young artist.

◆ **Let's start with a short biography of you and when your musical career and background started?**

Since I was a kid I used different instruments and when I grew up I studied learning it more seriously and Alhamdulillah I ended up in a professional way; it began when I was about ten years old when I found some interest in music which helped me with learning the piano and I become better and better thanks to God. Now sitting here today with some artistic works in my background.

◆ **How is the situation of your work as an Islamic singer in the world of west?**

It is quite difficult as you have many western media going on and of course broadcasting not Halal works, from the viewpoint of Muslims. We also face a big war against the Muslims through

the media and especially through music. Music is an art and the west is using it to get close to the Muslim youths. We are trying thus to give the youth something similar in quality, but different content; so we try to make it as western as possible and meanwhile as Islamic as possible.

◆ **How is the reception for your works among the audiences?**

Until now, very good. Alhamdulillah people are getting the artistic work as something good and we have had many people telling us they liked the songs and that if there are more of such works they will also tell people around them to listen to these works and won't listen to western non-Islamic music anymore.

◆ **Which other countries have you had performances and how did the audience like it?**

I have so far sung in Lebanon, Germany and Sweden where they like it. ➔





Some media in Lebanon covered the event too.

◆ **You performed a new song in Islamic Unity Conference on Thursday; can you explain about that piece of work and how it was created?**

When invited to the event we decided to do something new which can be multilingual. We started with the English part and asked the writer to get inspiration from Ayatollah Khomeini's letter to the western youths and she did so. We wanted something that the youth can relate to. The Arabic part was like continuation of the English part, and the Persian part is more like traditional. It is western style music with an Arabic or Middle Eastern melody and with English words; so it is easy for the Muslims to relate to, both musically and the lyrics. It tells the story of a person who feels confused in this world and then finds peace by finding the love of Muhammad (PBUH) and that's the main idea behind the song we were working on.

◆ **Can you read parts of the lyrics? I want to know how it is attributed to Prophet Muhammad?**

It took me years to face my fears
Lost many days to find the ways
The world around me is confused
And scattered and the solution is love
Who was this man that spoke the truth?
I walked different paths during my youth

Until one day a name entered my ears
A name so unique, it brought me to tears

Muhammad I heard, Muhammad they said
Ashhad o anna Muhammad an Rasul Allah
(I testify that Muhammad is Messenger of Allah)

I should also add that if you look at the last part of the Ayatollah Khomeini's letter, it says if you are confused about the world and your way go to Ahl al-Beit, the Household of the Prophet Muhammad. Read about them, read about who they are, how they lived and what they said and get the answer from them. That's why we say from there we got our inspiration.

◆ **Recently more Muslim musicians and singers are appearing internationally singing about Islam; how do you see the situation and what do you feel about it?**

I found as a Shia Muslim there is an empty space between the Shia and an Islamic icon the youth can relate to and we try to fill this gap. We of course do believe in unity among Muslims, but we need an icon Shia youth can connect to I personally set my goal to make the youth remember we have Imam Zaman (Imam of the Age) with us, he is around us and remember that he will come someday. This is the main goal of my work to remind the audience of Imam

so that the youth can relate to him as an Islamic Shia icon.

◆ **How much should be done in Islamic music?**

Actually we do need much more support from the people in charge and officials; as artists we need supports from people, from governments, from leaders, from everyone. Because as Muslims, normally I'm talking about Arab world and not western world, we see that Muslim artistic work is not taken so seriously as we want to.

◆ **Can you talk more on the life in non-Muslim societies and if you face difficulties?**

It is difficult to be in a western lifestyle; there is also a campaign against Islam there. Of course the government is neither supporting Muslims, nor chasing them. We are free and we follow our religion as far as we go with the law; Denmark, however, follows the United States in many things, but in Copenhagen where I live people are very open-minded, and you don't find the Islamophobia you see outside Copenhagen, where they don't know Islam and so they fear about it. Normally Danish people are open-minded and against Islamophobic works and only a small part of the society campaigns against Islam.

◆ **How about Islamic centers activities? How much does the government support and how do Sunnis and Shias relate to each other?**

We have Imam Ali Foundation and Shia Muslim Cultural Center where my father happens to be Imam of it. Of course there are many more mosques and centers both for Shias and Sunnis. But we do need more support for centers and their activities as we have to do a lot to prove ourselves to be supported by the government. Between Shias and Sunnis we are good Alhamdulillah; heads of mosques and centers believe and work in favor of unity among Islamic sects and myself as a musician use my art in this regard. We have good relations with other Muslims, Christians, etc. and we see each other as humans and respect each other and each other's beliefs |

French artist Paul-Louis Rebora: **'Lucerail' seeks to evoke feelings not pose questions**

French painter and sculptor Paul-Louis Rebora in an interview with MNA talked about his personalized style of painting 'Lucerail', saying the style focuses on evoking feelings in the audience.

French painter and sculptor Paul-Louis Rebora defines 'Lucerail' as "a concept together with a method, a style of painting as an approach to Fine Arts; a combination of light and color in a new way which can be easily positioned in museums, or be used in Applied Arts and contemporary architecture."

This French artist travelled to Iran a few days ago at the invitation of managers at Dr. Rahgoshay House-Museum in Badrood, Kashan who are an Iranian-French couple. Rebora, who is considered Pablo Picasso's last surviving student, was interviewed by Mehr News Agency correspondent at the Arts desk, Azadeh Sohrabi. The interview was translated from French into Persian by Miriam Gotz, Dr. Rahgoshay's wife who hosted the French artist, and into English by Marjohn Sheikhi.

"I started with figurative art like all the rest, with drawing objects," Rebora told MNA about his journey through the world of arts and getting to the point where he created his own style, "I was born in Morocco and took up courses in Fine Arts there, but then came to France to continue my studies. The more I worked with figurative art and landscape painting, the more dissatisfied I grew. I felt that I wasn't making any progress, so I went into abstract art. I studied abstract art for years in order to invent my own style of painting."

"I started working on my own style 30 years ago. I'm 89 years old now and I'm still as much in love with it as the first time," he added.

"What mattered to me the most was that I wanted to create something that would allow the audience to feel as part of the painting and fall into some kind



of trance when looking at it," he said.

He explained more about 'Lucerail': "my style is painting on the back of glass, as if you are standing before a painting through which light passes. Light is an important element in creation of my works. The transformation that I seek to provoke in my audience is achieved by light passing through the painting."

"I paint on several layers at the back of a glass and leave some spots untouched. Then I create holes in these spots that will be later covered by sheets of gold, copper or silver. Then I turn on the light behind the paintings," he added.

"I use light, form and color to evoke a feeling in the audience, not to have them faced with a question," he said.

Asked if he would like to set up a gallery of his works in Iran, he said "I would love that very much, but I can't do it on my own. I need an institute or gallery in Iran to cooperate with me on this. Furthermore, it is very important to me to be present during the whole process of setting up my works for display."

Rebora is considered the last surviving student of Pablo Picasso who is

known for the "cubist" style of art.

"Picasso was an empire. He was brilliant in everything he did. You can't find one single flaw in his works. We were close friends, asking for one another's opinions and feedback. He's been gone for a long time but I learned a lot from him when he was still with us."

"In fact, there is nothing new I can say about him that you haven't heard already," he reminisced. "He was full of ideas and with a perfect mastery over his works. More importantly, he worked in many different fields as was common among my generation. Nowadays, you can find few artists who work in several fields at the same time."

"I, for example, do graphics, work with charcoal, bronze and ceramics. I make sculptures and do paintings. Many actually call me the second Picasso," he laughs.

Painter and sculptor Paul-Louis Rebora is a member of the Academy of Fine Arts of Quebec (Canada), President of the International group "Art Couleur Matière", creator of the new concept "Lucerail", a revolution in the "museal abstract art", or in the contemporary architectural decoration |

Interview by Parnaz Talebi & Marjan Golpira

Narges Kalbasi Ashtari whose story has made headlines internationally and nationally these days tells the Mehr News Agency how the authorities in Rayagada District, benefit from the poverty that the local NGOs portray to the outside world.

Rayagada District is in the South of Odisha state which in turn is in Eastern India.

"The Authorities in Rayagada District benefit from the poverty. They extract money through foreign funds in the name of the poor with the help of these organizations. Everyone is well connected and work together to profit from this."

At age of 21 she sets out on a journey to India to open an orphanage. However, today she is faced with an uncertain future including a year in jail and \$4,300 in fines.

The following is her full interview with the Mehr News Agency on Sunday.

◆ **Narges some people may wonder why you decided to go to India to open an orphanage. Why didn't you perhaps set up one in Iran, your motherland?**

That's a very good question and it is one I get asked about a lot. To be honest, I did a lot of research prior to choosing a country to start my work in. I read a lot about the orphan, abandoned and disabled children of Iran and found many organizations and government run programs that help care for such children.

Generally speaking, Iranian people are much kinder to children in need compared to some states in India where I read horror stories on mistreatment and abuse of these children. The way children are treated in the developing world cannot be compared to Africa and some states of India. The state of Odisha has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world that was just one of many reasons I wanted to go there first. I will, of course, work for the children of my homeland too, and I will love and take care of any child who is in need. We should love all children equally, no matter where they are born. A child in need is a human indeed, we should focus on ending poverty globally, and that is what I want to be part of.

◆ **You had mentioned ASSIST, a local NGO in India, took one of your children's**

Rayagada authorities flawed: Narges Kalbasi



homes from you back in 2013. Why?

Actually I have built two children's homes in Rayagada district where they have taken one away from me and are currently trying to take the second one as we speak. At that time I was not a local in that area and I needed a piece of land to be donated to my Foundation. This NGO, ASSIST, donated two pieces of land to Prishan Foundation but once the homes were complete, their behavior towards me changed, and I later found out that the land documents that their group of lawyers had given me were actually forged. The land was still in their name. Once I found out that they were fake, I approached the local police and filed a complaint. The main husband and wife of ASSIST were sent to jail for 3 months because of that but still to this day they occupy my first home and the police are not investigating this matter. In their minds, ASSIST thought that once I built the homes, they could somehow get rid of me and then sell them to make money... both of these properties are very expensive and both of them together come to a total of around 80 to 88 thousand dollars. So as you can imagine in a place so poor as Rayagada district, this amount of money is huge and these people would go to any length for money, even if it means killing someone. They harassed me, they harassed the children, they threatened me, and now, they have insti-

gated this current case against me. They don't want me to talk about any of this and it is not just them, there are many other regional NGOs that are scamming people on a daily basis. The entire district and the NGOs here just wanted to silence me, and now that I have been sentenced, they seem to be getting what they wanted. It is absolutely an injustice to me.

◆ **Could you please walk us through the day when you had arranged an excursion for your blind children and orphan boys two years ago. Fill us in on the details please.**

On November 3, 2014, I took my visually impaired children and my orphan boys to a picnic in Rayagada to a tourist destination where a lot of people go every day for picnics. During this picnic two of my staff members, husband and wife, had also brought with them their own two children and it was during this picnic that they alleged that their older son disappeared. Obviously we all tried to search for him, yet we couldn't find him. So the parents went to the police station and I returned home with my own children. At the police station, they gave a statement to the police officer that their son was missing and they requested the police to search for him. And that was it.

It was only 33 days after, on December 6, 2014, that they were approached by ASSIST and were told to try to get mon-

ey from me and that if I didn't pay, they would help them file a case against me. They approached me many times with these threats, but I never paid a single penny to anyone.

So they went to the police station and changed their story. They said that I had murdered their son. They were alleging that I had taken their son to a river, thrown him in and watched him drown. Later on, they changed their story again and accused me of manslaughter, because they said I had chosen an unsafe picnic area, blaming me for the death of their son. Their story has constantly changed! Manslaughter due to negligence makes absolutely no sense, because firstly, the boy was not part of my foundation, secondly there's been no body found and finally, the parents were present at this picnic! They should have been taking care of him, not anyone else. I told the police from the very beginning that they were trying to extort money from me but instead of helping me, they were asking me for bribes too! So from the beginning it's been absolutely ridiculous and corrupt.

◆ **Do you believe police ran enough investigation to find the missing or drown boy whose disappearance has raised many doubts to this day as his body has yet to be found.**

Absolutely not. When the child was pronounced missing I had called the police to come and investigate. Two officers showed up an hour and a half later and they did not do a search at all. From that day onwards there has been no proper investigation what so ever. I have not even been questioned; nobody has ever asked me what happened. From the very beginning the motive was money and still to this day, it remains the same.

◆ **Just like you, your Indian assistant, Raju Gupta, also was charged of negligence on his part too for the incident, yet he walked away from any charges. Why?**

It's very clear! That's just another clear indication that this was just simply a revenge attack on me, an attempt to extort money from me. My colleague Raju Gupta doesn't have thousands of Rupees to pay in bribes, in their eyes, I do.

◆ **You said you have not received a fair trial at the local court of Rayagada. Why**

do you think the judiciary system in that village has failed you?

They have absolutely failed me. It is a tiny town and everybody is somehow connected there. Everybody profits and benefits from poverty in Rayagada, so if you start to talk about the corruption, and if you start to expose the people who are meant to be helping the poor, they all suddenly turn on you, because you will affect their income so to speak. Every single person working in this district profits from this, it is like a business for them. I was not able to speak properly in my court hearing and I was told to answer very short answers or yes/no. Even the judge in my court case cried when the mother of the child was talking! That's how unprofessional and completely biased the trial was. I didn't get a fair trial and I don't expect to get a fair appeal in the next court either because it is in the same town with same people.

◆ **Describe the attitude of the residents of Rayagada towards you these days, the village where you left the comfort of the West to launch children's homes through foreign funds for their kids.**

I don't blame the residents of Rayagada. They have kept their distance from me and again I don't blame them for that. Obviously, when there is local government, when the police chief and the mayor and these powerful people turn against you, then I don't expect the local people, the poor people, to go against the authority. I don't blame them for being silent because obviously they're scared. If I am a foreigner and I am also scared of these people I can only imagine what the innocent, uneducated local people are feeling. Everyone is afraid to help me and the person who provided me with bail has been threatened and scared as well. It is impossible for anyone in this district to reach out and support me without also being framed and silenced.

Do you fear for your life?

I Absolutely do. Many times people have tried to harm me. Many times they followed me on the highway trying to crash into my car. In one instance, in the middle of the night, there were police officers outside my home trying to frighten me. There are so many of these incidents and I have even reported this to police officers in different districts but they haven't intervened or tried to help me. There was an order from the Supreme

Court of India which allowed me to get an exit permit and leave India and also to get police protection, but they still do not provide me with this! They are trying to do anything to harm me.

◆ **What is your message for the judiciary system of Rayagada? for the people of that village?**

My message to the judiciary system is very different from the message I have for the people of Rayagada. I do not blame the people of Rayagada. The system in that area is flawed; those governing that area are corrupt. The people are not at fault. They cannot turn against the people governing this area.

My message to the judiciary system is that they have failed me and most likely many other people who weren't able to defend themselves. If they are able to do this to me then just imagine what they can do to people here who don't have a voice to speak up against it. I have a connection to the outside world but many people here don't, I feel really sorry for them. The state of Odisha needs to wake up and realize that nobody should be above the law and the law should be equal for everybody, this is not what is happening in one of their districts, Rayagada district.

◆ **Many people across the world have raised concern over your health and safety and they want to know what they can do for your freedom.**

Obviously, my physical and emotional wellbeing is not good at all. I think anybody in my shoes would feel the same. It's definitely a scary situation. Even now that I am 100% protected in the Iranian consulate, I'm still scared because I don't know what will happen in my appeal. I face a jail term for one year in the same town where I exposed their corruption!

My future and safety is all in the hands of the government of India. I don't know why they are so quiet, why are they are not intervening in this case? I demand a fair investigation. I'm not demanding an acquittal or anything else. I'm simply demanding a fair trial. I want them to open up my case and realize that I've been framed. I ask the people of Iran to please try to get in contact with Mrs. Sushma Swaraj who is the minister of external affairs [of India] and our Mr. Zarif to ask them to fight for me because I cannot fight alone anymore. I am afraid and need help. I want justice |

Algerian Min. of Culture:

To celebrate Hafiz is to celebrate love, humanity

Interview by: Somayyeh Khomarboghi

Algerian Minister of Culture Izzedin Mayhoubi has told Mehr News geographical barriers no longer pose difficulties to effective cultural ties with Iran.

Mr. Mayhoubi was in Tehran to officially open Algerian Cultural Week, an initiative of Iran's Ministry of Culture and Mr. Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri himself attended the ceremony on last Monday in Iran's National Library. Somayeh Khomarboghi of Mehr News International Service reached Mr. Mayhoubi for a short interview on prospects of cultural ties between Iran and Algeria:

◆ **Cultural common grounds provide nations and states means to improve ties; how would you see this issue in terms of Iran-Algerian ties? What has been done so far to improve bilateral cultural relations?**

The cultural events jointly held indicate a political will in both capitals for an all-out development; both countries waged honest efforts to work in cultural matters, as a bridge through which other sorts of relations crosses; the stronger this bridge, the better will be the economic and political ties and exchanges. Both presidents relied on this premise to bolster relations in all issues of interest.

Algeria had been participating in cultural events in recent years to introduce its culture, heritage, and civilization to Iran; culture occupies an important place, and the agreement on cultural cooperation signed December 25 2014 was a milestone of such exchanges; the second meeting of high commission in December 2015, chaired by Abdelmalek Sellal, the Prime Minister and Mr. Is'hagh Jahangiri, Iran's First Deputy-President, provided a yet stronger framework for cultural cooperation. The same meeting also was a venue where detailed plans for 2016-2018 were signed as an effective roadmap, and which would help more dynamism in cooperation. For example, commemorating famous



14th century Iranian poet Hafiz of Shiraz right in Algerian capital as the one hundredth such event, is to celebrate the human different modes of love and being loved and a great innovation by our cultural officials.

◆ **Do you think that what would improve bilateral cultural ties with Iran? And what are the major barriers?**

In meeting with Mr. Salehi Amiri, I discussed preparing a roadmap to improve cultural relations; we also signed agreement in cinema, music, and other fine arts; we agreed that both countries' intelligentsia would participate in joint sessions to address important cultural issues, which are also a challenge to other societies and nations, including terrorism and extremism, along the pressures mounted by the west. To tackle barriers on the way to happier future in a world of peaceful symbiosis, and where tolerance opens the rooms for friendship; critical thinking is the only way to face threats of reactionary thoughts and a groundless fear of what is to come; we should promote culture of mutual trust and a culture which looks forward.

Geographical and lingual barriers are no longer adversely affect cultural ties with Iran. The only problem would be of linguistic nature where communication would be slow and lethargic; on the face of this, both countries, I believe have a real will for better ties in the future.

◆ **How would a culture of fighting**

colonialism and imperialism would contribute to convergence of both countries?

Both Iran and Algeria resisted colonialist forces to save their countries; Algeria cherishes the model Iran presents in cultural resistance; art and culture are as a strong weapons in form of cinema, theatre, music, literature, visual arts, and other expressionistic and symbolistic art; in the age of globalization and its huge waves sweeping local identities, we should use these parameters to save native cultures and the heritage of centuries we inherited from the past.

◆ **What Iran and Algeria can do to fight terrorism and to tackle the very roots and causes of the evil?**

A culture of dialogue as an instrument of converging ideas acts as a bridge for more understanding and peaceful co-existence, especially in a region so volatile as the Middle East, where sectarian violence and hatred, along with extreme forms of tribalism, have contributed to a chaos already besetting the nations' odds of better days; terrorism and extremism should be addressed in terms of its roots; political turmoil, social underrepresentation, cultural marginalization, and economic deprivations are among the major roots of a situation where individuals take extremes in controlling the situation and to change the conditions in their own favor, however with whatever violent means. In such a failed state, individuals begin to hate others who they believe are cause of their plights and who they deem as the major party to direct the blame; Takfirism is fostered in such desperate situations. To address this evil, effective education and a working state system should at work; individuals should be inculcated with a culture of tolerance and listening to the others' voices; on this, the states should not be alone and the intellectuals and elites should come closer to realities by abandoning their ivory tower of abstractionist aestheticism, and to provide the society with their knowledge to help it avoid extreme situations |



Technology

“The network thus created by connection of cars and regulatory and monitoring systems of water, gas, and transportation sectors will require a special section of frequency spectrum under strict monitoring,” he added. “Currently, individuals are connected only through mobile devices, which takes less bandwidth and spectrum; however, IoT use different protocols, requiring new sort of regulation of radio networks and ➡

sensors sending data through them; software will be developed to handle different sensors in a certain protocol; security is of utmost importance; in an ecosystem of sensors, family privacy, network privacy, and health of the whole system constitute issues for consideration."

Fard highlights the preliminary stage of work on the project; "we have already identified part of resources of the domain; the project is multidimensional and proper grounds should be prepared. In any rate, the new system will carry data on radio networks; large volumes of communication should be channeled through available networks; on the other hand, huge traffic passing through will add to the responsibilities of Telecommunication Infrastructure Company of Iran (TIC) which will contribute to the progress of the project," he detailed. "IoT challenges structures beyond the resources available to a ministry; even the Judiciary should intervene to oversee the legal requirements and enforce the ethical principles of using the technology; police and the insurance will also be involved; when, for example, a car connects to the internet through the protocol and it hits another car in an accident; the technology to be implicated and the regulating body to be questioned for possible damages should be identified through rules governing the use of all the elements of the system," Fard told Mehr News.

"We predict that IoT will infiltrate all fields; we predict also hosting of 50 billion sensors through which a population of 80 million would be connected, the number of sensors being large as individuals would need more than a single sensor to connect to different objects around themselves; we would not reach the figure however by the end of the Six Development Plan and will be preparing the capacities," he added.

With the new technology on place, who can help ignoring the huge potentials? Definitely, all industries and economic sectors will sought to join the network. This will transform the mode of activity in many sectors including industry, retail sector, factories, and even agriculture, which is believed to be the pioneer in adopting the benefits of the IoT. The amount of investment in in-

stalling facilities in agriculture will reach from \$ 30m in 2015 to more than \$ 75m in 2020. The sensors installed provides live data about livestock and crops to farmers; a tilling machine working on land would connect to Internet to find about the timing of fertilizers and irrigation, not to mention optimal harvest time.

A sector to enjoy IoT services is health where sophisticated machines synchronize with database to serve the patients more efficiently; MRI machines breakdown would be predicted by a central data base monitoring the machine's status, thus improving the overall quality of health and treatment services.

Retail sector will also be availed by

to a network of complicated maps and will be guided through internet the most viable routes to reach the destination from among the thousands of possible routes; this will contribute to lighter traffic and the declined number of traffic accidents; the machinery in a factory would be shut down before a technical glitch damages the whole system by using real-time data provided by surrounding devices.

These all are only part of huge potentials of the IoT; thus, the investment in the new untapped technology will take unprecedented sums; the Ministry of ICT has provided no information on the investment in IoT, however, Telecommunications Co. has underway the prelim-



IoT services through working on wireless technologies to send the list of their products to potential customers on their mobile phones. Users will also be able to find specific product in the nearest center to their location in a marketplace.

Transportation will also enjoy the technology to improve communications of ships, trucks, etc. in form of a network to which all are connected; a striking feature is to control the temperature inside the storage of food items where corruptible food products would be saved timely; in public transport sector, intercity buses will use sensors and other sort of software to collect demographic data of commuters and the road, thus will optimize the fuel consumption.

The automobiles will be connected

inary studies according to media speculations. Mohammad Khwansari, head of Iran Telecommunication Research Center assures the readers of the project of IoT in Iranian setting. According to the official, the roadmap will soon be prepared on the modes of application once the preliminary studies was completed. "The roadmap will establish an ecosystem of IoT where tech companies will find paths to the market through encouragements coming from government regulatory bodies and policies," he added. "In a fast-growing modern setting, life has become more digitalized than ever, since virtually everything will be connected to network and will receive data and change overall behavior of the family members." |



Dossier

American analyst Hagopian:

US rigged system set Trump up for failure

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Former US Army officer and columnist Joachim Hagopian says the US rigged system let Trump win as a way of setting him up for failure when the global economy implodes in the near future.

The 70-year-old real estate developer and former reality-TV star, Donald Trump, won the US presidency against Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton on Wednesday after securing more than the 270 electoral votes needed to win. His election, however, came against the backdrop of mass media predictions gone wrong, Trump's earlier criticism of the American electoral system, his rocky election campaign marred by controversial remarks against minorities, and the follow-up anti-Donald Trump protests in various parts of the US.

In an interview with MNA, Joachim Hagopian, a columnist at Veterans Today and a former US Army officer, believes that the result of this election was a clear mandate that "American voters have had enough of corrupt power machine politics" and are "desperate for change". He goes on to note that it would be naïve to think that "a unanimously controlled Republican presidency as well as both houses of Congress will suddenly bring unity and harmony to Washington", with Trump only fulfilling his "figurehead role in the dirty business of oligarchy".

He maintains that if "Trump follows through on creating new jobs to help build a robust national economy, that would be the most effective way to heal the wounds caused by his checkered past" and disparaging remarks against minorities. He further expresses hope that Trump will stick to his noninterventionist agenda and will not attempt to obliterate Iran's nuclear agreement.

The following is Mehr News Agency's interview with American political analyst, Joachim Hagopian:

◆ **What is your evaluation of the US election results? How come all the**



predictions by many media were proven wrong?

With a thoroughly corrupt and irreparably broken two party system, US elections always involve two candidates already selected by the ruling elite, although Trump only begrudgingly. So it's always a choice of the lesser evils. In this case, Donald Trump from the start was viewed by the power elite as the far less favored, less desired outsider. The co-opted mainstream media was also blatantly pro-Hillary and anti-Trump, shamefully displaying the most biased, least objective media coverage of any presidential election in US history. Hillary was the obvious power establishment choice from the get-go. The fact that the outsider who never held public office before actually won is a clear indication that American voters have had enough of corrupt power machine politics. The result of this election was a clear mandate by the people of America rejecting the self-replicating Bush-Clinton-Obama dynasty of big government turned fascist totalitarian police state where the interests of the people are no longer served by its oligarchy government. The American people are desperate for change, hence the seemingly longshot success of an outsider making a big promise to "make America great again."

Though it may be tempting to pro-

claim the people's voice has been heard in a free American election, that exultation would be naïve and misleading. The ruling elite eventually came to realize Hillary Clinton with all her never-ending scandals is simply damaged goods and a growing liability. So the already rigged system of counting votes allowed Trump a narrow margin of victory. The non-stop WikiLeaks exposure of Hillary-DNC emails forced citizens the world over to recognize the rampant US corruption and criminality of its rigged political system as undeniable and indisputable evidence. The entire world now readily sees that American democracy is non-existent, a propaganda lie and sham historically propagated to serve the aggressive fascist interests of US Empire imperialism.

All the media predictions were wrong because it was scripted that way. Hillary was their choice. The giant mega media corporations systematically inflated the poll numbers right to the end (Reuters had Clinton with a 90% chance) and through relentless propaganda hype for over a year attempted to convince American voters that heavily favored Hillary was destined to be our next president, like it or not. A recent study of news stories broadcast on the three commercial networks ABC, CBS and NBC from July through October showed 91% of the news was negative toward Trump →

while minimizing if not ignoring all the email dumps proving Hillary violated espionage laws breaching US national security, engaged in highly illegal, even treasonous “pay-for-play” operations with foreign nationals selling off America to the highest bidders. Her tax exempt Clinton Foundation is a get rich racketeering cartel worth \$2 billion that after the Haiti earthquake scammed the poorest nation and people in the Western Hemisphere.

Many of us in alternative media got the election outcome wrong as well, mainly because we realized how one-sided and fixed the electronic voting machines are. Then FBI Director James Comey reopened the Hillary investigation 11 days prior to election based on what was found on the laptop belonging to disgraced former New York Congressman Anthony Weiner, husband of 20-year top Hillary aide Huma Abedin. When it was determined to contain explosive new evidence that the Clintons participated in a pedophile sex ring through registered sex offender-billionaire Jeffrey Epstein’s Lolita Express and Caribbean sex island, it was finally over for Hillary. I think it was at that point that the globalists made their choice to allow Trump to win despite Comey’s flip flop [again] “clearing” Hillary just 2 days prior to Election Day. So MSM got it wrong because they always assumed Queen Hillary was entitled the presidency and journalists like me got it wrong because the criminal system was set up to ensure crime bosses steal elections. But in my case, I’m glad I was wrong in my prediction as under Hillary, nuclear holocaust was already a done deal.

◆ **What do you think was the main factor that diminished Clinton’s chances at presidency?**

Aside from her half dozen felony crimes, pathological lying as a power-hungry sociopath and 40+ years of nonstop scandals? In the end, the ruling elite deemed her damaged goods, that’s why she lost their rigged election. The globalists controlled this entire political debacle throughout. I’d like to say that the will of the American people has finally spoken loud and clear, and that they are calling for drastic change, away from big government politics ruled by big business. But the still rigged system

permitted Trump to win as a way of setting him up for failure when the global economy implodes not very long from now. Similar to Brexit, this election outcome might be viewed as a reflection that average everyday citizens are fed up being victimized by centralized governance that has grossly overstepped its constitutional boundaries while morphing into oppressive tyranny intentionally polarizing and exploiting the West versus East confrontation towards World War III. This is the New World Order agenda being pushed by the ruling elite and a figurehead president by the name of Donald or Hillary hardly matters.

Republicans not only won the White House on Election Day, but they also maintained their majorities both in the House and the Senate. What would a Republican-controlled America mean to the country itself and the world?

Always we must realize that the same power interests control the world whether a Republican president or a Democratic president occupies the White House, the case in point being the Obama administration as a mere extension of the Bush-Cheney administration. America’s domestic and foreign policies both continued uninterrupted under Obama because the same neocon megalomaniacs control Washington regardless of which party happens to be in power. These puppets – be they Democrat or Republican – take their marching orders from the same ruling elite that controls them.

Also we should not entertain any false illusion or hope that a unanimously controlled Republican presidency as well as both houses of Congress will suddenly bring unity and harmony to Washington. It will not change how the corrupt and dysfunctional broken US government works. The Republican establishment still hates Trump. Why do you think the Bushes supported Clinton? The Speaker of the House Paul Ryan said he could not even support Trump for president and only toned his rhetoric down just before Election Day. A Trump presidency faces a largely hostile Republican Congress so the gridlock that has characterized Washington politics so far this 21st century will not change with outsider Trump in office. For over a century the Republican Party has historically always

represented and served the elite’s interests over the people’s interests and Trump as just one individual fulfilling his figurehead role will not change the status quo of how the dirty business of oligarchy functions.

◆ **With many endorsements for Hillary Clinton by some European leaders, what countries would now find the US a closer ally with Trump as president?**

The obvious answer is Russia. Both Putin and Trump have made public statements expressing admiration for each other’s style of leadership as well as a desire to work together as partners in eliminating ISIS, al Qaeda, al Nusra and terrorism worldwide that Clinton, the Bushes and Obama created and support. The economic sanctions against Russia that the US Empire imposed on its vassals in Europe hurt the European people almost as much as Russia. Hopefully for all of humanity’s sake, a Trump presidency can stop Cold War 2 in its tracks, eliminating any chance of WWII against Russia, China and Iran that war-mongering Hillary and her Washington establishment were determined to ignore.

Opening up trade between Russia and Europe as well as America (and I definitely don’t mean the globalists’ Trans Pacific Partnership or the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) will be a win-win-win for all parties involved. European leaders that blindly followed Empire’s aggressions should be replaced. Cleaning house and “draining the swamp” as Trump has claimed as his US mission should be a goal of both the US and entire Western bloc nations if they want to survive in a peaceful world. The financial Ponzi schemed system of debt-based thievery promoted and controlled for centuries by the likes of the Rothschilds and Rockefellers, the City of London and US Federal Reserve, their criminal monopoly cabal must go, along with the US dollar/petrodollar as standard international currency. Wall Street, the World Bank, the IMF along with the treasonous globalist war criminal puppets Obama, Bushes, Clintons and their European lackeys and minions all must go. They are the cesspool in the swamp that needs desperate draining. A new economic and financial system needs to be implemented based on meritocracy, ➡

transparency and justice.

◆ **How will Trump's presidency affect the conditions of minorities in the US? And what about the Muslim visitors, seeing as he had once called for a total shutdown of Muslims entering the US?**

This question validates my point of always the two party US presidential candidates being a case of the lesser evil. Donald Trump has some serious repair work to do if he wants to mend and heal the open wounds and make peace with US minority groups. His racist, volatile statements in the past toward minorities made during his campaign is clearly a liability. The fastest growing minority in America are Latinos, and his calling Mexican immigrants "rapists and criminals" was outrageous. I am not about to be an apologist for his insults and past behavior that indicate racism not just towards Hispanics but African Americans, Muslim Americans, and members of Middle Eastern ethnicities. He seems to have offended all these groups with prejudicial slurs and bigoted statements. It led many who may have otherwise supported his candidacy to back away. Though his insulting rhetoric was toned down in latter months of his candidacy, his poor track record toward minorities speaks for itself, and it's not good.

Demonstrating effective, sound, strong, positive leadership to undo and overcome what's already public record will be a near herculean task for him. But if he simply follows through on creating thousands of new jobs that help build a stronger robust national economy enhancing the lives of every segment of the American population, particularly those impoverished at the lower socioeconomic rung, that would be the most effective and most expedient way to heal the wounds caused by his checkered past.

That said, the globalist agenda to destroy Europe and North America by sponsoring waves of millions of unvetted refugees from the Middle East and North Africa into Europe and North America is being streamlined against the will of residents in Europe and North America knowing it will increase hostilities and tensions between races,



religions, cultures and classes. The global elite desires race wars and religious wars as a strategic means of divide and conquer rule, establishing the pretense for more authoritarian control, less civil liberties and freedom, and ultimately breaking down the very fabric of civil society, social and national cohesiveness while destabilizing populations with higher crime and unemployment. This chaos, violence and disorder facilitates global governance of one world government, which for over a century has been the elite's ultimate objective.

As part of this divisive, destructive violent agenda, America's first black president given the assignment by his puppet masters to destroy America, as a presidential candidate initially promised to be a unifier, not a destroyer. But it didn't take long for him to become the worst racial divider and agitator president in US history. He has polarized America even beyond the damage that his predecessors Bush and Cheney inflicted. This is the sorry, pathetic mess that I'm afraid the bigoted Mr. Trump has inherited.

If Trump can boost the slumping, staggering US economy, jumpstart a once vibrant but now near nonexistent manufacturing sector, repair sorely neglected, decaying US infrastructure, provide incentives to bring back US companies that have outsourced millions of US jobs abroad, close the many loopholes aiding offshore tax evaders consisting of the wealthiest corporations and class, in other words perform the miracle of accomplishing the impossible amidst the global economic meltdown on the verge of total collapse, then Trump the miracle worker will never be called a racist again.

◆ **How do you predict Trump's administration's policies in regard to**

Iran and the nuclear deal which he had threatened to tear up?

I was very disappointed by Trump's AIPAC conference speech, promising to tear up the nuclear arms deal on his first day in office. He came off like just another Zionist controlled US politician pandering to apartheid rogue state Israel. As opposed to Hillary who promised to bomb Iran if she were elected, Trump proclaims himself a USA first, noninterventionist wanting to avoid seeking wars around the world, a clear break from the Bush-Clinton-Obama neocon con to maintain global unipolar hegemony at all cost by aggressively provoking a global war against Russia, China and Iran.

We can only hope that Trump will not attempt to obliterate the nuke agreement. The entire pretext that only US, Russia, China, France and UK are entitled nuclear weapons is inherently wrong, especially since nations like Israel, India and Pakistan also possess nuclear warhead arsenals. No country on earth should have the power to destroy the world. And nuclear development as an energy source is a dangerously bad idea as well (aka Fukushima, Chernobyl, etc.). The terms of that nuclear agreement allowing UN inspectors to freely monitor Iranian nuclear facilities is a fair enough concession to allow the already ratified deal to be both upheld and honored by Iran and the P5 nations that signed it. Hopefully Trump will leave well enough alone as a noninterventionist promoting peace and cooperation as opposed to confrontation and war.

Joachim Hagopian is a West Point graduate and former US Army officer. He has written a manuscript based on his unique military experience entitled "Don't Let The Bastards Getcha Down." It examines and focuses on US international relations, leadership and national security issues. After the military, Joachim earned a master's degree in Clinical Psychology and worked as a licensed therapist in the mental health field with abused youth and adolescents for more than a quarter century. In recent years, he has focused on his writing, becoming an alternative media journalist |

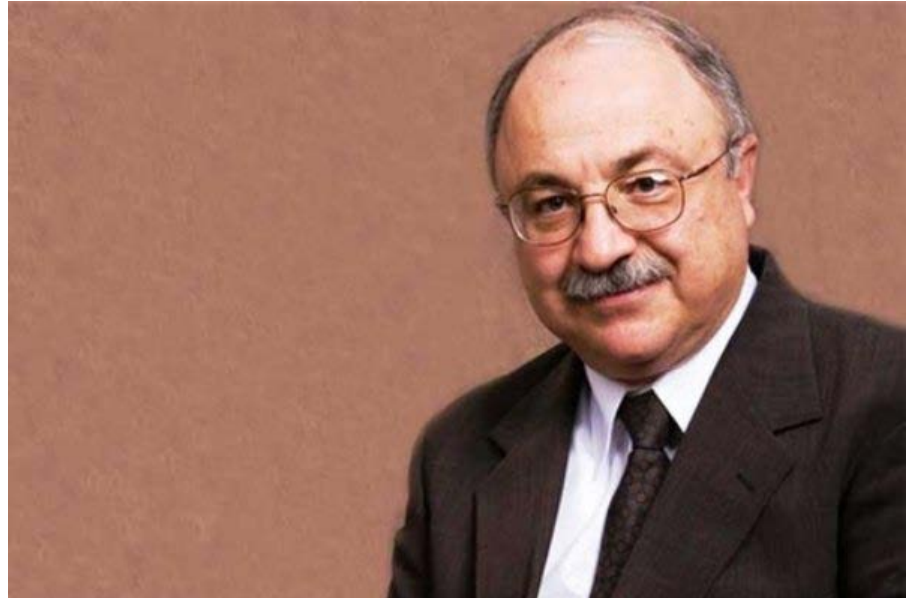
Prof. Entessar:

Trump 'to learn how Washington works with lobbies'

*Interview by: Shabnam Shokouhi,
Javad Heirannia*

A University of South Alabama professor has said with a majority in the House and the Senate, now Trump would easily ignore deal signed with Iran (JCPOA) in favor of more sanctions.

Professor Nader Entessar told Mehr News International Service that Trump's outreach to American white and middle-class population contributed to his win in the presidential elections, where he eschewed systematically discussing in detail his public policy in favor of touching the sensitive areas to which American plebiscite would readily respond with enthusiasm.



◆ What are the major causes of a Trump win?

There are a litany of reasons for Trump's victory, but I believe one of the main reasons for his victory was his unorthodox campaign and his focus on "the forgotten Americans" and promising to "Make America Great Again." Trump did not focus on detailed policy issues, his was a campaign that targeted the fear and anger that many Americans, especially the white electorate, felt about their government and what is normally referred to as the "Washington Establishment."

◆ How would Democrats lose the elections in the House and the Senate along with a defeat in presidential race to win the White House?

The Democratic Party was already in the minority in the House of Representatives and the Senate. It was almost impossible for the Democrats to gain control of the House; they had hoped to be able to gain the majority in the Senate, but the Democratic defeat at the top of the ticket made this also an impossible task. The Democratic Party's hold in the majority of the states in the US has

been weakening for some time now. A cursory look at the political map of the United States shows how dominant the "Red" states (Republican states) have become in the country.

◆ Analysts believe Trump will largely remain untouched by formal power structures in the US, since he is financially independent. How do you think of it?

I don't quite agree with this assessment. We have to remember that Trump had never held an elective political office. Once in office, Trump will have to recognize how Washington works, which means that he will have to make some compromises, including economic compromises, with powerful economic lobbies. Running as major country requires skills that are different from running one's real estate properties.

◆ What will dominate Trump's Middle East agenda? And in as with Iran's JCPOA, will he remain committed to its obligations?

It is too early to assess Trump's foreign policy at this time. We will have to wait and see who Trump selects as ma-

jor players for his foreign policy team. Some have said that Newt Gingrich, John Bolton or Senator Bob Corker (current chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee) are leading candidates to become the Secretary of State in the new Trump administration. These, especially Gingrich and Bolton, are extreme hawks. Regarding the JCPOA, Trump has been very critical of it and, from time to time, has indicated his plan to tear the document up and renegotiate a new deal. I think the JCPOA will face significant obstacles once Trump is in office. He may not officially discard it, but with a Republican majority in both the House and the Senate, Trump will have an easy time to ignore the JCPOA and support more sanctions on Iran.

Nader Entessar is Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice at the University of South Alabama. He is the author of more than 70 articles and book chapters in scholarly publications and has published six books. Dr. Entessar's latest publications are 'Kurdish Politics in the Middle East' and 'Iran's Northern Exposure: Foreign Policy Challenges in Eurasia.' |



Political analyst Finian Cunningham:

With wiser counsel, Trump's views on Iran to temper for better ties

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Political analyst Finian Cunningham says while US bad faith is already extant regardless of Trump, if Trump shows his pragmatism and learns from wiser counsel, his views on Iran could temper for better relations.

The US election of 2016 was already a heated presidential race which culminated spectacularly in the election of the Republican candidate Donald Trump whose election campaign was marred by controversial remarks, and was thought by many mainstream media to be the least likely to win. Yet, while Democratic party nominee Hilary Clinton had a wider popular vote (47.8% to 47.3%), it was the businessman Trump who won the electoral college (56.88% to 43.12%) that determines the next president to sit in the White House.

To shed light on various aspects of the election results, Mehr News Agency reached out to Finian Cunningham, an expert on international affairs, who believes that the election of 'outsider' Trump is "a popular protest to the fundamentally undemocratic" US which could then "permit better international relations between the US and the rest of the world."

Cunningham argues that the "exit polls from the US election indicate that many people who voted for Trump did so not so much because they positively endorsed Trump, but more because it was a protest vote against the American oligarchy and to keep Clinton out of power".

He views Trump presidency in a positive light, saying it will "increase tendencies within the EU for more inde-

pendence from Washington's foreign policies, such as on NATO and hostility towards Moscow."

He then goes on to call Trump's controversial remarks against minorities and Iran's nuclear deal an area of concern, attesting that while "Trump does not appear to be in the warmongering category", the US system is "always prone to militarism and conflict in the world to project its imperialist hegemony."

The following is Mehr News Agency's interview with Finian Cunningham, an Irish political commentator who is currently based in East Africa:

◆ What is your evaluation of the US election results? How come all the predictions by many media were proven wrong?

I see the election of Donald Trump as a popular revolt by the American people against many years of political and economic disenfranchisement by the US ruling class. The US political class of Washington-based elites, in both main parties, function more like an oligarchy than a representative government. The majority of ordinary Americans have seen their livelihoods and communities deteriorate over many years while the Washington "Beltway Bubble" has grown ever richer through cronyism with Wall Street financial elites and corporate America. So, the election of Trump who is seen as an outsider to the Washington system is a popular protest to the fundamentally undemocratic character which US politics has become. That undemocratic character is also expressed in relentless war-making by the US ruling class. The media predictions got the result so wrong because the US dominant

media are embedded with the oligarchy. The media wanted Hillary Clinton to win because she is a willing puppet of the oligarchy. Part of the prediction-error was due to blind media bias against Trump and his supporters and also partly due to willing propaganda to sway the election in her favor. As it turned out, the majority of ordinary Americans weren't hoodwinked by the Washington elite and their servile media. That is phenomenal. Because it shows that the US elite and their propaganda control over the populace are rejected. Without this hegemonic control over the people, the elites and their warmongering agenda have been abruptly checked. That could then permit better international relations between the US and the rest of the world.

◆ What do you think was the main factor that diminished Clinton's chances at presidency?

Clinton was rightly seen by most American citizens as a corrupt tool of Wall Street, the corporate elite and the military-industrial complex. Her fraudulent "liberalism" and "humanitarianism" have been responsible for prosecuting wars and conflicts in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe (Ukraine) and the grave deterioration in US relations with Russia. Clinton as Secretary of State in the Obama administration was a key driver for the rise of Takfiri terrorism afflicting many countries. American people realized that Clinton's conduct and her abuse of political office to enrich her own family is tantamount to very serious crimes of corruption and treason. American people understood that if she were to be elected president the upshot would be even more corruption and in-

ternational conflict, especially towards Russia. Exit polls from the US election indicate that many people who voted for Trump did so not so much because they positively endorsed Trump, but more because it was a protest vote against the American oligarchy and to keep Clinton out of power for the sake of creating a more peaceful world. She was seen as criminal and dangerous.

◆ **Republicans not only won the White House on Election Day, but they also maintained their majorities both in the House and the Senate. What would a Republican-controlled America mean to the country itself and the world?**

The Republican Congress that prevailed under Democrat president Barack Obama was generally seen to be "hawkish" with regard to Russia, Iran and other issues. So, the prospect of a Republican presidency under Trump and a Republican legislature might make some people feel apprehensive with regard to US foreign policy being more aggressive and hostile. However, Trump has positioned himself as being more of a pragmatic leader, seeking more cooperative international relations, less military interventionism and concentrating his efforts on "fixing American society". If he can assert his more pragmatic, less hostile foreign agenda then the Republican-dominated Congress might make his policies more achievable. I also think the Republican hawks in Congress would have to be more mindful that the American people have clearly demonstrated that they are averse to war and conflict and that they are now demanding that politicians abandon military adventurism overseas, and instead concentrate on rebuilding America at home after decades of economic decay and looting by the elite.

◆ **With many endorsements for Hillary Clinton by some European leaders, what countries would now find the US a closer ally with Trump as president?**

The reaction from European governments seems to be split between the likes of Germany and France which are strongly "atlanticist" and those such as Hungary, Czech Republic and others who are more critical of what they see as the EU being too subservient to the US. Germany and France were firmly for Clin-

ton to become next president. Whereas eastern European countries facing problems of immigration are inclined to agree with Trump's rhetoric about tighter immigration controls. Within the EU, there is also much discord over US-led sanctions against Russia and the expansion of the NATO military alliance. Trump's call for better relations with Russia and his stated agnosticism towards NATO will boost Europeans who also share these views. It is notable that unlike the incumbent governments, opposition parties in France and Germany are welcoming Trump's victory. Parties like Marine Le Pen's National Front are critical of the way EU governments have toed the line from Washington. The Brexit vote in Britain shared this more skeptical sentiment towards Washington. That is why the German and French governments are particularly unnerved by Trump's election. They fear that it will add fuel to the rise of anti-EU parties within their own countries. Merkel and Hollande are facing elections next year and could be thrown out of office. Overall, I think a Trump presidency will increase tendencies within the EU for more independence from Washington's foreign policies, such as on NATO and hostility towards Moscow. That is bound to be a good outcome.

◆ **How will Trump's presidency affect the conditions of minorities in the US? And what about the Muslim visitors, seeing as he had once called for a total shutdown of Muslims entering the US?**

This is certainly an area of concern. Trump has inflamed certain circles of white racism with his rhetoric. However, I don't anticipate a surge in racial tensions under Trump. I don't detect him as being a racist bigot. A lot of his rhetoric was probably electioneering to mobilize the disenfranchised demographic of poor working class Americans worried about excessive immigration. I think Trump will tamp down this potentially nefarious aspect of his presidency. Interestingly, voting results show that he received substantial support from African-Americans and Latinos. That suggests that people were more motivated by what they discern as his more important, realistic policies of economic revival for the masses and withdrawing from overseas conflicts.

◆ **How do you predict Trump's administration's policies in regard to Iran and the nuclear deal which he had threatened to tear up?**

This is another area of concern. Trump is of course wrong on opposing the deal. He said some very disappointing things about how Iran would use the accord to fund "terrorism" and that he would tear up the deal when he takes office. Another foreign policy area of concern is his apparent fervent support for the Israeli regime, saying that he would make Jerusalem the sole capital of the Zionist occupation of Palestine. On the Iran nuclear deal, it is hard to see how Trump could simply rescind it because it is an internationally binding accord. So we will have to wait and see how this pans out. Anyway, under Obama, and presumably his would-be successor Clinton, the nuclear deal was being abused by Washington balking at implementing the lifting of sanctions. So it's not as if Clinton would have been much better. Washington's bad faith is already extant regardless of Trump. However, maybe if Trump shows his pragmatism and is open to learning from wiser counsel, his views on Iran could temper for better relations. Overall, Trump does not appear to be in the warmongering category that has so dominated Washington for too long. That makes him potentially more reasonable as an American president. But we are talking in relative terms here. The US political-economic system is always prone to militarism and conflict in the world to project its imperialist hegemony. One person in the White House cannot change that fundamental structure and tendency. The best one can hope for at this stage in history is a slightly more civilized, cooperative US president.

Originally from Belfast, Ireland, Finian Cunningham (born 1963) is a prominent expert in international affairs. The author and media commentator is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. For over 20 years, Cunningham worked as an editor and writer in the mainstream news media, including The Mirror, Irish Times and Independent |

Interview by: Javad Heirannia

Director of the non-proliferation program at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) believes Trump is smart enough to keep JCPOA alive, at least to avoid the blame possibly put on the first party to undermine the deal.

Mark Fitzpatrick told Javad Heirannia of Mehr News International Service in a short interview that any Trumpian scheme to kill the JCPOA would have far-reaching impact on the US' European allies parties to the deal; he underplays Trump's campaign promises; "during the campaign, Trump said many things about the JCPOA, some of them contradictory."

Mr. Fitzpatrick's article is a critical discussion of claims of violations of the deal both by the US and Iran; there, Fitzpatrick argues that neither side had been violating the JCPOA. "The most consistent thing he said, however, was that he would renegotiate the deal," he said. "Because it is an international agreement among eight parties, he cannot unilaterally renegotiate it."

◆ **President-elect Donald Trump claimed during the presidential campaign that Obama showed favoritism toward Iran in the nuclear agreement and that he would renegotiate it. What will Trump actually do?**

During the campaign Trump said many things about the JCPOA, some of them contradictory. The most consistent thing he said, however, was that he would renegotiate the deal. Because it is an international agreement among eight parties, he cannot unilaterally renegotiate it. He can impose new sanctions on Iran in order to try to pressure it to seek a new deal, either to replace the JCPOA or to supplement it.

◆ **The circle around Trump included severe opponents of Iran and the JCPOA. How much will this circle**

Mark Fitzpatrick:

Trump cannot unilaterally renegotiate JCPOA



impact Trump's foreign policy about Iran?

Most of the men advising Trump on foreign policy matters and those he has named to key positions are known to have grave concerns about Iran's behavior, including its involvement in other states. One might say they are antagonistic toward the Islamic Republic of Iran, recognizing that there are some valid reasons for this. Because they are the ones who will be filling in the details of his foreign policy and implementing it, their views matter a great deal. Although Trump himself may be inclined to make a deal with Iran, his advisers will be more inclined to first up the pressure.

◆ **Some argue the Trump will not violate the JCPOA and instead will impose sanctions Iran on grounds of terrorism and human rights violations. If so, how will such actions affect the future of JCPOA?**

I think that prediction is correct. Trump is smart enough to realize that if he tries to kill the deal, America will

bear the blame and his allies will not be inclined to join in any 'snap-back' of sanctions. He instead will put pressure on Iran in other ways, so that if Iran responds by breaking the deal, it will bear the burden of blame. It would be best if no party violated the deal. Instead, those who want to strengthen the deal should seek to supplement or replace it with a new deal, meanwhile keeping the JCPOA alive.

◆ **Suppose Trump does violate the JCPOA, then what will be the reaction of the US' European allies?**

If the US unilaterally violates the JCPOA, it would cause a foreign policy crisis with America's partners, particularly those who were also party to the accord. Most of them would be reluctant to join the US in imposing new sanctions on Iran.

Mark Fitzpatrick is Executive Director of IISS–Americas, responsible for representing the institute in the Western Hemisphere. He also heads the IISS Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Policy Programme. |

Political scientist:

Trump to offer Taipei to Beijing 'on silver platter'



Interview by: Mehdi Zolfaghari

A University of Chicago professor believes Europe is just as dispensable as Taiwan and the president-elect has surrendered it in advance.

Donald J. Trump has recently made a phone call to Tsai-Ing-wen, president of Taiwan. This was the first call of the US president to a high-ranking official of Taiwan in nearly 40 years, an issue arousing China's authorities' harsh reaction calling the US for not only to respect 'One China' policy, but also refuse to continue such an approach in the future.

Obama reiterated the US commitment to One China policy earlier in the week as a general agreement with China; however, the phone call had a far-reaching impact on the US-China relations in that China's foreign ministry said in a scheduled briefing that it was extremely concerned with Trump's comments, with spokesman Geng Shuang telling reporters that the policy was the basis of relations between the world's two largest economies. The government's official response came after the Communist Party-owned paper, Global Times, published an opinion piece with the headline: "Trump, please listen clearly, the One China policy cannot be traded" as it warned Trump that China

cannot "be easily bullied."

Mehdi Zolfaghari, of Mehr News International Service reached Professor Robert R. Bianchi in University of Chicago, to ask him about the significance of Trump's call and the ensuing tension between the US and China. Bianchi believes that if Trump tries to use economic maneuvering in ways that threatens Chinese security, hardliners in Beijing will not assume he is bluffing or horse trading; therefore, Europe is just as dispensable as Taiwan and the president-elect will surrender it in advance:

◆ Donald Trump has recently made a contact with the head of Taiwan. This is the first call of the US leadership to Taiwan after 37 years. What is the reason behind it?

Trump is precisely the type of operator Taiwan should avoid. He is virtually offering Taipei to Beijing on a silver platter while sniffing the rewards he hopes to extract from the bargain. People in Taiwan and every other East Asian country suspect that American security guarantees are empty and that it is just a matter of time until Washington and Beijing divide the Pacific Basin into spheres of influence. Trump's telephone ploy will stoke their worst fears of abandonment, making them more susceptible to Chinese pressures and more likely to esca-

late their costly arms races.

Given the economic dependency of the US on China, what is the right approach of Washington toward Beijing?

Today's China is a champion of free trade while the US is sliding toward protectionism. China will be happy to arm wrestle over the details of economic policy because they are confident they can defend their interests and continue to close the wealth and power gaps with the US. But many Chinese leaders expect the US will try to provoke a war in order to derail China's rise and to crush its military strength before it matures into a serious rival. If Trump tries to use economic maneuvering in ways that threaten Chinese security, hardliners in Beijing will not assume he is bluffing or horse trading. They'll conclude that he is preparing for war and that they can't afford to hold their fire.

◆ Some are of the opinion that Trump had a contact to Taiwan while he was not the official president of the US; therefore, he is after exerting pressure on China. Does he intend to follow suit after swearing in and becoming the official president?

Guessing games and psychological manipulation are integral elements of statecraft in China and many other countries with longer international experience than the US. If a New York real estate tycoon wants to try his luck with Chinese adversaries, they'll probably welcome the opportunity to see his gong fu.

◆ Rex Tillerson - a figure who has a warm relationship with Russia - has finally been nominated as the Secretary of State position. How would his nomination affect the US- Russia relationship on the one hand and the US- EU relationship on the other?

Tillerson nomination sends a single message to Moscow and every Western capital—Europe is just as dispensable as Taiwan and the new American president surrenders it in advance.

Robert R. Bianchi is a political scientist and an international lawyer with special interests in China and the Islamic World. He received his doctorate and law degrees at the University of Chicago |



ELECOMP 2016

News in Vision



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei received President of Indonesia Joko Widodo on Dec. 15 in Tehran.



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei received Slovenian President Borut Pahor on Nov. 23.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Seyyed Ali Khamenei met with Finnish President Sauli Niinistö on Oct. 27.



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei has received Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidential Council Head Bakir Izetbegovic on Oct. 25.

Visiting Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro met on Oct. 22 with Leader of the Islamic Revolution ayatollah Khamenei.





Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif attended a meeting on Syria with Sergey Lavrov of Russia and Cavusoglu of Turkey in Moscow on Dec. 20.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif paid tribute to the late Russian Ambassador to Ankara Andrey Karlov on Dec. 20, ahead of talks with his counterpart Sergei Lavrov.



President Rouhani met with Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Yukiya Amano on Dec. 18 in Tehran.



Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan met with South African President Jacob Zuma in Pretoria on Dec. 14.





Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani met Peter Maurer of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on Dec. 7.

Cinema Vérité, 10th Iran International Documentary Film Festival, kicked off in Charsou Cineplex on Dec. 4.





آیین امضای تفاهم نامه همکاری مابین

شرکت ملی مناطق نفتخیز جنوب ایران و شرکت شلمبرژه

Schlum

Signing Ceremony For Memorandum of Understanding
Between **NISOC** and **Schlumberger**

Ahvaz November 27th 2019 اهر ۳۹۵



Signing ceremony for MoU between National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) and the world's largest oilfield services company Schlumberger was held in Ahvaz, Khuzestan province, on Nov. 27.



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani met with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu on Nov. 26 in Tehran.



Thirty-six people were killed and 80 injured so far in collision of Semnan-Mashhad and Tabriz-Mashhad trains on Nov. 25.

Karbala hosted the largest human society in history on Nov. 21. Millions of Muslims across the world commemorated Arbaceen, a religious observance that occurs 40 days after the Day of Ashura.





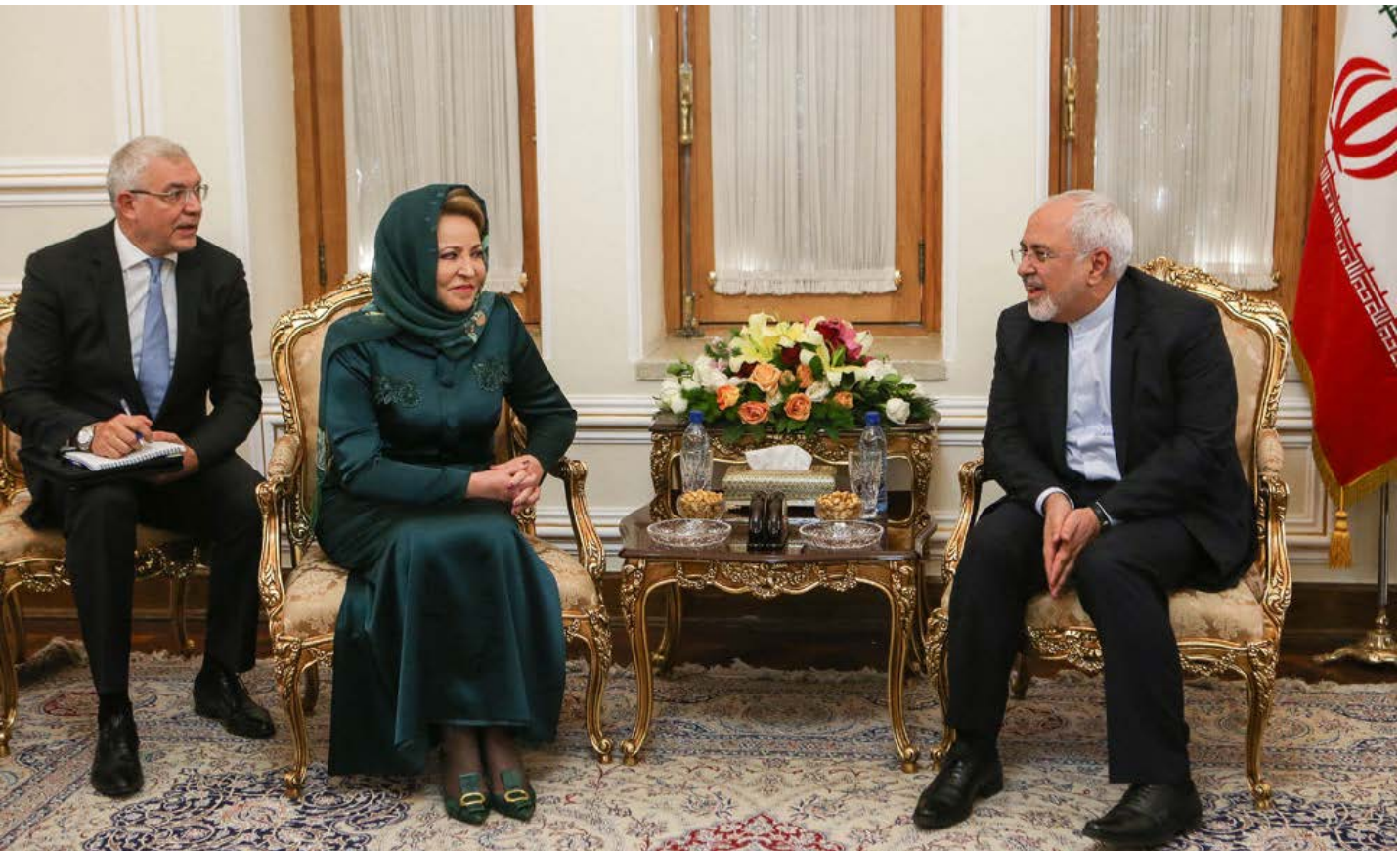
The 8th edition of Iran Air Show started on November 16 on Kish Island in the presence of Minister of Defense General Dehghan and VP Sorena Sattari.

Opening ceremony of the 5th News Agencies World Congress and the 16th General Assembly of Organization of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA) kicked off on Nov. 16 at the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku. Iran attended the event with representatives from Mehr News Agency and IRNA. Iranian, Chinese defense ministers meet





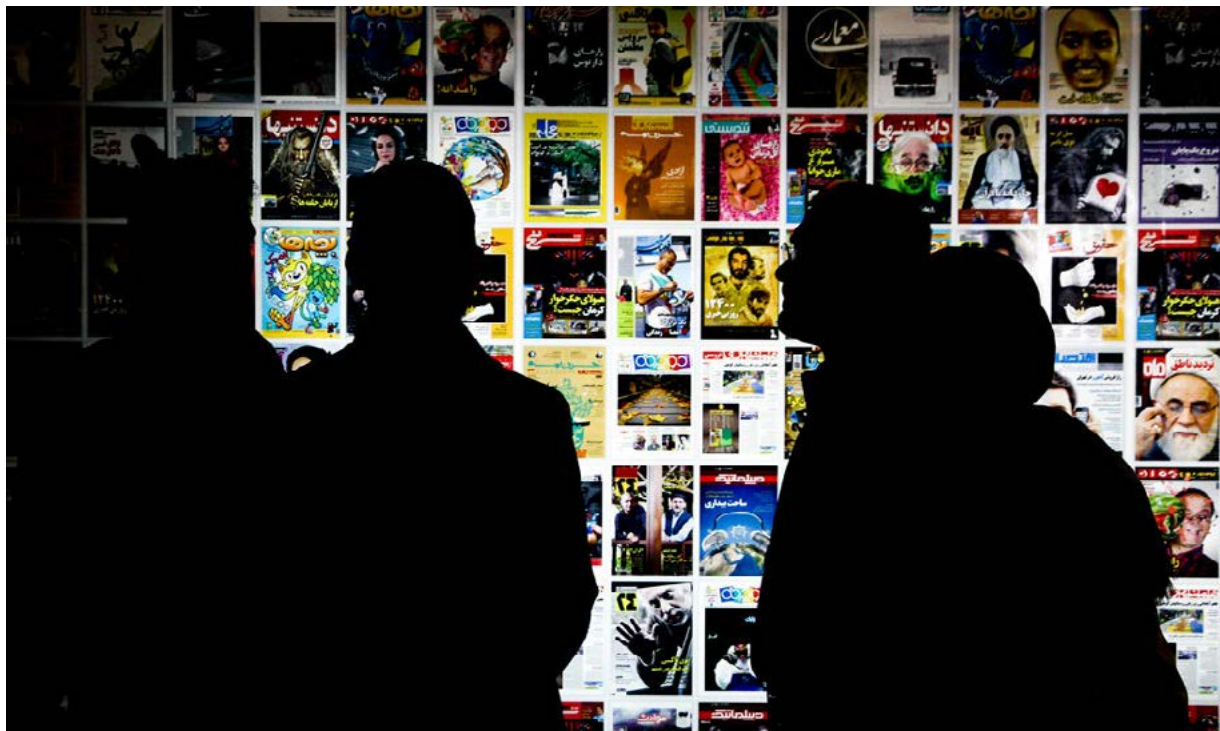
Iran's Minister of Defense General Hossain Dehghan held talks with his Chinese counterpart Chang Wanquan on Nov. 15 in Tehran.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif met with Russian Federation Council Chairperson Valentina Ivanovna Matviyenko on Nov. 14 in Tehran.



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani met with the Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly Laszlo Kover on Nov. 12 in Tehran.



The 22nd International Press Exhibition was inaugurated in Tehran on Nov. 5.



Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif hosted EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini on Oct. 29 in Tehran.