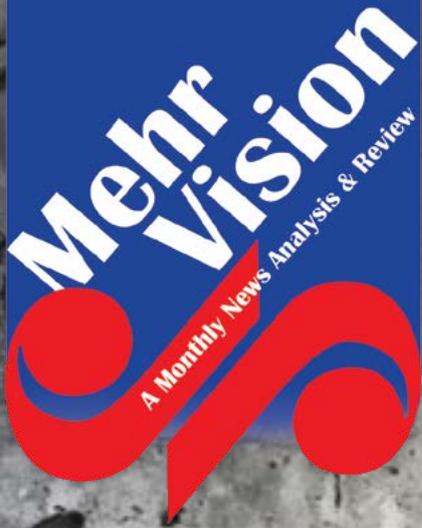
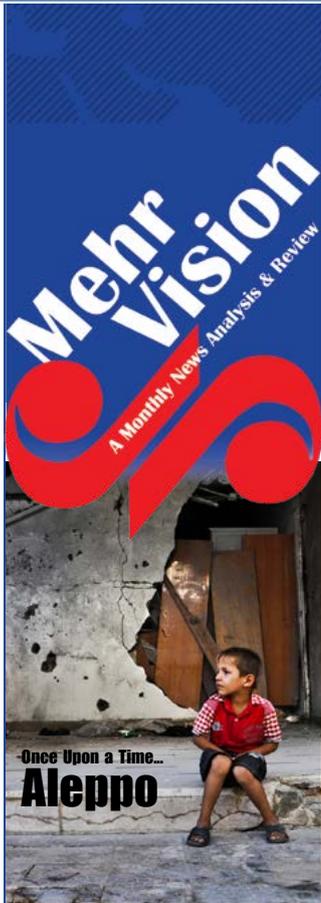


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Once Upon a Time... **Aleppo**





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News in Vision **74**

Nojeh airbase; climax of Iran-Russia defense cooperation



By: Parnaz Talebi

Deploying Iran's airbase by Russia Air Force to attack terrorist positions in Syria has been proved highly controversial, however, it indicates the close ties Iran and Russia hold countering terrorism in the region.

It was on August 16 that Britain and US, in an attempt to undermine and halt the advancement of Syrian army forces in Aleppo, leaked the information that Russia would use an air base in western Iran to operate sorties against terrorists, according to anonymous sources. It was just a week after President Rouhani's visit with Vladimir Putin where he reaffirmed that Iran and Russia cooperation would continue until full restoration of security and stability to Syria and the whole region. It was Russia Defence Ministry who put an end to all speculations officially announcing the presence of Russian jets in Iran; "Russian long-range bombers have deployed and would take off from the air base in Hamedan and destroy terrorists' positions in Syria."

US didn't hesitate to call the act "unfortunate, not surprising or unexpected" the same day during a press briefing session by State Department spokesperson

Mark Toner. He also confirmed US Secretary of State John Kerry's telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Ministry Sergei Lavrov, adding "the United States is looking into whether Russia has violated a UN Security Council resolution by deploying Tu-22M3 bombers and Su-34 strike fighters to an Iranian air base." It was no surprise as, reportedly, Iran had admitted to provide an airbase for Russian jets under the condition that Russian fighters hit the terrorist targets specified by Iranian field forces, among which there were positions Russia has been asked by US to ignore.

Iranian side, however, kept silent till the next day when Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani touched upon the issue as the controversies reached high on the legitimacy of the issue; "Iran is cooperating with Russia as one of its allies in regional issues, particularly in regard to Syria. This cooperation by no means entails that our military base is under their control," Larijani told the Parliament assuring that the use of Iran's air base by Russia is not violating article 146 of Iran's constitution, which bans establishment of foreign military bases on its territory for any peaceful reasons.

The following day, August 17, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani underlined that

sharing facilities is a part of Iran-Russia's strategic cooperation in combating terrorism predicting very difficult situation for terrorists in Syria due to "constructive and expansive cooperation among Iran, Russia, Syria and the Resistance Front."

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, Head of Iran's Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, reacted to the disputes on legitimacy of the issue announcing that the deployment had been approved by Supreme National Security Council and is in line with Iran-Russia-Iraq-Syria quadrilateral agreement on fighting terrorism. Yet, he noted that the "temporary use" of the airbase is merely for fueling.

"Iran would provide a second airbase to Russia if situation demands," announced Iran's Minister of Defense, Hossein Dehghan, underlining once again that the act does not undermine the constitution; "No Russian plane and or fleet has been deployed in the airbase and they use it for fueling and taking off toward Syria," he told reporters on August 20, announcing that no deadline would be set for the activity in the airbase.

Deploying Hamedan airbase for anti-terrorist airstrikes had logistic reasons behind. According to Russian experts →

using the Nojeh airbase aimed at cutting flight times, increasing bomb capacity and improving response capabilities of its aircraft. It was estimated that missions launched from Iranian airbase would increase the bomb capacity of fighters by three times. On the other hand, Russia was planning to provide cover for heavy Tu-22M3s bombers deployed to Iran by bombers that take off from Hmeymim base in Syria.

And it worked. On August 16, Russian and Syrian media reported heavy losses by terrorists. Russian airstrikes destroyed five large ammunition depots with weapons, munitions and fuel, as well as militant training camps near the cities of Serakab, Al-Ghab, Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor cities, Sputnik reported. In addition, Russian bombers destroyed three command and control centers near the cities of Jafra and Deir ez-Zor. A "significant number of militants" were killed in what the Russian Defense Ministry described as a "concentrated airstrike." "The Russian Armed Forces have never carried out such a major and well-coordinated operation in terms of timing, multiple fronts and targets," the media outlet reported.

Russian media also pointed out that the Tu-22M3 deployment was part of a larger change in the strategic landscape regarding the Syrian battlefield. On August 12, Syria dispatched eight Kalibr-NK cruise missiles to Syrian shores. Meanwhile, a surface action group, comprising the Tatarstan and Dagestan frigates, as well as the Grad Sviyazhsk and Velikiy Ustyug corvettes, was deployed to the Caspian Sea, according to Russian media. These ships were carrying a total of 24 Kalibr-NK cruise missiles.

However, the main target being liberation of Aleppo, didn't advance at the expected pace as the released footage of a 5-year-old Syrian child, Omran Dagneesh, who was reportedly rescued in Aleppo after an airstrike raised strong international reactions bringing the military operations in Aleppo to a cease, somehow.

Meanwhile, an abrupt stop in using the Nojeh airbase was announced by Spokesman of Russia's Defense Ministry on August 22, just a week after the start of deployment.

"The Russian military aircraft involved in launching airstrikes from the

Iranian Hamadan base against terrorist sites in Syria successfully accomplished the tasks they had set out to complete," Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said in a statement. "All aircraft involved in this operation are now on Russian territory."

"Continued use of the Hamadan air base in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Russian Aerospace Forces will be carried out on the basis of mutual agreements to combat terrorism and depending on the unfolding situation in Syria," he detailed.

Once again the issue attracted the attentions amid media hype with the most common speculations circulating around remarks made by Iran's defense minister the day before Russia stops operations. Dehghan accused Russia of publicizing the deal excessively, calling it a "betrayal of trust" and "ungentlemanly."

Dehghan went further to say that "Russians are keen on showing that they are a superpower and can greatly impact security trends. They also wish to appear as an effective agent in the scene of operations in Syria so that they will be able to negotiate with the Americans and guarantee their own part in Syria's political future," Mehr News reported.

Iranian minister, noting that Russia's use of Hamdan airbase was due to need for a stronger confrontation with terrorists in Syria, underlined that "under no circumstances will we ever provide Russians with a military base. They have not come here to stay."

Iran's Foreign Ministry also officially announced the departure of Russian jets after Russian Defense Ministry statement. Bahram Ghasemi, Foreign

Ministry Spokesman told reporters that the Russian airstrikes on militants in Syria were "temporary, based on a Russian request, but that is finished for now."

US reacted immediately; "I'd have to refer you frankly to the governments of Russia and Iran to speak to what happened, we're monitoring it closely, we continue to, it's not clear to us other than what we've seen in various press and public statements whether (Russia) their use of this airbase has definitively stopped, but we'll continue to watch it closely," State Department Spokesman Mark Toner said.

Some analysts believed that the annulment of the permission was reflecting the deep and historical mistrust Iranian had of Russia and signaled lack of adequate cooperation. Still, the deal was a historical one for Russia, as Iran had not allowed any foreign power to have military bases or deploy any since World War II. The deal helped Russia feel again as a super power, analysts say, noting that the symbolism of the agreement was important for Moscow.

Despite all media hype, it should be noted that Iran and Russia's alliance to fight terrorism has never been doubted neither by Iranian party nor by Russian side. Iran and Russia, though via different approaches, share major goals in region; preventing ouster of President Bashar Assad by force and fighting terrorism, as a threat for their own national security. Russia's priority, however, seems to be confronting the US-led regime change in Syria while Iran is playing a key role as a regional power in supporting Assad and Syrian integrity |





Interview by Lachin Rezaian

A former US army psychological operation officer and counter-terrorism analyst calls Iran-Russia cooperation plan to save Syria the greatest thing that has happened to the world in over 25 years.

Scott Bennett asserted that Iran-Russia cooperation to fight terrorist extremists would not allow the reckless wars of American imperialism to spread any further, and gloriously China is also coming along side Iran and Russia in full agreement and assistance in this effort.

The world is becoming aware of its mistakes towards the Middle East, with "Turkey's President Erdogan seems to have come to understand that the power shift away from the US influence and towards the Russian-Iran-China alliance is something that he must adapt to," Bennett said in an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency:

◆ **How do you evaluate Iran-Russia cooperation on regional issues, including Syria and Yemen?**

Without a doubt, the Iran-Russian alliance and cooperation on regional issues is perhaps the greatest thing that has happened to the world in over 25 years. The great powers of Russian and Iran coming together is a true sign of hope for an end to terrorism, an increase in regional stability, and a peaceful future.

It saddens and disgusts me beyond words when I consider the destruction, death, misery and anger which the United States arrogantly and foolishly unleashed upon humanity in its Middle East wars in Iraq, Libya, and now Syria. We now know after fifteen years of re-

Fmr. US Army PsyOp officer: **World seeking power shift towards Iran-Russia alliance**

search that the attacks of September 11, 2001 were NOT the work of Osama Bin Laden or Saudi Arabian hijackers, but instead was a "false flag attack" that certain traitors in the American intelligence agencies, the White House, Israel, and Saudi Arabia conducted. They did this using sophisticated technology, hologram imagery, missiles, and psychological warfare techniques. The American media was also complicit in this false attack. The reason for doing it of course was to unleash an American led war on the Middle East to disintegrate the Muslim regimes and replace them. Sadly, instead of moderate and productive new regimes to rule, the American interventions have unleashed savage Takfiri Wahhabi monsters that rape, destroy, and ruin everything they touch. Worst of all, the moderate people in the Middle East have been forced to flee their homelands, and now are being driven into Europe where increased tensions and outrage and cultural conflicts are causing all kinds of new problems.

With Russia and Iran coming together in agreement to fight terrorist extremists, they are sending a message to the world that they will not allow the reckless wars of American imperialism to spread any further, and gloriously China is also coming along side Iran and Russia in full agreement and assistance in this effort. So now the only countries that remain to come along side in agreement are the countries of Europe. Which I anticipate coming very soon as they begin to see the damage the US has done to them through these terrible policies.

◆ **What do you think about the deployment of Russian long-range bombers to be taken off from Hamadan air base in Iran and to carry out airstrikes against targets belonging to the ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist groups?**

The Russian long range bombers and the base being set up for them in Iran is a strategic victory for peace, because it not only allows the bombing runs

against ISIL Takfiri terrorists, but it also shows the world that Russia and Iran are in alliance, and no nation will attack Iran without attacking Russia. This effectively sets up a protective barrier for Iran against any attacks by Israel or the US.

Interestingly, Turkey's President Erdogan seems to have come to understand that the power shift away from the US influence and towards the Russian-Iran-China alliance is something that he must adapt to. We see Erdogan adapting Turkey by divorcing itself slowly from NATO and the US, and trying to mend its relationships with Russia and Iran. Interestingly the coup attempt in Turkey may have been created by Erdogan himself, and self-inflicted in order to create the excuse for Erdogan to separate. It makes perfect sense, and the incompetence and failure of the coup, and the instant counter-response and ending of the coup by Erdogan suggests that it was really an artificially generated psychological operation, and not a real event. But if it was a real event, then Erdogan has also blamed the US openly for supporting the coup against him, and possibly financing and planning it with the help of NATO and the CIA. Time will tell.

◆ **How do you think about Iran's role in resolving regional issues? Why Iran is an integral part of any resolution to the regional issues?**

Iran shares a common culture, history, language, and identity with the various peoples of the Middle East, and has also been a great nation since biblical times. Iran has grown through history for thousands of years, and this gives it great respect and identity among other nations and cultures. It is this honor and respect which gives Iran its security and confidence and humility when dealing with immature and childish nations and agendas that may soon pass into oblivion by their own hand.

◆ **What destructive states of the region, including Saudi Arabia and its allies, seek →**

through establishing instability, war and tensions in the region?

The instability of the region was triggered by the United States and Israel and Great Britain originally invading Iraq, then creating civil war there, and spreading the fires of rebellion through the CIA operation known as "The Arab Spring". The plan was to trigger revolutions, and hope that miraculously Democracy and law and order would spring up and take over, but instead the opposite occurred. In the vacuum of authoritarian power and absolute dictatorship rule, many of the peoples in the region fell into religious fanaticism and cult like delusion, and sought to use their new freedom to destroy the rest of civilization and replace it with Wahhabi Salafi laws, rules, and culture. Since the rest of the world is not open to this Wahhabi ideology, and in fact views it as mentally deranged and politically suicidal, this has created an endless conflict.

The hope is that with Russian-Iran-China drawing a line in the sand, the U.S. and NATO will pause and give careful consideration to what Vladimir Putin originally said at the United Nations...."Do you realize what you have done?"

Hopefully, they will, and a new agenda for peace and stability in the world will take precedence over democracy and capitalism. Time will tell.

Dr. Scott Bennett, formerly of the US Army 11th Psychological Operations Battalion, attempted to blow the whistle by contacting the commercially-controlled media and writing to US politicians after being sacked from his job as terrorist finance investigator after he proved too zealous at the job. He also tried to expose Union Bank of Switzerland for financing terrorism (Al Qaeda, Benghazi, ISIL) through the US and Allies, Saudi, Qatar, Turkey, Israel back in 2012; then thrown in prison for it. Bennett had a background in advertising, before being fast tracked into the US military PSYOPS division, receiving a Direct Commission as an Officer, and held a Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmentalized Information (TS/SCI) security clearance



Impotent rage of Washington

By: Said AlKhalaki

The US and its allies have once again demonstrated that their foreign policy is not aimed at resolving the long-term Syrian crisis but boosting their own interests in the region.

Washington not only provides military assistance to so-called moderate Syrian opposition, that has been repeatedly condemned for war crimes, but also launched information offensive against its geopolitical rivals in the Middle East, Russia and Iran, who successfully fight against terrorism in Syria.

Some quality American press presented the withdrawal of Russian aircraft from Hamadan airbase in Iran as the evidence of the cooling in relations between Moscow and Tehran which had recently moved to the unprecedented new level. According to the statements made by some local liberal politicians, close and fruitful cooperation between Iran and Russia annoy pro-American part of the Iranian political elite.

Besides the US intelligence data, that some authors often refer to, can't be considered as a serious argument because nowadays the American intelligence services have already become a source of disinformation so much useful to the White House in order to justify its foreign policy and to discredit its opponents. The US intelligence once again proved its incompetence when they informed Washington about the allegedly sharp contradictions that have arisen as a result of

Russians using the Iranian military infrastructure. This news item was then immediately spread by Western mainstream media.

However, according to our source at the Iranian Ministry of Defense, Russia and Iran have no contradictions concerning their fight against terrorism. "Russians have once again accepted a kind invitation from the Iranian side, which provided them with the airbase to attack terrorist positions in Syria", he stressed. "Our countries have a long experience of cooperation. Hamadan airbase has been regularly used by the Russian Air Force, and we can definitely state that our cooperation will continue in future".

This claim was officially confirmed by the Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani who said that Russian fighter jets' flights from Hamadan are not halted and that Russia will keep using the airbase as long as it is needed.

Today it is evident that the USA are disappointed and frustrated by the fact that Moscow manages to achieve its Middle East goals, as well as pick up new allies and expand the sphere of its influence. As for the USA and its allies, their anti-terrorist efforts can't be called successful, and their originally stated goals are now as far from being fulfilled as a year ago. That's why Washington will carry on an information war and attempt to discredit joint operation conducted by Tehran and Moscow against terrorists.

Said AlKhalaki is a freelance activists working in Syria and Iraq with Inside Syria Media Center



Khalaf Abbas:

US apology for Deir Ezzor episode 'unavailing'

Interview by: Somayyeh Khomarbaghi

Syrian parliament speaker has told Mehr News Syria would not accept US apologies for targeting Syrian government troops in Deir Ezzor.

Mrs. Hadiyah Khalaf Abbas is visiting Tehran heading a delegation. Somayyeh Khomarbaghi of Mehr News International Correspondent found an opportunity to interview her about the situation in Syria and diverse other issues including Iran's contribution to the country:

◆ **What messages would selection of a female representative to the speakership of the parliament for the first time in Syria implicate?**

The selection highlights the democracy in Syria and the civilization country enjoyed; it also communicates the message that the country had been in a right track toward democracy and progress; however, in other countries, women are disenfranchised, they would not be elected to the parliament, and even ballot boxes are quite absent from the political process. The same countries would boast of advancing democracy in Syria. Syrian Parliament fosters the diversity of partisan spectrum, and selection of me to the speakership just belies the claims of other countries lamenting the absence of democracy in Syria.

◆ **How would you evaluate US-Russian agreed cessation of hostilities in Aleppo and US targeting of a Syrian government forces convoy in Deir Ezzor?**

Events in Syria since the crisis engulfed the country clearly show that the US had been working to distort the realities and coordinating terrorists; Deir Ezzor episode is such a telling example. More than 45 minutes of unremitting strike would demonstrate that it had by no means been inadvertent, but well-organized and deliberated attack. The episode also exposed Washington's defiance of the ceasefire signed with Russia, while Syrian and its friends have been complied by the rules of ceasefire, but terrorist groups breached the agreement in Aleppo, Hama, Deir Ezzor, and elsewhere.

◆ **Russian foreign minister Lavrov has communicated to Syria apologies by Washington in Deir Ezzor episode. Is the apology intended to signal anything to Damascus?**

Washington's apologies would remain unavailing as long as the US actions fail to translate to concrete action and as long as Washington brings serious changes to her policy of backing terrorists; the apology would not be given due weight by Syria if the US does not prove in action coordination in fighting

terrorism and ends provision of arms and logistics to terrorists.

◆ **How would you see visit to Iran and meetings with country's officials in achieving anything which helps Syrian crisis?**

The visit is part of a general framework of friendship and cordial relations between Iran and Syria, and sought to improve coordination in fight against Takfirist-Wahhabist front backed by the US and its mercenaries in the region. It also sought non-political objectives, namely, establishment of Iran-Syria Friendship Association and deepening bilateral ties in economy, culture, and science and technology.

◆ **After 5 years of conflict in Syria, what would you think would be a real solution to the crisis?**

We assume for Syria two steps and work to achieve: 1. Fighting terrorism and restoring pace and stability to the whole country through defeating extremists; and 2. Political phase which includes negotiation of all Syrian sides engaged in the crisis without any foreign intervention. Only Syrians should decide about their political future and we have achieved some success on the ground and in national reconciliation, and believe this would help the political path further |

Political analyst Finian Cunningham:

US call for no-fly zone in Syria foil to protect its terrorist proxies

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Political analyst Finian Cunningham, in an interview with MNA, said the US recent calls for no-fly zone in Syria is “a desperate bid by the American state-sponsoring terrorist coalition to afford much needed cover for their proxy fighting assets on the ground.”

In an exclusive interview conducted by Mehr News Agency, Finian Cunningham, an expert on international affairs and an analyst of the current Syrian crisis, shed light on the various aspects of the US war agenda in Syria. He believes that the recent US-led airstrikes on a Syrian army position which killed at least 60 soldiers was carried out deliberately. Furthermore, he asserts that the attack, contrary to US claims, had not been coordinated with the Russian side, and that the call for no-fly zones by John Kerry this week – which demands that Russia stop its airstrikes while the US warplanes would continue their own air campaign – is “a foil to salvage the terrorist proxies from what promises to be a historic defeat.” The Irish political commentator, who is currently based in East Africa, also maintained that the ceasefire failure proves that “Washington is an accomplice in the state-sponsored terrorist war on Syria.”

The following is MNA’s interview with Mr. Cunningham, who has worked for over 20 years as an editor and writer in major news media organizations, including The Mirror, Irish Times and Independent:

◆ **On 17 September, the US-led coalition airstrikes killed about 80 of Syrian soldiers and wounded at least 120 others near Deir Ezzor Airport in an eastern part of Syria. The US military said it was targeting ISIL militants and if it hit Syrian troops, it was ‘unintentional’; meanwhile, Russia**

and Syria said the strikes prove the US and its allies are defending ISIL. How do you evaluate this development?

In believing American official claims that the attack on the Syrian Arab Army base at Deir Ezzor was an “accident” – as the Western media automatically did without question – is stretching credulity to breaking point. This is a major Syrian army base with hundreds of troops and an airfield. The American military were reportedly observing the site for two days before the attack, which was launched with at least four warplanes and a drone. It was a sustained attack lasting up to one hour. The American air raid was also accompanied by ISIL militants on the ground assaulting the base. Since we know that Washington has been covertly sponsoring, arming and training terrorist proxy groups in its dirty war for regime change in Syria since March 2011, one has to conclude that the American action at Deir Ezzor was a deliberate murderous attack on the Syrian army to augment the regime-change proxy terrorist forces on the ground. Russia and Syria are correct in their skepticism towards US claims to the contrary. Such US claims are contemptible deception to cover up what is in actual fact a war crime.

◆ **Furthermore, US claims that they have conferred with Russian military before the strikes and they immediately halted the airstrikes when the coalition was informed by Russian officials that they might be hitting Syrian troops. On the other hand, Russia blamed the US for failing to coordinate with them on the airstrikes. What is exactly going on here?**

US claims of communicating details ahead of the attack sortie to the Russians are also hard to take seriously. The US and Russia have a “deconfliction” arrangement whereby they are supposed to notify each other of their respective



aircraft maneuvers. On the Deir Ezzor incident, the Americans may have given some vague notice of aircraft operating in that part of the country. But it is doubtful that the information would have been detailed and precise in such a way as to have properly alerted the Russians to a pending “mistaken attack” on the Syrian army at the Deir Ezzor base. This would contradict the conspicuous and steadfast refusal of the Americans to coordinate with the Russians over the past year in Syria operations supposedly to combat the terror groups. After a year of refusing to coordinate with the Russians on this, now we are expected to believe that the Americans suddenly did a U-turn on their de facto policy of non-cooperation. Again, the Russian version of the incident is much more credible and logical.

◆ **Diplomatic quarrels between the US and Russia grow more heated as escalating violence in Syria has left a ceasefire reached earlier this month in tatters. Now John Kerry has proposed a “no-fly” zone over the Syrian battle zones in order to prevent the Syrian government from attacking “civilian targets with the excuse that it is just going after Nusra.” As it is now proved that Al-Nusra is connected to and affiliated with Al Qaeda, this proposal seems to be giving more credibility to the argument that the US is backing terrorists in Syria. What is your opinion on that?**

Yes, that is a sensible deduction. US Secretary of State John Kerry’s calls for a no-fly zone seem to be a desperate bid by the American state-sponsoring terrorist coalition to afford much needed cover for their proxy fighting assets on the ground. The implementation of →

no-fly zones has long been a demand by the Turkish and Saudi regimes, and now Washington appears to be endorsing such a move as well. The situation is this: The US-led coalition's covert war for regime change in Syria is facing defeat from the formidable combined forces of the Syrian army, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah. The battle of Aleppo portends the ultimate defeat of the US-led international conspiracy to terrorize the nation of Syria into submitting to its hegemonic designs for regime change. Given the high stakes, the US is now showing growing frustration over losing its covert war. The call for no-fly zones by John Kerry this week – under the cynical guise of protecting humanitarian aid convoys – is a foil in order to salvage the terrorist proxies from what promises to be a historic defeat.

◆ **Speaking of humanitarian aid convoys, one such convoy of the UN and the Red Crescent came under an air attack on the Castello Highway on 19 September. The UN first claimed it was an 'airstrike', but the Russian delegation noted that neither the Russian nor the Syrian air forces have attacked the convoy, which made the UN revise the statement to say 'an unknown attack'. The US, on the other hand, is accusing Russia or Syrian government for the attack, without presenting any evidence. What is your evaluation of this? Can one conclude that it has been an airstrike, carried out by the US forces and UN has revised the statement under Washington's pressure as it has done it in the case of Yemen and under Saudi pressures?**

This is typical Western propaganda technique. Accusations are leveled and amplified by the Western mass news media, without any facts or supporting evidence. It is bombast that relies on forceful and repeated assertion in order to give it a veneer of credibility. The Al Nusra terror group's media helpers known as the White Helmets – who pose as first aid responders – were conveniently in place and at precise time to make a video of the aid convoy trucks having been attacked. The video, as usual, was then disseminated by the Western mass media, without question or verification. The nature of the damage to the aid trucks suggests that they were set ablaze or fired upon from the ground, according to reliable sources. That negates the claims made by the American government and West-

ern media that the aid convoy was hit by a Russian or Syrian air strike. Besides, the Syrian and Russian authorities have categorically refuted that allegation. Also, Russian drone video footage shows that the aid convoy passed unharmed from Syrian government-held western Aleppo into the militant-held eastern quarter. A mortar-carrying vehicle belonging to the insurgents passed near the convoy. For the past week, since the ceasefire was implemented on September 12, the various illegally armed insurgent groups – the US-led coalition's terrorist proxies – were shelling and sniping at the proposed aid route into eastern Aleppo. The militants were even warning that they would attack forthcoming humanitarian convoys in protest over the proposed ceasefire. What actually happened to the attacked convoy is not clear. But it would be highly conceivable that it was raided by the US-sponsored terror groups and the incident was then misattributed to Syrian or Russian forces in a false-flag propaganda exercise. The nearly six-year Syrian regime-change covert war has seen numerous false flags, such as the massacre at Houla back in May 2012 and the alleged chemical weapon atrocity at East Ghouta in August 2013, which were followed by saturated Western media coverage alleging that the Syrian government forces were to blame, whenever in fact it was the Western-backed surrogate terror brigades. Given the systematic behavior, it is entirely probable that the attack on the aid convoy last week in Aleppo was another such false flag to smear Syria and Russia in order to extract political concessions, such the demand now from Washington for no-fly zones to be established, which as noted above, has the real purpose of providing protective cover for its terrorist proxies.

◆ **While the US had suggested that it can control armed groups in ceasefire, hundred cases of truce violation have been committed by them and Washington has failed to control them. Some believe the recent cessation of hostilities and its subsequent failure proves a discord among Americans and their former allies in region which are Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar; they did not follow the US demands and allowed terrorist and armed groups in Syria to violate the truce. What is your take on this and if this is the case, what can be**

the next scenarios for the US in Syria?

I am not aware of any major rift between the US and its co-conspirators for regime change in Syria – Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. There has always been tensions over tactics, with Turkey and Saudi Arabia usually being more gung-ho than Washington. My take on the ceasefire failure is simply that it proves beyond doubt that Washington is an accomplice in the state-sponsored terrorist war on Syria. The fact that Washington's appeal for "moderate rebels" to dissociate from "terrorists" was spectacularly shown to be futile indicates in turn that the official Western narrative about the Syrian conflict is a load of lies. The Western claim of supporting a "secular, vetted opposition" in a "pro-democracy uprising" – while at the same time supposedly fighting terrorism – is demonstrated to be a mockery of the truth. The truth being that Washington and its NATO and Arab clients are guilty of waging a war on Syria with various terrorist brigades acting as their proxy ground forces. The ceasefire was immediately violated by all these insurgent groups and there evidently was no distinction between them as Washington and the dutiful Western mass media have been claiming for the past six years. That glaring moment of truth was unbearable for Washington to allow, and in my opinion that was a pressing reason for the US to "kill the ceasefire". With its terrorist proxies facing defeat, there is now a very imminent danger of the US and its NATO and Arab dictator allies escalating military intervention directly. The recent occupation and annexation of Syrian territory by Turkish and American military forces is a grim harbinger that the covert war for regime change may be turning into an overt war – an international war no less involving NATO on one side and Russia and Iran on the other.

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 |

By: Hamidreza Gholamzadeh

Moscow emphasizes it will not hold joint air strikes with Washington and the two sides will only coordinate missions and targets.

In early hours of Saturday, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov appeared in front of media representatives and announced that they had finally reached an agreement on ceasefire in Syria. The surprising news came out just less than a week after US President Obama and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin failed to reach any deal on the sidelines of G20 summit in China. Russia represented Syrian government and its supporters in the negotiations while the United States represented so-called 'moderate' terrorist groups fighting in Syria, connected to Al-Qaeda.

The deal which is clinched after months of negotiations between Russia and the United States is so fragile that both diplomats in several cases during the joint press conference cast doubt on its endurance. According to the reports, the deal includes seven days of ceasefire scheduled to be placed on Monday and on the condition that the 'cessation of hostilities' can succeed to last for seven days, Moscow and Washington will then launch airstrike against terrorist positions on which they have reached an agreement. Russia has of course emphasized that the air strikes will not be joint missions and the two sides will only coordinate missions and targets.

The fact that neither sides is confident that the deal would last for even a week is due to the prior experience when the hold of fire on both sides led to an attack by terrorist groups inflicting casualties on pro-Syrian government forces. The Americans, however, allege that Assad forces had also breached the ceasefire then; a claim they never provided evidence for and is similar to other claims by US officials accusing Syrian government. Even on Friday night in Geneva, John Kerry repeated such previous allegations where he was describing how the ceasefire would work; "that should put an end to the barrel bombs, an end to the indiscriminate bombing of civilian neighborhoods."

'Barrel bombs', 'chemical weapons' 'civilians', 'humanitarian crisis', etc. are

Will US-Russia fragile deal on Syria survive?



terms US officials use frequently to add to their pressure on Assad and depict their campaign in Syria as humanitarian. But the facts and figures prove vice versa. A recent brutal and ruthless beheading of a teenage refugee by Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki group which is supported by the US was heartrending and stirred much controversy around the world, however Washington refused to comment on the issue. Over the years of conflict and war in Syria which has displaced millions of people, the United States has failed to address the refugee crisis properly and more often has paid lip service to it. Aleppo is also no different story and after five years of fight in the country and with all brutalities and pressures armed groups have had on civilians in the second largest Syrian city, the human rights outcries and humanitarian concerns just appeared when Russia and Iran-backed Syrian Army forces could impose siege on terrorists in the city. Noteworthy enough, a recent report has shown that Obama administration has sold the highest amount of weapons to Saudi Arabia which is supporting terrorists in Syria and has invaded Yemen. The humanitarian concerns of US thus are nothing but word game.

During the talks to the media in Geneva, despite John Kerry's concerns, Russian FM Lavrov confirmed that his government has informed Bashar Assad

of the details of the deal and that he had accepted the terms. In the meantime, State Secretary John Kerry called on armed groups in Aleppo to 'distance themselves from ISIL and Al-Nusra' – which has rebranded itself as Fath al-Sham Front. Al-Nusra has been under support of Washington as moderate fighters but it turned out later to be affiliated with Al-Qaeda in Syria. Almost everyone admits that it is very confusing to define who is who in Syria and armed groups fighting against Assad are also in some cases fighting against one another and even unite against each other! So in such a situation, the fact that US has sufficed to only invite armed groups to detach themselves from their allies doesn't seem to be practical as the groups have proved to be irrational actors and the scene is so complicated that it is hard to believe that they can hold the fire either on Syrian Army or other groups. The previous ceasefire, however, brings this possibility to mind, too, that Washington is well aware that armed fighters and terrorist groups are not easily giving up with their ideological affiliations and no separation from Al-Nusra or ISIL would happen there on the ground, but the US-brokered ceasefire will buy them time to rearm and reorganize their forces to continue their proxy war on Bashar Assad government on behalf of the United States and its regional allies |

Syrian ceasefire or shortcut to Aleppo?

By: Parnaz Talebi

Russia and US recently agreed on a ceasefire in Syria that didn't seem promising and enforcing at all, noting the facts on the ground.

G20 Summit in China, which was attended by Russian, American and Turkish high officials, was considered an ample opportunity to discuss one of the most critical issues of the international scene: Syrian crisis. However hopes faded as no white smoke emerged after the meeting between US President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin on September 4, on the sidelines of the summit. Calling the meeting "candid, blunt and businesslike" Obama said "we had some productive talks about what a cessation of hostilities would look like for Russia and the US to focus on our common enemies," adding that regarding "the gap of trust that exists" the gaps are not closed yet. Putin, more optimistic, underlined that Russia would strengthen counter-terrorism ties with United States and even said an agreement could be reached in the next few days.

Talks was then continued by Russia Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of State Foreign John Kerry on the sidelines of the G20 Summit the same day, which was dedicated to According to the ministry, the sides discussed "further steps to assist in resolving the conflict in Syria, including the task of consolidating the cessation of hostilities and the Russian-US cooperation in the fight against terrorist groups," according to a statement by Russia Foreign Ministry. "There still remains a couple of tough issues that we need to work on," Kerry said after the meeting during a press conference announcing that the talks will continue.

Lavrov and Kerry resumed talks on Syrian political process and joint fight against terrorism in Geneva on September 9, while Lavrov had met with UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de



Mistura a day earlier. It was German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier who revealed what was going on behind the closed doors in Geneva; "The most important thing for now is a humanitarian pause for Aleppo, and it would be preferable to make it last for 48 hours. Talks are currently being held on implementing a ceasefire for between seven and 10 days."

The marathon of exhaustive talks ended late Friday. The agreement reached by US and Russia, albeit not a comprehensive ceasefire but a temporary cessation of hostilities, was put into action at sundown on September 12, involving halting all attacks, including airstrikes, by all parties. The agreement also requires unimpeded humanitarian access to areas in need, including Aleppo, and depends on all forces pulling back from strategic Castello Road. Next step, if the sides respect the ceasefire for seven days, would be establishing a Joint Implementation Center (JIC) by Russia and US, separating terrorists from moderate groups and finally joint airstrikes against terrorists.

Yet, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov stressed that there still remains a lack of confidence in US-Russia cooperation and negotiations on Syria; "Despite all the problems, despite the lack of trust, which continues to emerge, despite attempts to sabotage what we agreed

upon today, we have managed to work out a package," Lavrov told reporters. "Today's document is not the only one, there are actually five of them," which both Lavrov and Kerry rejected to talk about. Not surprisingly, Kerry stressed the importance of aid to Aleppo during the presser held immediately after talks; "Both pro-government and opposition groups will be required to provide safe, unhindered and sustainable humanitarian, commercial and civilian access to eastern and western Aleppo," he said. "Neither the opposition nor the government will be permitted to attack or to take territory held by the other or...to obstruct the delivery of humanitarian goods."

The deal received acclaim nearly all around the world, the most important of which was the approval of the agreement by Syrian government. Damascus has been informed of the deal, agreed to it and the cessation of hostilities will be applied to the city of Aleppo for humanitarian purposes, SANA reported on September 10.

The so-called opposition also hailed the deal when Bassma Kodmani, the opposition's High Negotiations Committee (HNC) spokeswoman, announced that moderate groups would re-organize and distance themselves from the radical groups. She underlined that in return government forces should end →



the “strategy of surrounding whole areas and besieging them.”

However, despite all hope and optimism the temporary cessation of hostilities agreement brought up in international scene, the nature of the deal doesn't seem so strong to bear the heavy weight of an almost 5-year-long war. The agreement is even considered fragile and weak as it is pursuing far-fetched aims as separating the so-called moderate opposition groups from terrorists, which is in fact impractical, let not say illogic. The issue was also one of the major causes that bring the February agreement of ceasefire to a failure. No doubt the ceasefire has so far reduced the violence paving the way for deliver of humanitarian aid to the country, particularly the besieged Aleppo where both sides are in dire need for. Still, US and Russia are aware that the agreement would barely reach its final stages, if it could stand the several violations both sides are currently blaming each other for. Being realist, US, concerned by recent developments in the region, specifically rapprochement of Russia to Turkey and the achievements of Syrian army and its Russian and Iranian allies in strategic Aleppo as well as it's fading role in Syria, is trying to buy time for itself and its allies in the region to turn the situation around. The temporary halt of violence on the terrorist's side is due to repairing and regrouping as the core of the anti-government militia

is Syria are groups like ISIL and former al-Nusra Front (current Jabhat Fatah al Sham) and their several affiliates who have no interest in political talks and solution as their ultimate purpose is to topple down President Assad and the democratic government and to establish their caliphate, an essential part of which is in line with US is seeking in Syria. Talking about Syrian crisis, it should be always kept in mind that it was US and its western allies who inflamed the conflict for regime change and invaded the Arab country under the pretext of fighting terrorism against the will of Damascus. Hence, the ceasefire deal, at its American prospect, is another time-buying plot to help the insurgents recover, particularly in strategic Aleppo where they have been encircled by government forces. Noteworthy, the truce states trucks should be allowed to travel into eastern Aleppo, which is held by terrorists and insurgents, without the need for written permission from the Syrian government and without stop in checkpoints. This would have no other meaning than lifting the siege, giving breathe time to terrorists and supplying them with arms and goods, or the so-called “humanitarian aid”, as they have been heavily weakened by Syrian army recently. Yet the greatest challenge would remain the separation of moderate terrorist, what Lavrov has called the top priority for both parties of the ceasefire. This is the point where many believe that the brokered truce

would fail, as that would be impossible to differentiate between thousands of terrorists and hundreds of groups affiliated to each other and overlapped. The major problem, as well, would be the notorious al-Nusra Front, which includes several opposition groups US doesn't want to target.

On the other hand, the temporary ceasefire would negatively influence the Syrian army and its allies in Aleppo. Ceasing attacks and air strikes and the possible delivery of aid to the terrorists may halt the advancements of Syrian army in battlefield Damascus. But from a different point of view, the Syrian government may also take advantage of the temporary ceasefire to reinforce its army and forces.

The confidentiality of some parts of the deal, however, sets the ground for negative speculations. US Department of State spokesman Mark Toner said at a briefing “There are some operational details, areas of sensitivity, we do not believe would be in the interest of the agreement, or in anyone's interest, to share,” while Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov called on US to publicize the deal; “In order to brush away any doubts on how we will fulfill our commitments in the way in which they were stipulated in the agreement, we suggested revealing these agreements and not keeping them secret, as our American partners wanted,” he said, adding that Russia has nothing to conceal.

Overall it seems that Russia is the key player of the fragile Syrian ceasefire. With its increasing influence in the region stemming from its consistent and productive policies in the region, Russia has the upper hand in Syrian crisis and it should be noted that its presence in the Syria has been authorized by Damascus. The US-Russia truce, whether successful or not, once again bolsters Russia's role and position in the region, demeaning the US as a superpower. It is now on Russia to not only convince Syria follow the ceasefire – as the two have so far proved to be loyal to – but also should have an eye on the United States to abide by the deal and stick to its commitments in convincing terrorist and armed groups to hold their fire |

Blindsiding game of Erdogan; Op Euphrates Shield



By: Parnaz Talebi

Ankara's recent invasion of Syria, though claimed to be anti-terrorist, is exactly setting the ground for reinforcing the tragedy ongoing in the Arab country.

In a surprise move late August, Turkey launched a military operation dubbed "Euphrates Shield", the aim of which was claimed to be liberation of northern Syrian city of Jarablus from ISIL. Preventing new flows of migration and delivering aid to civilians were also announced by Turkish officials as aims of the operation, which was lunched under air support of US-led coalition, albeit despite the will of Syrian government who called it "blatant violation of sovereignty".

Yet the act seemed reasonable as on August 22, after a suicide bombing attack in a wedding party in the Gaziantep left over 54 people dead, Turkish military launched strikes against ISIL shelling targets near Jarablus and north of Manbij announcing that the strikes are aimed at opening a corridor for an operation. "Daesh should be completely cleansed from our borders and we are ready to do what it takes for that," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said during a news conference after the Gaziantep attack.

Turkey's President Erdogan also stated that the aim of the "Operation Euphrates Shield" is to eliminate threats from ISIL and Kurds later on August 24; "we started a military operation in northern Syria at 4 a.m. this morning, aimed at eliminating the threats posed by Daesh and Syrian Kurds," He said, adding that Turkey is trying to put an end to attacks on Turkish territory from neighboring Syrian regions.

Not surprisingly, the very first warning came from a Kurdish body, The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), demanding the immediate withdrawal of Turkish forces; "Turkey is trying to turn its indirect occupation of Syria into a direct one, we demand that Turkey immediately withdraws from territory of Syria, stops supporting terrorist groups in Syria, otherwise we will force them out of our territory," said a PYD representative, Sputnik reported.

Ankara, then, put it clearly; "PYD, YPG and among them these democratic forces have to go beyond Euphrates to the eastern part... [otherwise] we are going to do what we need to do, and we will not allow them to realize their secret agendas," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu warned on Wednesday.

Hitting Kurdish forces in Syria, who are backed by US unconditionally, was considered as a response to US' refusal to extradite Fethullah Gülen, whom Er-

dogan blames for the failed coup of July 15. Discontent by US' response to the coup and receiving negative pulses from its other NATO allies in European Union, Turkey made a return first to Russia and then to Iran, who supported the country massively after the coup. The most notable shift, however, maybe was the shift in Turkey's position over President Assad. Erdogan, previously, had repeatedly refused to negotiate with Syrian president. Yet, it was after his visit with Russian President Vladimir Putin early August that in a statement Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said "there may be talks [with Assad] for the transition."

In line with all these concerns, US Vice President Joe Biden arrived in Ankara only hours after "Operation Euphrates Shield" was launched. Although much was not revealed of Biden's meetings in Ankara, it was clear that Ankara's U-turn in foreign policy was the major concern for US, while Turkey's was the reason behind the lack of support from Western allies after the coup.

Biden also tried to restore the lost trust of Turkish government and nation after the coup; "We express in no uncertain terms the continuing, unwavering support of the United States for Turkey in the wake of last month's attempted coup," he said in his joint press conference with Prime Minister Yildirim, adding in another part of his remarks, "but we are also awed by the bravery of the Turkish people, who literally stood in front of tanks, some actually ran over by those tanks, to defend your democracy."

"I understand the intense feeling your government and the people of Turkey have about [Gülen]. We are cooperating... with Turkish authorities, our legal experts are working right now with their Turkish counterparts on the production of and evaluation of the material and evidence," Biden said noting that legal procedure must be followed by both sides.

Yet, Ankara seemed closer to its goals when Yildirim and Biden announced that they reached an agreement that forces of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party →

(PYD) and Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) must not move to the west of Euphrates river if they don't want to lose US support. Ankara, further, asked Washington to review its stance on the two Kurdish organizations and to recognize them as terrorist groups.

On the other hand, both Russia and Iran expressed concern on Turkey's operation in Syria. "Moscow is deeply concerned about what is happening in the Syrian-Turkish border area," Russian Foreign Ministry said, adding that further degradation in the conflict zone and the prospect of Kurdish-Arab ethnic conflict raises alarm, according to Sputnik.

"We are convinced that the Syrian crisis can be resolved only on the solid basis of international law, through broad intra-Syrian dialogue with the participation of all ethnic and religious groups, including Kurds, and on the basis of the June 30, 2012, Geneva Communique, Resolution 2254 and other UN Security Council resolutions adopted on the initiative of the International Syria Support Group," the ministry stressed.

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Bahram Ghasemi, also voiced concern on Turkey's military operation; "Turkish presence on Syrian soil will lead to further complication of the situation in the region," said Ghasemi. "Adopting approaches that defy the political authority of a country's central government is not acceptable," he continued.

Turkey's military operation, at first glance, may seem promising with regards to fight against terrorism and the trilateral cooperation of Ankara-Moscow-Tehran, yet that would be simplistic to ignore the existing facts in Turkey's foreign policy and its unconditional support for terrorism in the region. Turkish government, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has been seeking ouster of President Bashar Assad since the onset of crisis in Syria and had not spared any effort to reach the aim including backing different terrorist groups like ISIL and al-Nusra Front (renamed Jabhat Fateh al-Sham). Ankara, meanwhile, has long been an important NATO ally for Washington in the region, notably for providing airbase for US airstrikes in the Middle East, among them the strategic Incirlik Air Base. Further, Turkey has been in a frustrating clash with Kurds in

the region, considering them a threat to its territorial integrity.

Some analysts, optimistically, argue that the significant U-turn by Erdogan was a sign of his flexibility and pragmatism after he noticed how his strategies in the region are boomeranging on his nation and government. They argue that Turkey was suffering from insecurity and its citizens have been regularly threatened by terrorists, whose flow to region in general, and Syria in particular, was authorized by Turkish government through borders. In addition, economic, energy and particularly political and military issues made restrictions, preventing Ankara from full breakup of ties with Moscow and Tehran. Erdogan knows

both fighting parties in Syria. The zone then would facilitate weaponing and supplying of the terrorists and would provide them a safe corridor to the heart of Syria. meters and 30 kilometers deep. No-fly zone, under any interpretation, is equal to war and is considered an obvious military assault against the target country's sovereignty. This would be the second safe zone as Pentagon issued a warning last week that Syrian and Russian aircrafts approaching Hasakah in eastern Syria would be shoot down by US warplanes. Establishing buffer zones in Syria is not a new idea however, and it was agreed upon in July 2015. The safe haven was designed to span from the Turkish borderline into Syria. Extended from Azaz in the West to Jarablus in the East and as far south as al-Bab, the zone was planned to extend to the doorstep of Aleppo, the most strategic town for



that further cooperation with Iran and Russia means more guarantee from EU and US, analysts say. On the other hand, and in a broader outlook, the trilateral cooperation of Turkey-Russia-Iran could strengthen the role of all three countries in the region, weakening the influence of EU and US and putting pressure on their allies like Saudi Arabia and lead to a review of strategies by West.

Still, from the more realistic point of view, the recent developments are not in favor of countering terrorism in Syria or supporting its government. The Turkish incursion into Syrian territory, air-covered by US warplanes, could be considered gaining control on a Syrian town and installing proxy forces. Ankara has already announced that it wants to establish a "safe zone" along the Syrian side of the border stretching 100 kilo-

both fighting parties in Syria. The zone then would facilitate weaponing and supplying of the terrorists and would provide them a safe corridor to the heart of Syria.

Turkey, the invisible hand of NATO in the Middle East, has no intention of fighting terrorism clearly. In fact, Ankara killed two birds with one stone, or better say, many birds with one stone under the pretext of recent operation. Ankara cleared its borders from Kurdish forces and gained the control of border town of Jarablus under the US support with a false flag operation and is establishing a buffer zone, which it was struggling for since 2012. In a broader picture, however, this means more NATO and US influence in Syria and region and failure of political solutions for the Syrian crisis, and therefore paving the way for the ultimate goal; regime change in Syria |

Syrian and Iraqi crisis post-US presidential elections

By: Davoud Shoja'

Only few months later, new US president will settle in the White House; in this edition of elections, developments in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria occupy the center-stage for either presidential campaign or the public in the US.

The crises in Iraq and Syria came to the foreground after Paris terrorist attacks earlier in 2015.

The collapse of the state in the Middle East with current states no longer functioning properly would jeopardize greater part of the US interests in the region. Weaker states are easy preys to terrorist groups where states supporting and arming terrorists regularly recruit fresh mercenaries. Weak states could pose other challenges to the US: a single most important challenge is which threatens her allies in the region. But, terrorism would have consequences to her at home as well. Already a Russian-Iranian pact and coordination in the Syria and Iraq has challenged some of the US lackluster positions in the region, forcing her to take different positions than she would otherwise. Iraq and Syria are important to the US. However, she has pursued different policies in Syria than in Iraq, adopting to the necessities of the situation. There is however evidence that Syrian crisis will occupy the place of a second priority in US Middle Eastern policies, since the nature of interests in Syria is different and less important, while in Iraq, US interests are at stake in some important ways.

US interests in Syria

Syria and some of Eastern European countries had been traditionally falling in the Russian scope of influence, where the US had no direct interests, Hezbollah and Iran links here being the exception. Syria is important for the US in some ways:

1- Capacities and resources of Syrian friends (Iran and Russia, inter alia)

which would be excellent means to solve the crisis in Syria and thus contribute to US interests. With military means to change the equation in Syria laid in abeyance, the US will be unlikely to use military, with subsequent decline, albeit for the time being, in her hegemonic role;

2- Syria has been the golden ring in Resistance front against Arab conservative front, the major western ally in the region, and a major threat to the US-Zionist joint interests;

3- Syria is important for the US in a possible success of the major rivalry in the region, namely, Turkey and Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis Iran, for the interest of the former;

4- Syria is important for Russia-US balance of power, since it is the last resort for Russia to dictate its political and military preponderance in the region, which would be a hurdle for western and American agenda in the Middle East;

5- Syria is important for emergence of a new security arrangement in the Middle East, since it had been the sole Arab state (before the civil war engulfed the country in 2011) which came to oppose Zionism as its major foe, investing what she had in this conflict to win the fame of the only supporter of Resistance front; today as well, developments in Syria will have far-reaching consequences for Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Afghanistan and even Pakistan;

6- Developments in Syria and crisis management will have also impact on the Islamic Republic of Iran's performance in the region;

7- A quadrilateral coalition in Syria is in conflict with western interests, with the future possibility of a Chinese contribution to the scene, and with likelihood that the contribution would bolster Resistance front;

8- The future of energy is in stake; Syrian gas reserves with a shift in modes of energy consumption toward gas, the country would host gas pipelines in the future, which will win for the country a



US priority;

9- Syria is a ground where western collation seeks to attain its objectives.

American agenda in Syria

Since 2011, the US have pursued the following in Syria;

1- Weakening the government of Bashar al-Assad and strengthening her own armed fighter groups;

2- Supporting and improving position of so-called moderate opposition in efforts to curb and defeat ISIL;

3- Preparing for filling the possible vacuum with possible fall of Assad;

4- Advertising her imagined effective role in fighting global terrorism and extremism;

5- Coordinating operation of her collation in Syria against ISIL;

6- Opposing and minimizing Iran's influence and position in Syria.

Currently, the US have been providing intelligence and arms support for moderate opposition, with a firm belief that this is the best possible option and tactical means to defeat ISIL and Assad government. With the temporary nature of tactics used by the US in the region, it is inevitable that the she will work with Russia in Syria to coordinate fight against ISIL, since Russians have recognized some groups of moderate opposition in concert with the US to help with the mechanism.

Iraq

In Iraq, influential groups, purportedly independent and acting on their own, have been under the effect of greater regional players as well as players beyond the region; a surge of terrorist attacks after the Parliamentary elections →

in Iraq would provide evidence to this.

Events in Iraq are closely associated with those in Syria. The situation turned to be different than what the acting players would assume, with Syrian government hitting much success on the ground against opposition and ISIL; the security arrangement has shifted in the interests of Assad's government, and with a successful elections in June 3 2014, it plunged the opposition in despair, and mounting pressures on them so as to seek new grounds for operations against Assad. In line with this, western intelligence along with their allies Turkey and Saudi Arabia supported Iraqi Sunnis along Syrian borders to join the fighting terrorists in Iraq.

Syrian presidential elections gave government an upper-hand in crackdown on ISIL. Such a situation was dominant in Iraq when elections united the government and people. It was the first election since the withdrawal of US forces and was huge success with the government managing to restore security to ballots. The political participation was hope-inspiring, with all ethnic and religious groups contributing to a 62-per cent turnout. International observing body also approved the health of elections to add to the public euphoria.

The election success however incited intense opposition in other yet hostile groups which hated the course of events in Iraq and who opted to embark on a series of sabotage and suicide attacks. This trend of hatred is a common denominator of ISIL and its sympathizers in Iraq and Syria during six years of conflict. The losing parties (ISIL and other terrorists) have ever worked to change the situation to worse when Baghdad and Damascus succeeded. Terrorists have misinterpreted the events, since the situation in Iraq has changed for good, with ancien régime gone and a democratically-elected government ruling with the consent of the republic. In larger part of the Middle East and Persian Gulf states, and even in North Africa, democratic elections and governments have been rare and have not welcomed by the petty dictatorships ruling hereditarily.

Islamic Awakening and popular Arab uprisings totally changed the situation in the Arab world, with public finding

chances to directly decide on their own future. In such open situations, most of the ruling regimes would see their interests at risk, thus initiating actions to prevent democratic movements and changes. The Awakening however had its own enemies and opportunists; in Iraq, such opportunist states sought a firm foothold to effectively install a regime favorable to their own interests. However, developments have been disappointing for these countries in the past decade and have forced them to resort to drastic tactics to destabilize Iraq through terrorism and sowing discord. The remaining cadres of Baathist party have formed the core elite of the ISIL and have been an excellent means to infiltrate Iraq with pernicious effect. ISIL is a terrorist organization with a religious label, while ironically, its members and other terrorist groups are by no means 'practicing Muslims' in strict sense of the term. The group have acted in blanket manner in targeting members of all known religious denominations in the region including Shi'ite, Sunni, Christian, Yazidi, etc. They uphold no certain religion, neither would they ascribe themselves to a certain country thanks to multinational nature of their members who come from diverse countries as Russian Muslim republics of Caspian Sea and Australia. As such, ISIL's sympathizers and the ideology they preach have far-reaching effect all over the world, with Europe alarmed at the prospect of terrorist events in France. With improving situation in Iraq and Syria for the interest of ruling governments, there is a growing fear that these mercenaries will return to their home countries, with grave implications to the governments of these countries, for they would work as preachers of hatred and terrorism towards the majority non-Muslim population. European fanatics as well as Arab extremists contribute to the composition of ISIL. It is estimated that nationals of over 50 countries fight against Syrian government within a loose body of cacophonous and diverse extremist and Wahhabist terrorists, who have been seeking their mission in volatile situations and acts of atrocities and savagery they regularly engage in; their hotbed had been Iraq and during the years of instability,

they migrated to Syria when the situation was ripe for such groups who saw the time opportune for their adventurism.

US elections and impact on Syrian and Iraqi crises

Within the US, Republicans and Democrats share the policies on the future of the crisis in Syria. Observers believe that however the major parties differ only in their methods of handling the issue. However, the present author believes that evidence shows that there will be absolutely no difference between Democrats and Republicans in both tactical and strategic views on the situation in Iraq and Syria given the past misadventures of the US in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama's flirtations with Russia have been only tactical, since the fate of Hillary Clinton, his fellow party's major nominee for the November elections is at stake. The cooperation will have some agreements on Syria and Iraq with due impact on the presidential elections as well. As tactical, the agreement will in the most probability have no long-term effect on the situation in Iraq and Syria, since the objective is short-term and only seeks to create a margin of security for the Zionist regime. An examination of the presidential election nominees of both parties reveals no drastic difference in their plans for the future of Syria and the Middle East at large. Only the Republicans espouse a fast-tracked approach and more robust action, with the latter shared by Democrats as well. Both parties plan for a no-fly zone, and provision of training and logistics for moderate opposition groups against Assad and ISIL. The scope and intensity of such plans constitute the real point of departure of Dems and Reps. Donald Trump advocates curbing the influx of armed groups from the Turkish borders. He also supports sending boots either American or from other allied countries to accelerate fight against ISIL; however, Hillary Clinton has a penchant for diplomatic efforts led by the US in combination with air strikes by coalition and support for local fighters especially Kurds; she also shares with Trump establishment of the no-fly zone to solve crisis in Syria, but supports dividing Iraq to three Shi'ite, Sunni, and Kurd auton- →

omous units.

With the corollary above, we reach at the following about the US presidential elections and its effect on the future of Iraq and Syria: the US is a hegemonic power which regularly resort, as a means, to Takfirist terrorists such as ISIL to destabilize Syria and Iraq and she will do in the future. For example, in an article in The Times in 2015, the author claimed that the US had been the major player behind formation of ISIL and continued to support and arm the group later in the course of group's evolution to a full-fledged mercenary. The article also

ISIL leader and cleric Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi took intensive military training for a whole year in the hands of Mossad, besides courses in theology and the art of speech. The Pentagon and the State Department listed Al-Baghdadi as highly wanted, with prizes soaring to \$ 10m for him, dead or alive. This catapulted Baghdadi to a position of prominence in leading ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Western double-standards are evident in that Washington has not concealed its support for terrorist groups, but clearly admitted sending arms to some of terrorist groups classified by the US as moderates.

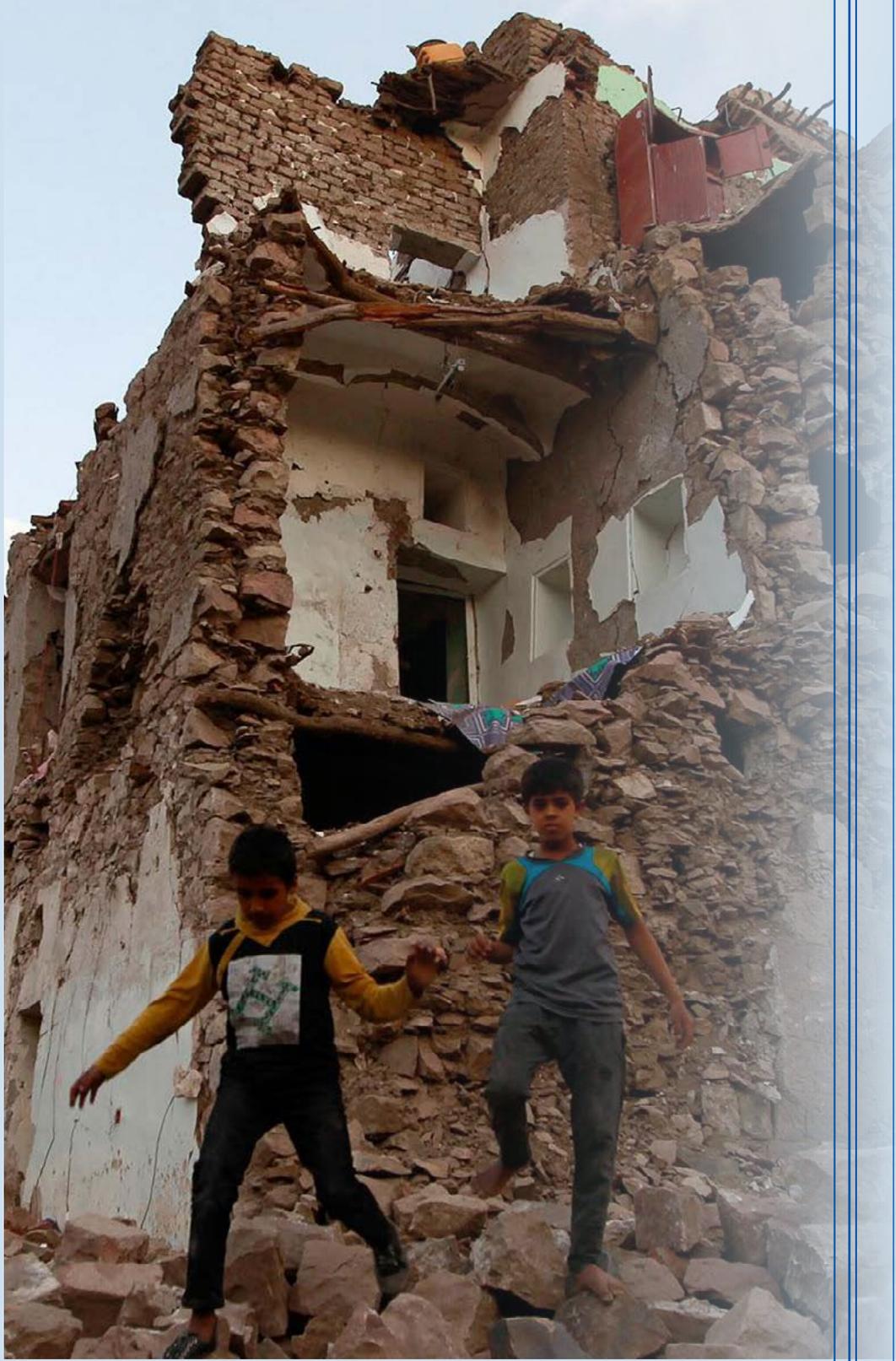
to her ends. In Iraq, the US have failed to contribute effectively to fight against ISIL, sharing the hostile Arab states' criticism of the Shi'ite government of Mr. Heidar al-Ebadi and has posed her own political agenda dictated. Evidently, the US has abused terrorism as devices to her political means in especially forging three federations (yet on the paper however) of Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds, which renders Iraq no longer extant. In her attempt, the US actions is in line with her grander scheme of the new Middle East where smaller and weaker governments live in a pandemonium of petty ethnic and religious conflicts. Such units could be easily manipulated in a region of utmost importance, where the US would have an extended presence in the absence of any regional power where Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, etc. cease to exist and new entities appear in the map of the Middle East. The US would seek to appear as the ultimate savior, through her propaganda empire, and encumber with favor Iraqi government and nation while they have almost defeated ISIL, largely depriving them of their major strongholds and vast territories in Sunni-majority provinces. The claim then would be sold to the international community that the US ended the crisis in Iraq.

Among the long-term projects of the US are cheap energy and the possibility of an arms race in the newly-established countries which would buy inordinate amounts of weapons from the US and thus recycle their oil income back to America. Such strategy is a favor of Hillary Clinton's and Democrat camp would welcome the initiative. In Syria, the US has appeared more deceptive, seeking to win the Islamic Republic of Iran's consent in their new schemes of peace in Syria after Geneva round of talks systematically failed. In Syria, they welcome a destabilized country and region where their interests are best met. Whenever the balance of power has moved toward Syrian government, with terrorists pushed on the wall, the US, Saudis, and other actors armed the terrorists, with Democrats resorting to diplomacy to save their mercenaries. Now, the short-term objective ahead of the US elections is to change this balance for their interests |



implicated US military and intelligence. Edward Joseph Snowden revealed that CIA worked closely with Israel's Mossad and British MI6. "The former employee at US National Security Agency (NSA), Edward Snowden, has revealed that the British and American intelligence and the Mossad worked together to create the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)." Snowden said intelligence services of three countries created a terrorist organization that is able to attract all extremists of the world to one place, using a strategy called "the hornet's nest." NSA documents refer to recent implementation of the hornet's nest to protect the Zionist entity by creating religious and Islamic slogans. According to documents released by Snowden, "The only solution for the protection of the Jewish state "is to create an enemy near its borders." Leaks revealed that

For nearly 6 years, terrorists have had the US support in their fierce fight against Syrian government and people; they have violated all ethical, human, and conventional values. Iraqi government would be paralyzed in its fight against terrorism should the Islamic Republic of Iran fail to support the government. Western powers had been crucial to resilience and resurgence of terrorist groups; serious action against terrorism could have ended them for good in the region. If the US only blocked paths where arms and money provided for terrorists, these groups would have been strictly limited in scope and we could have seen a step forward in achieving a region free of terrorism and crisis. However, things are not in the venues we assume and the US has not been true to its apparent pose of fighting terrorism, but used terrorism as instruments



Politics

Media blackout on Saudi Yemen invasion; UN's futile shouts

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

While Western media outlets, by and large, have turned a blind eye to US-sponsored, Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen, the presence of UN Humanitarian Chief, Stephen O'Brien, in Tehran provided an opportunity to bring this humanitarian crisis back into focus.

"It is deeply saddening to be marking a whole year of violence in Yemen. A country whose people were already facing great deprivation and hunger, and who have had to deal since last March with the added horror of war, bombing, shelling; losing their homes and loved ones," this is what Stephen O'Brien, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said in his statement on Yemen on 24 March 2016. O'Brien was appointed by Ban Ki-Moon as the UN humanitarian chief on 9 March, 2015; 17 days later, Yemen came under heavy airstrikes by Saudi Arabia's bombing campaign, which is backed by the United States and includes eight other Arab countries: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, and United Arab Emirates.

Saudi Arabia was much aggrieved after Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement took state matters into their own hands and forced the U.S. and Saudi-backed puppet-president Abde Rabbo Mansour Hadi to resign and escape the country. Perhaps afraid of the spread of revolutionary ideologies to their own despotic regimes, and under the pretext of defending the 'legitimate government of Yemen', Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf Arab allies formed a coalition, without so much as a UN mandate, to restore Hadi – who had already lost his legitimacy for fleeing and being sought as a fugitive from justice – to power; a move that soon proved to be impossible as more and more people in Yemen, even those who did not side with the Houthis, started to reject Hadi as legitimate ruler, as he was the one who breached the sovereignty of the country by allowing external intervention and brought the country to the brink of disintegration and destruc-



tion. But none of these have deterred Saudi Arabia from pursuing its bombing campaign in Yemen. And the reports by Human Rights organizations across the world on the war crimes committed by the Saudi coalition, including child killing, attacks on hospitals and schools, and destruction of the country's infrastructures, have not managed to rally the world, particularly the Western side, against Saudi's unjustifiable aggression. Why is that?

Western media's silence on Yemen's crisis

"In just five months, the country is crumbling into a 'Syria-level crisis'," said the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) about the fast deteriorating state of Yemen. Yet, not much has been covered by Western media outlets, not to the scope of the coverage of the Syrian war, which makes one wonder whether the international community is still unconvinced about the catastrophic scale of this humanitarian tragedy, or whether they are reluctant to report on atrocities that would expose their respective countries' complicity or undermine their false narratives about the crisis.

There is no questioning the powerful role of mass media in construction of public opinion and social change, and amid this, key opinion leaders have been created, on which many people around the world rely to get their facts. When the body of three-year-old Syrian Ay-

lan Kurdi washed up on a Turkish beach a year ago, it was the social media that managed to draw the world's attention to the dire and perilous situation of Syrian refugees, galvanize public opinion, and by creating widespread sympathy for the humanitarian crisis, they managed to put pressure on European governments to be more accepting of the immigrants. By all accounts, the same trend was expected in regard to Yemen's crisis, with its staggering death toll of at least 4500 civilians and 6,711 others wounded, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the World Food Program also announced that Yemen is on the brink of cataclysmic famine, with over 50 percent of the 24 million population at immediate risk. Yet, there is a deafening silence from Western media outlets, which could have been a tremendous help to force the Saudi-led coalition to abandon its campaign under international pressure and thus, alleviate the sufferings of the Yemenis, but instead, they decided to become complicit in the US-sponsored, Saudi-led nightmare that has been going on for one whole year and six months, with no immediate prospect of peace.

This reminds me of Iran's nuclear program and the media hype around it, that aimed to distort facts and disturb the atmosphere of the negotiations. The hysterical media spin about Iran's peaceful →

nuclear program and defense capabilities still continues, even months after the world powers reached a deal with Iran and admitted that a nuclear Iran had been a truly manufactured crisis. Western media outlets went into a frenzy for covering the delivery of Russian-made S-300 missile defense system, which are strictly for defense purposes, and threw a fit over Iran's missile tests. Yet, they continue to ignore Washington and London's arms deals to Saudi Arabia, worth billions of dollars and used to slaughter innocent civilians. They are also very adamant in giving copious coverage of the Syrian crisis, where the US, UK and France as major players are pushing for a regime change for strategic reasons, but Yemen still remains a muted case, because the Western media are reluctant to expose the complicity of the US and UK in the deaths of thousands of people in Yemen, and to prevent the flow of Saudis' dollars that funnel through the Western banks.

UN blacklists Saudi-led coalition for killing children in Yemen, later removes it under pressure

The Human Rights Watch in its reporting on violations by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, documented indiscriminate or disproportionate Saudi-led airstrikes that killed and maimed children in Yemen. Six such unlawful coalition attacks in early 2016 killed twelve children. In another airstrike, a bomb dropped by coalition aircraft on the Mastaba market in March 2016 may have killed 10 Houthi fighters but also killed 97 civilians, including 25 children. The report cites other attacks that killed more civilians than fighters, and among the civilians killed in airstrikes there have been at least 10 children. There is no denying the evidence, the astonishing bulk of which finally forced the UN Chief Ban Ki-Moon to publish a report on June 3 covering the period from January to December 2015, which documented the beginning of air strikes by the US-backed, Saudi-led coalition in Yemen on 26 March 2015. According to the report, intensive aerial bombardment took a devastating toll on the civilian population and 'grave violations against children increased dramatically as a result of the escalating conflict.' The report listed the Saudi Arabia-led coalition for killing and maiming and attacks on schools and hospitals, maintaining that 60 per cent of child casualties (death of 510 children and 667 more injuries) were attributed to

Saudi Arabia.

But the UN soon announced the removal of Saudi-led coalition from the child's rights blacklist, after giving in to political manipulation by the Riyadh regime which threatened the international organization with de-funding several UN programs. Ban said he removed Saudi Arabia from the report under 'undue' financial pressure, adding the decision was 'one of the most painful and difficult' he has had to make as Secretary General. The decision drew a lot of heated criticism and condemnation from human rights groups, with Amnesty International censuring the United Nations "after it shamefully caved in to pressure to remove the Saudi Arabia-led military coalition from the UN's list of states and armed groups that violate children's rights in conflict." Ban stressed that the omission was 'temporary' until further investigations were conducted, but Saudi diplomats to the UN were quick to describe the change as an 'irreversible' moral victory. Almost four months have passed since then, the UN still claims that it needs to conduct more investigations, all the while Yemen continues to be bombarded by Saudi airstrikes where civilians, including children, are not spared, access to medical treatment, food and water is compromised, and the Western media chooses to remain remorselessly silent on Yemen's suffering.

US, UK complicit in Saudi's bombing campaign in Yemen

In the latest atrocity in Yemen, Saudi Arabia used internationally-banned cluster bombs in its air assaults against the impoverished country, dropping them on several areas in the district of Baqem in the northern province of Sa'ada on 4 August.

The United Nations' human rights office has recently called for an independent international investigation of cases of human rights violations in the Saudi war on Yemen, confirming the use of banned cluster bombs by Saudi Arabia against Yemen's residential areas. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, an airstrike used US-supplied cluster munitions in a December 12, 2015 attack on the Yemeni port town of Hodaida, injuring a woman and two children in their homes. In May 2016, the US placed a hold on transfers of cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia, but the Saudis are still in possession of significant amounts of cluster

munitions, including some manufactured by Britain, and the civilians' lives continue to be endangered by the coalition attacks that are a blatant violation of human rights and international laws. Meanwhile, the US continues to refuse joining the 119 countries in banning cluster bombs, having the audacity to defend them as having "demonstrated military utility [and] their elimination from US stockpiles would put the lives of its soldiers and those of its coalition partners at risk."

Right behind the US in arms dealers' circle, is the United Kingdom, which, according to a recent report published by the Independent on Sep. 5, has sold a full two-thirds of its weapons since 2010 to Middle Eastern countries. Meanwhile, statistics collated by UK Trade and Investment, a government body that promotes British exports abroad, show the UK has sold more arms than Russia, China, or France on average over the last 10 years.

Despite urgent calls on the British government to stop the sales of weapons to repressive, invasive regimes such as Saudi Arabia, British Foreign secretary Boris Johnson in a statement on Sep. 5 defended UK arms sales to Riyadh, saying the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen is not "in clear breach" of international humanitarian law. The Government also said that it has not seen evidence of Saudi war crimes. Perhaps someone needs to refer British officials to the reports of Human Rights Watch on Saudi atrocities in Yemen?

But as Andrew Smith of Campaign Against Arms Trade once told The Independent, Saudi Arabia and other Arab regimes "aren't just buying weapons, they're also buying political support and legitimacy. How likely is the UK to act against human rights violations in these countries when it is also profiting from them?"

The world needs to know what is happening in Yemen

The UN humanitarian chief's presence at a press conference on Sep. 5 in Tehran provided the perfect opportunity to draw the attention of the media, and subsequently the general public around the world, to the pressing matter of Yemen's crisis and the Yemenis' growing humanitarian needs.

Asking him about Iran and the UN's cooperation in regard to Yemen, Mr. O'Brien referred to Saudi Arabia's blockade of humanitarian aid delivery to Yem- →



en – albeit, without a direct reference to Saudi Arabia, and said “I made it clear during my meetings with Iranian officials that looking back on the very unfortunate time when it was not possible for the humanitarian aid shipped to Yemen to reach those in need, there was a clear advantage in the Iranians delivering their help through the United Nations’ humanitarian response program, because that clearly shows that the motive and the intent of that humanitarian aid was not open to either misinterpretation or manipulation, because the UN humanitarian operations at all times act impartially.”

“That is a highly important and valuable character in everything that we do so that we cannot be accused of being partial in meeting those needs wherever they arise,” he added. “That is why we have asked Iran to send its humanitarian relief through the UN plan as this is a way we can make sure that you are covered by that impartiality, since bilateral supply in a conflict inevitably draws wrong and unfavorable conclusions.”

Mr. O’Brien, in his address on 3 March 2016 to the UN Security Council, talked about the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in Yemen and highlighted the necessity of protecting the civilians, “millions of whom face relentless and often indiscriminate bombing and shelling of urban areas.” He presented a vehement argument that the war needed to stop, that “airstrikes and random shelling of civilian areas violate cardinal rules of international humanitarian law and constitute unlawful conduit of hostilities”, but the majority of the world, or at least that part of the world that contributes the most to the narratives of current developments,

still chose to turn a blind eye to this humanitarian disaster unfolding in Yemen.

“I think you will find that no one would ever accuse me of not shouting about the humanitarian needs in Yemen,” O’Brien said during his press conference in Tehran. “I have often felt I have been shouting into an empty room, assessing the political views of both sides of a very nasty conflict, which has left 80 per cent of the Yemenis in some form of humanitarian need.”

“Of the 21 million people in Yemen who have some form of need, there are about 5 million that we are reaching with essential, life-saving services and we have managed to mobilize some funds,” he said. “I have been putting very strong UN leadership to make sure that the world knows how much we need that humanitarian relief in Yemen.”

The UN official welcomed the opportunity to talk about Yemen, as this would be further coverage of the humanitarian needs in the war-torn country, but he cautiously reminded that he tried not to get involved into politics while trying to mobilize as many humanitarian services as he could for the Yemenis. “It is vital for my duty to observe impartiality, independent and neutrality in all humanitarian missions in the UN and across all other humanitarian partners and to make sure we identify the needs, and the means by which those needs can be met,” he stressed.

Due to this very same concept of impartiality, perhaps, and his reluctance to touch upon politics, the UN humanitarian chief refrains from pointing out the absurdity of the war that has been waged against Yemen under unjustifiable and

selfish pretexts of Saudi Arabia. In fact, in the same address to the Security Council on 3 March, there is not even one single mention of Saudi Arabia as the country responsible for all the carnage that has been going on in Yemen for a year and a half. He mentions ‘Coalition’ three times, but does not make any reference to the countries responsible for the airstrikes, either directly or indirectly, and in a way, his omission falls in line with the purposeful silence of Western media outlets which are careful not to draw too much negative attention to the country that is supplying the U.S. and the UK with billions of dollars for arms deals; the same bloodstained dollar bills that managed to get Saudi Arabia off the UN blacklist of child killers.

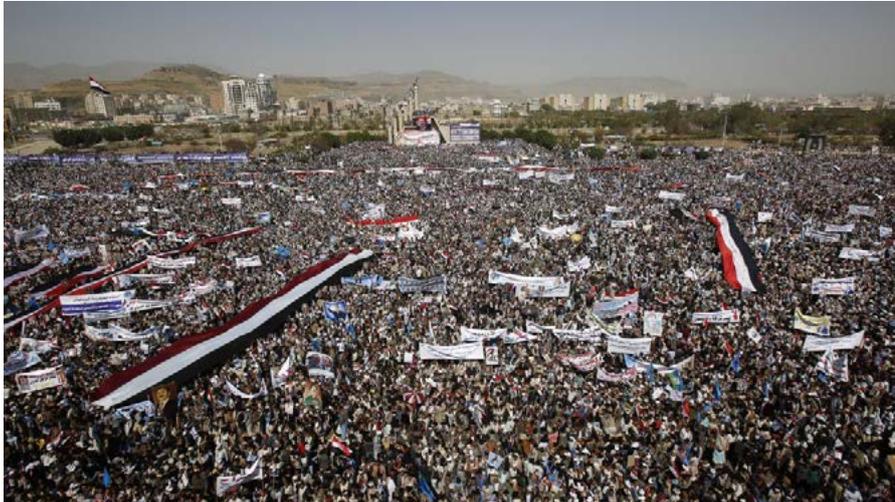
“You will see from my public records my very firm presentations to the Security Council as well as the UN Secretary General Mr. Ban who made a pre-statement that further investigation was required in order to be clear whether there was a justification or not for the inclusion of any kind of allegations about the children’s deaths, which we take with the utmost seriousness,” O’Brien was once again careful not to even mention the name of Saudi Arabia against which those ‘allegations’ were leveled.

“The investigation is still ongoing, and we will come to see how that materializes,” he concluded. While we wait to see how the investigations of the UN would materialize, attacks on schools, hospitals and residential areas in Yemen continue. The country, already one of the poorest in the Middle East, has been dealt great damages to its infrastructures, and its economy is on the verge of collapse. A May 6 joint report by the World Bank, United Nations, Islamic Development Bank and European Union has estimated the damage costs in Yemen at almost \$7 billion and economic losses at over \$7.3 billion.

In the words of Mr. O’Brien himself, “humanitarian action can only temporarily alleviate human suffering. The people of Yemen want lasting peace and security now so that they can rebuild their lives and safely raise their families.” The war in Yemen has been going on far too long, and perhaps it is time the world took notice and did something definitive about it. The media owes it to the children of Yemen whose lives are constantly endangered by a war that should have never been |

Yemen rallies: For democracy, against Saudi Arabia

By: Hamidreza Ghola-



People in Yemen held massive rallies on Saturday to show their support for newly-founded High Political Council formed by Houthis and Abdullah Saleh forces to show off how popular the movement is and to oppose Saudis' support for Mansour Hadi.

An interview of one of Iranian domestic news websites with a former IRGC commander who used to be on mission in Syria absorbed the attention of some foreign media. Mohammad Ali Falaki had shared with Mashregh News his experience in war in Syria and had talked about the strategy of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. One part of his comments which has been interesting to foreign media was where he speaks of a strategy of IRGC in forming a 'liberation army' in the region which according to him is now active in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Al Jazeera, for instance, had considered it an official announcement that Iran is going to have its boots on the ground in these three countries and this presence would be a military one.

What General Falaki has described is the same advisory mission Iran has long been pursuing in Syria and Iraq at the request of the legitimate governments of those countries. What he has elaborated is that the Revolutionary Guards is focusing on mobilization of forces in their own country or region. The so-called Liberation Army, according to Falaki,

is under command of legendary Major General Qassem Suleimani and is currently present in three fronts of Syria, Iraq and Yemen where the two formers are fighting terrorists and the latter is engaged in a futile aggression launched by Saudi Arabia.

What the once IRGC commander has elaborated and the foreign media ignored is that Iran has always asserted that it supports legitimate governments in the volatile region and supports any true measures taken to maintain stability and eradicate terrorism and violence in west of Asia. On the other hand, the presence is advisory and at the request of officials democratically elected by the people of those countries. Moreover, what IRGC and its command over the Liberation Army is seeking is to help people of those countries stand on their own in fight against terrorism and foreign intervention. It can be compared to US program spending \$500 million for training so-called moderate fighters in Syria – who later turned into terrorists or were immediately defeated by them – with the very significant difference that Iran is doing it legally in cooperation with the local governments and with respect for those nations and the US did it regardless of the people and governments of target countries.

In other words, while the West is abusing instability of the region to follow its own interests under the pretext

of war on terrorism, Iran not only is 'really' fighting terrorists, but also is following its principle policy of supporting and contributing to democracy and nation's will in countries suffering instability and insecurity. This difference in discourse and policy of Iran and US is the reason why Tehran could easily play a role in Yemen and Washington didn't have enough pretext to intervene. Iran has always affirmed that it supports what the people of a country really want; the very same solution is what Iran has offered and supported for Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and even Palestine.

While on one side of the story Iran has been supporting Houthis – inaccurately considered and depicted as Shia by western media – and revolutionary people in Yemen, Saudi Arabia – with the green light of the United States and western states – launched a regrettable war on the poor country. Riyadh claimed that it supports former president of the country Mansour Hadi and as one of rare countries in the world which have had no elections in their history and women are still deprived of basic rights such as driving cars, announced that its massive bombardment of civilian areas in Yemen is for returning democracy to the country by reinstating Mansour Hadi. Hadi, fugitive former president of Yemen, came to power after revolutions in region arrived in Yemen and toppled longstanding President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Mansour Hadi who had took power within agreement with Houthis and revolutionary forces to form a transitional government, refused to leave the position and stirred public anger and ended up in taking refuge in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi efforts to form an international or a regional alliance proved futile within last 16 months and many countries denied being part of the coalition and some left it after unfair, brutal attacks on civilians took many casualties and world public opinion raised pressure on human catastrophe in Yemen. The situation in Yemen is terrible enough to force

the United Nations to report on child killings and put the name of Saudi Arabia among child-killing regimes. The fact, however, was embarrassingly erased with political and financial pressure of Riyadh on the UN and Secretary General Ban Ki-moon officially announced that Saudi Arabia was removed from the report due to the pressures and threats to cut its funding for UN.

An airstrike on a hospital run by Médecins Sans Frontières, or Doctors Without Borders, caused more public anger and scandal for Saudis. Many western people across the world are questioning their governments in the United States, the Britain and France over massive arms sales to Riyadh. Oxfam has reported that the UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia were in violation of Britain's national, regional and international arms transfer obligations under three different regulations including the Arms Trade Treaty, which the United Kingdom has strongly supported.

These and many other issues such as use of illegal weapons by the Saudis and Riyadh's incapability to achieve its objectives in Yemen, have turned it into a terrible quagmire for the Arab country. Latest developments in Yemen are a turning the situation into a new chapter which proves Iran's policy and has forced US to withdraw from its stance. On Thursday August 18, Yemen announced formation of High Political Council as the parliament of the country and on the day after, a senior official described that the political council

was responsible to form government in order to run political, military, security, economic, administrative, social and other affairs of the country. The government comprises 10 members half of whom are from Houthis and other half are made up by forces loyal to ousted president Abdullah Saleh. So far, the announcement received mixed reactions as a UN chief advisor criticized the move as hindering negotiations, and some approved of it.

Yet, what happened in Sanaa on Saturday seems to be a game-changer as tens of thousands of Yemenis poured to the streets to support the Council. The massive rallies witnessed Saudi jet-fighters maneuvering overhead the crowds and targeted outskirts of the city to terrify the demonstrators; but the population in return condemned Saudi aggression and shouted unity with the High Political Council.

As Tehran had repeatedly emphasized that its support for Houthis and revolutionary forces was due to their popularity among nation and the support in fact goes to the people, the huge turnout of people from all walks of life was a proof that the Council benefits from public support and receives legitimacy from nation. On the other hand, while US has been sort of forced into supporting Saudis as its ally in the region and had done it in the minimum ways including advisories and refueling assistances, they sharply reduced the number of American forces assigned to 'Joint Combined Planning Cell' on last weekend from 45

staff to less than five people according to US Navy spokesman in Bahrain Lieutenant Ian McConnaughey quoted as saying to Reuters.

Yemen is another sample showing who is truly seeking democracy, peace and stability in the region and who is supporting dictators and terrorist groups in the region. As Iran's insistence on remaining of Assad in power in Syria to avoid a power vacuum and on people's role in determining their own destiny proved later to be the right policy to avoid another Libya in region, the emphasis on political solution for Yemen and people's role is another right policy in a volatile region which desires peace and stability. Yemenis showed that they consider no place for Mansour Hadi in the politics of their country and rejected Saudi claims for reinstating him.

The only way to bring the humanitarian crisis in Yemen to an end is the United States, western countries and other Arab states in the region convince Saudi Arabia to leave Yemen and stop fanning the flames of war and aggression in Yemen and elsewhere. Otherwise, Riyadh would either suffer serious internal problems and lose its weight in region or will act irrationally and get the situation in western Asia even worse than the current turmoil.

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 |





Why encroaching on Iranian soil is an unattainable dream?

By: Lachin Rezaian

Iran's strong defense capabilities and military achievements in spite of the sanctions against defense sector have foiled enemies' intentions and objectives through the 37 years after the Islamic Revolution.

In recent years, Iran has made major breakthroughs in its defense sector and attained self-sufficiency in producing key military hardware and systems.

By attaining self-sufficiency and producing new achievements, which have been acknowledged by international experts, Iran has so far designed and manufactured different domestically developed missiles, radars, satellites, drones, tanks, aircrafts, destroyers, etc.

The Islamic Republic has also conducted military drills to enhance the defense capabilities of its military and to test modern military tactics and

equipment, including Beit-ul-Muqaddas 27, Beit ul-Muqaddas 28, and Great Prophet.

Iran's military show has provoked enemies to condemn its self-sufficiency, military power and achievements as a threat to the world, especially the region.

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

Ayatollah Khamenei has issued a fatwa (religious decree) on prohibition of weapons of mass destruction. He has on many occasions stressed that the production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons is Haram (religiously forbidden) and the Islamic Republic considers the pursuit and possession of nuclear weapons as a great sin.

Iranian Defense Minister Hossein

Dehghan has hailed Iran's defense sector, adding in spite of the sanctions against defense sector, the armed forces have foiled enemies' intentions and objectives by attaining self-sufficiency and producing new achievements, and will do the same in the future.

The threats of military action by the US and its ally, Israel, against Iran, as well as the illegal unilateral sanctions by Washington and the European Union are based on the allegation that Iran's nuclear energy program pursues military purposes, a claim Iran has categorically rejected.

Dehghan has reiterated that the Islamic Republic needs no permission from anyone to boost its military and missile capabilities. "We will decisively follow our defense program objectives and expand our missile capabilities."

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addressing a meeting of government officials in →



cluding President Rouhani on August 24, said enemies of Iran are strongly opposed to Iran's military and defense capabilities and make every effort to prevent its growth.

Iran, as a country living in the most unstable and volatile region of the world, is fully entitled to build a credible conventional capability to deter and defend against any aggression.

Iran's military achievements aim to fully repel any enemy threat. Israeli officials have repeatedly talked of a military strike against Iran, however, the regime's top commanders have opposed such action warning against the repercussions of a war with the Islamic Republic.

Over the past 37 years after the Islamic Revolution, Iranian military defense industry has always been progressing, producing new achievements in the field of defense capabilities; various sectors of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, the Islamic Army and Iran's Department of Defense despite tough sanctions, have relied on domestic power, talents and capacities to design, manufacture and test modern and advanced equipment, with missile tests, unveiling of defense systems, aircraft launch, express boats production with higher speeds, producing modern weapons and making numerous ships are only a few kinds of Iran's capabilities in the field of defense.

Scientists and experts of Defense Ministry and Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran have brought

about important and valuable achievement for the Iranian nation. Through the production of critical military projects and satellite launch, the country has been freed from dependence on western countries; delivery of 20 helicopters, cruise missiles, drones, satellite are among the most important achievements of the organization.

The following presents some of the new military-defense systems and equipment Iranian experts have achieved so far:

Missiles and air defense missile systems

Nowadays along with other technologies, missile technology adds strength to the country's armed services. At present of technological advancements, every country which has a well-known military power, is trying to enhance its missile technology because it becomes a real important tool in modern confrontations.

While talking about missile technology developments in The Middle East, Iran is one of the leading countries in that perspective which has the complete missile systems.

Here is the list of some important missiles of Iran's military system:

Missiles

Emad

Emad is a liquid-fuel, intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) with a claimed range of 1,700 km and 750 kg payload. It was first unveiled in 2015.

With an advanced guidance and control system in its nose cone, the missile's accuracy is reported to be around 500 meters. The missile is capable of striking targets with great precision.

Qadr

Qadr (sometimes referred as the Ghadr) is the most advanced Iranian liquid-propellant medium range ballistic missile which has more than 2000 km range, about 100 m CEP and carries a single 700 - 1000 kg warhead.

Talash

Talash missile defense system is a long- and medium-range system with a domestic missile capability designed and manufactured by the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL). It is synced up with the Iranian air defense missiles, Sayyad 2 and 3.

Bavar 373

Bavar-373 is a long-range mobile air defense system which uses a phased array radar like Russian 96L6 for tracking aerodynamic targets and ballistic missiles in medium to long ranges, mounted on the ZAFAR heavy truck.

Mersad

Mersad is an Iranian advanced low to mid range Air defense system developed in 2010. It fires Shahin (Falcon) missiles which are reverse engineered, domestically upgraded versions of the American MIM-23 Hawk Surface-to-air missiles. It uses a series of domestically produced radars and Electronic devices.

Sayyad

Sayyad (Hunter) is a mid-range, high altitude solid-fuel missile and can destroy different types of helicopters, drones and targets with small radar cross-section and high speed and maneuverability within its operational range.

Radars

Ghadir

The Ghadir radar system has been designed to identify aerial targets, radar-evading aircrafts, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles as well as low-altitude satellites. It is equipped with over 100 antennas which are capable of 360 degree rotation. The Ghadir radar system is capable of discovering and tracking planes from a 600-kilometer distance and ballistic missiles from a →

distance of 1,100 kilometers; it detects objects at an altitude of up to 100 kilometers.

Fath 14

Fath 14 is a state-of-the-art long-range radar system domestically produced to be attached to missile systems and is capable of discovering hostile aircraft or drones. It covers areas 600km in range and is capable of tracking small flying objects in high altitudes.

Bidar

Bidar is a surveillance and intelligence analyst system and its main characteristic is that it is untraceable.

Nazir

Nazir is a long-range and high-precision radar system capable of detecting targets with its low cross section ability. The system is protected against anti-radar missiles and enjoys the ability to detect targets at ranges in excess of 800 km and a height of 100 feet.

Bina

Bina is a 3D high-resolution control radar which has great ability in detection and identification of potential targets with low radar cross section, and can fully fight against electronic warfare while also detecting stealth targets.

Kashef

Kashef is a series of Iranian early warning radars developed by SAIRAN. Currently there are two versions in service, Kashef 1 and Kashef 2. Kashef 1 is a 2D radar operates in S-Band and has a range of 150 km. Kashef 2 is externally very different from Kashef 1. It uses a different net-like antenna that can be split in 3 parts to reduce the time needed for setup and breakdown. The range is 200 km and the maximum number of targets it can track simultaneously is increased to 1000. It uses 30 kW of power.

Aircraft and Helicopters

Ghaheer-313

It is a single-seat stealth fighter and multi-role combat aircraft that was publicly announced in 2013.

Saegheh 2

It is a twin-seat fighter jet, which has more power, mobility, navigation equipment, fire power, pay load and operational range compared to its single-seat version.



Panha 2091

Panha or Toufan is an Iranian overhaul and upgrade of the Bell AH-1J International (export version of the Sea Cobra) light-attack helicopters.

Armored Vehicles

Zulfiqar MBT

Zulfiqar is an Iranian main battle tank (MBT) and has a distinctive box-shaped, steel-welded turret of local design. It has three variants; the Zulfiqar-3 is the most advanced variant of the Zulfiqar family. It features considerable upgrades to the fire control system, chassis, engine and main gun. The new variant is equipped with the 2A46 125 mm smoothbore cannon with an autoloader, a laser rangefinder and a new fire control system.

Rakhsh

It is a lightweight 4x4 cross-country APC developed and produced by DIO's Shahid Kolah Dooz Industrial Complex and named after Rakhsh, the mythical horse of Rostam in Shahnama. It is in service of Iranian Police, Iranian Army, IRGC and Sudan.

Cobra BMT-2

It is an Iranian armored personnel carrier armed with a 30 mm autocannon or a ZU-23-2 anti-aircraft gun.

Tosan

It is an Iranian light tank for unconventional warfare and can drive long distances on its tracks and does not need to be carried on trucks.

UAV

Tehran has gained a lot of experience in making drones after the country first used the aircraft for military use. The Islamic Republic has so far unveiled various domestically produced drones, including Ababil, Fotros, Hazem, Karrar (long range attack drone), Mohajer, Sarir, Shahed 129, Yasir and Zohal. Iran unveiled its first domestically manufactured long-range UAV named Karrar in 2010. The first Iranian medium-altitude long-endurance UAV, the Shahed-129 was unveiled in September 2012, which is capable of carrying out combat and reconnaissance eight missions for 24 hours and has a range of 1,700 km.

Ababil

The Ababil, much smaller than manned airplanes, is a domestically-manufactured naval surveillance plane. Ababil-5 is for medium-range reconnaissance and surveillance missions and the Ababil-T is designed for short, medium-range attack missions.

Karrar

It is the first long-range unmanned aerial drone manufactured in Iran and single-use drone which has a range of about 600 miles.

Toofan

Toofan is an Iranian UAV which has been developed to find and destroy the enemies through optical explorer. In this type of mission, the UAV is designed for battle and with small dimensions, it could approach to the enemy →

without being detected and its high speed makes any reaction extremely difficult.

Mohajer 4

Mohajer 4 was manufactured for air surveillance and target identification from 150Km distance. It may be capable of guiding laser-guided munitions to their targets. Its fuselage is redesigned and features low mounted trapezoid shaped wings with upward-canted wingtips to lessen the drag. Operational range of the drone is almost double of the older versions.

Shahed 129

It is a UCAV with 24-hour flight capability and armed with Sadid missiles. It is capable of carrying out combat and reconnaissance missions with an endurance of 24 hours, making it the first Iranian MALE UAV.

non-stop and create less noise, and can be easily repaired as well. The drone is 12 KG heavy and the vertical flight drone can move carrying consignment up to 3 kg, and can be used for emergency such as carrying scorpion and snake bites serums.

Mohajem 92

Mohajem 92 is a drone that has a range of 500 kilometers (310 miles) with a maximum speed of 200 kph (125 mph). It was manufactured by the self-sufficiency department of the Islamic Republic Air Force.

Fotros

Fotros is a drone with a range of 2,000 km and can remain aloft for between 16 and 30 hours. Fotros can carry missiles for air-to-ground attacks. In theory, this makes the Fotros roughly equivalent to the drones that the US.

Forces since the end of Iraqi imposed war on Iran in 1988, to undermine Iran's military strength and defense achievements.

However, as Iranian commanders, defense minister, president and many high-ranking officials comment, every achievement unveiled in Iran's military system is for the stability, security and peace in the region.

Iran definitely enjoys the right to defend against any outside threat and for this purpose operates within the international law which indicates no flying target is allowed to invade Iranian air space.

Iranian officials have repeatedly underlined that the country's missile program and defense capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran are not negotiable with any country, under any circumstance.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has underlined that Iran's missile tests did not violate the nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), clinched by Iran and the 5+1 countries on July 14, 2015.

Accordingly, Iran's missile launches have never been against the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the nuclear agreement. Resolution 2231 (2015) provides for the termination of the provisions of previous Security Council resolutions on the Iranian nuclear program and establishes specific restrictions that apply to all states without exception.

The resolution calls upon Iran not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology. It does not prohibit legitimate and conventional military activities, nor does international law disallow them, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif has reiterated.

Iran has never sought to acquire nuclear weapon and never will in the future, as it fully honors its commitment under the NPT and the JCPOA. Iran will continue with its defense capabilities and that these defense capabilities have nothing to do with nuclear weapons |



Dorna

Dorna with maximum speed of 220Kmph in 3300m altitude is the second generation of Mohajer-2 with the intention of improving range and flight endurance.

Roham

Roham can receive photogrammetry (mapping from aerial photographs) data, fly and hover over sea or mountainous and forested areas, land on and take off from any location, monitor a specific target at low altitudes and patrol an area at a high speed.

Hodhod 3

Hodhod 3 is an unmanned multi-rotor which is capable of operating without a band. It can fly for 53 minutes

These are only a few instances of showing Iran's defense and military achievements.

Iran's progress in military arena has sparked concerns and criticisms from its enemies, most notably the US, in the world and the region.

The United States is concerned about Iran's increasing missile power and tries to use it as a pretext to undermine the Iranian Establishment which is mostly flimsy and legally worthless, however, indicative of Westerners long-term policy which shows they do not want the Islamic Republic to be powerful enough to ensure regional security.

They have increasingly imposed economic sanctions against Iran's Armed

Merkel under fire over 'open-door' refugee policy

By: Maryam Azish

In July, Germany was rattled by several attacks, three of which authorities say have been carried out by asylum seekers or refugees inspired by extremists.

A series of bloody attacks on civilians in July have focused attention on German Chancellor Angela Merkel's open-door migrant policy, which allowed hundreds of thousands of migrants from the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere into Germany last year and resulted in a decline in her domestic popularity in the European country.

According to a survey published in the newspaper "Bild am Sonntag", fifty percent of Germans oppose Merkel, blamed for her moderate asylum policy for exposing the country to a shocking bloodshed, seeking a fourth consecutive term.

Results indicate that 50 percent of poll participants were against a new term for the Chancellor, while 42 percent were in favor.

Party support

Meanwhile, within supporters of Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), 70 percent support another term for Merkel, while 22 percent said they were opposed.

So far Merkel, who was first appointed as Chancellor in November 2005 and is serving her third term, has yet to announce whether or not she will seek a fourth term as Chancellor.

According to the German magazine "Der Spiegel," Merkel is waiting to see if she has the backing of the CDU's Bavarian sister-party, the Christian Social Union (CSU). The next German federal elections are expected to be held at some point between August 27 and October 22, 2017. Merkel was first appointed as Chancellor in November 2005 and is serving her third term.

Recently, the sudden rise of attacks in Germany has encouraged political rivals of Merkel, criticizing her modest asylum policy.

The attacks have revived a backlash

against Merkel's decision last year to open the borders to those fleeing war and persecution.

In the span of a week in July, an axe rampage, a shooting spree, a knife attack and a suicide bombing stunned Germany, leaving 13 people dead, including three assailants and dozens wounded.

Defending Open-Door Policy

Defending her open-door policy towards refugees, Merkel, who has led Europe's economic powerhouse for nearly 11 years, is insisting she feels no guilt over a series of violent attacks in Germany and was right to allow hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees to arrive last summer.

"A rejection of the humanitarian stance we took could have led to even worse consequences," the German chancellor said, adding that the assailants "wanted to undermine our sense of community, our openness and our willingness to help people in need. We firmly reject this."

Recognizing how fearful people were about their personal safety, she said: "We're doing everything humanly possible to ensure security in Germany," acknowledging the "huge degree of insecurity people feel as a result of the recent events, that people are scared". But, she said, "fear cannot be a counsel for political action".

Anti-Merkel Rally

On July 30, over 5,000 protested in Berlin and thousands more throughout Germany over the 'open-door' policy that many have blamed for four brutal terrorist attacks that left 13 dead over the last month, while a key political ally Horst Seehofer, the conservative premier of Bavaria, dramatically withdrew his support over immigration policy.

Seehofer has launched a fresh attack on her leadership, distancing his party from Merkel and straining the coalition that keeps her in power.



Stressing he had no wish to start a quarrel with Merkel's party, Seehofer said it was important to look 'reality' in the face.

'Merkel must go' has been trending on social media, with people posting powerful pictures including one claiming that she has blood on her hands after recent attacks.

A survey found that 83 per cent of Germans see immigration as their nation's biggest challenge - twice as many as a year ago.

Recent attacks have fuelled the right-wing movement, which has long called for stricter immigration controls, particularly in Bavaria, where she faces heavy criticism from high-profile politicians.

New Asylum Policy

The violence reignited political friction that had eased as the number of new arrivals to Germany slowed to a trickle in recent months due to the closure of the Balkans migration route and an EU deal with Turkey to take back migrants.

According to German government, some 222,000 asylum-seekers arrived in this European country in the first half of this year, reflecting a much-reduced influx.

Last year, nearly 1.1 million people were registered as asylum-seekers in Germany. Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said he won't forecast how many will arrive in 2016, given uncertainty about developments.

Public conscience in the international community view Merkel's stand toward the refugees in the context of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The question come to the mind of the ordinary people regardless of their partisan affiliation is that what to do with the refugees standing behind the borders of the European states in the cold weather? |

By: *Lachin Rezaian*

Etiquette of diplomacy is a set of common principles and rules of good behavior diplomatic figures observe to show their courtesy and respect for another culture they stay in.

The significance attached to the general concepts and fundamental principles of diplomatic etiquette is to the extent that sometimes disagreement over the question of which foreign policy chief must, for example, first stretch out his/her hand to shake hands with the opposite side, has led to the disruption of a major international agreement.

Islamic Republic of Iran, as a member of the United Nations, is obliged to implement formalities, customs and diplomatic etiquette and expects the same from those who travel to Iran for diplomatic reasons.

One of the basic principles and fundamental rules of protocol or the etiquette of diplomacy in foreign travel includes attending to the culture and customs of the host country and generally the opposite side; This is an international practice to respect and observe the customs and traditions of the host country which may even be broadly inconsistent with the cultural context of the visiting person.

The dos and don'ts of a social life exist based on the fixed and common patterns in all societies; how they are implemented in a special culture is according to the values and beliefs of the community.

Thus, although all societies may assume some behaviors polite and some others impolite, they are defined only by the culture of each community, so that good behavior and manners in a category may not be acceptable in any other category.

The issue is highly regarded in Iran's cultural context, because Iran is an Islamic country with special diplomatic codes, maybe not existing in many other countries, including Islamic dress code, handshakes between women and men, ban on alcohol use and etc.

Greeting in certain countries have national overtone. Handshake is the main form of greeting in Iran, however, it is forbidden to shake hands with women.

Clothes are also an essential element,

When cultural courtesy becomes diplomacy



because it is a part of appearance. It should be modest and conservative and women must wear hijab in their meetings with Iranian officials in Iran's territory.

Foreigners should respect national traditions in food. They should avoid drinking alcohol, which is prohibited strictly in Iran.

However, unfortunately, in recent years, communicating with some European and Western diplomatic and political figures have brought about some problems according to which even basic diplomatic etiquette that should be observed by foreign guests have been easily ignored and violated in Iranian territory raising many criticisms in different ways.

For example, Senior Foreign Office official Deborah Bronnert represented the British government at the reopening of the Iranian embassy in London without covering her head.

Emma Bonino, the Italian foreign minister, had resisted covering her hair during a trip to Iran after her plane landed in Tehran. Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, explained her that compliance with hijab is a part of the ceremonial protocols for female diplomats visiting Iran, and if she did not abide by them, all of her scheduled appointments would be cancelled. Reportedly, Benino covered her hair and

left the plane.

Dutch politician Marietje Schaake is the most famous case who appeared in public meetings and ceremonies in Iran with an improper outfit for formal setting and totally incompatible with the rules and traditions of Iranian dressing codes.

The hijab law Article 102 passed by Iranian Parliament says: "Women within the Islamic Republic, be they Iranians or foreigners, Muslims or non-Muslims, must comply with hijab requirements while in public places and public view. In 1997, the law was developed further in Article 638 of the Islamic Penal Code.

Despite such explanations for demanding that foreign diplomats observe cultural requirements in Iran, some ignore and disrespect the law and norms.

This is also true about consuming alcohol in Iran. The import, sale, manufacture and consumption of alcohol in Iran is strictly forbidden on religious grounds, with exceptions only for certain recognized Iranian religious minorities- not foreigners.

Three years ago, a drunk employee of Saudi Arabia Embassy in Tehran Yaser bin Muhammad Ali Yami killed an Iranian driver and wounded another in a fatal car accident in Tehran. Four bottles of alcoholic beverage was found in the employee's car. Iranian officials deported him from the country and asked Sau-

di government to punish the offender and pay compensation for vioaltions.

In the latest episode, Japanese Ambassador Hiroyasu Kobayashi was briefly detained and questioned by Iran's security forces on April 28 when he and his wife attended a dinner hosted by a local acquaintance and at which alcohol was served.

Prohibition of alcohol consumption, wearing hijab for women, shake hands and public display of affections between a man and a woman, and some other codes are parts of a culture and social codes in an Iranian society and the law supports and protects them as well.

This is true for the Iranian representatives as well. They are not allowed to attend events serving alcohol. Recently Iranian President Hassan Rouhani refused to dine at the Elysée presidential palace because wine was served during the meal. Although Iran had requested a halal menu, which customarily means no alcohol, France was unwilling to break with the tradition surrounding official state lunches and dinners.

However, his visit to Italy went much more smoothly with officials keeping alcohol off the menu at state dinners and even covering up its ancient nude statues in Rome as they signed £12bn worth of business deals. Iranian officials did not request the statues be covered up but were said to appreciate the gesture.

Everyone, including Iranians, foreign diplomats, and tourists should obey and respect the etiquette, formalities, rules, and cultural principles of the country, regardless of the fact that it is incompatible with their own culture and norms |

DAPL: A broken treaty, a lost promise



By: **Fatemeh Ravangard**

On September 3, 2016 members of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and a large group of supporters including environmentalists showed up to voice their objection to the \$3.8 billion, 1,172-mile-long Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), built by Energy Transfer Partners—the company in charge of the Dakota Access pipeline.

The peaceful protesters, who were members of around 200 tribes, were raising tribal flags in opposition to the oil pipeline that would cross right through their sacred lands that are the resting places of their ancestors and revered to the Lakota and Dakota people. In only one day, bulldozers destroyed sacred tribal sites “turning the place into hollow ground,” according to Standing Rock Sioux chairman David Archambault II. “This demolition is devastating,” Archambault claimed. “These grounds are the resting places of our ancestors. The ancient cairns and stone prayer rings there cannot be replaced.”

But that is not where the story ends. The pipeline which was licensed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in late July is a major threat to the tribe's water supply. Transportation of fossil fuels through

the pipeline, as reported by environmentalists, might “contaminate their (Native Americans’) water resources infringe on their fishing rights, or desecrate their sacred lands.”

Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners has arranged for nearly half a million barrels of crude oil to be carried from the Bakken shale directly to the U.S. Gulf per day. The oil is planned to be transferred through the 1,172-mile (1886 kilometer) pipeline which would pass through the Dakotas and Iowa on its way to Illinois or better said, it would cross public waterways including the Missouri and Mississippi rivers.

Native Americans consider water as their first medicine and believe in water protection as a means of energy security, agricultural security and national security. That's why they have treaty rights over land and water use. As agreed upon, the U.S. government is obliged to take account of these treaties and prevent any kind of violation of tenets of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of indigenous peoples, including the “right to health, right to water and subsistence, threats against sacred sites including burial grounds, treaty rights, cultural and ceremonial practices, free prior and informed consent, traditional lands and resources including water, productive capacity of the environment, —

and self-determination.”

But the Dakota Access Pipeline project has turned out to be a direct violation of Native Americans’ rights since it poses an inevitable threat to the Missouri River upon which the Tribe depends. What is intimidating is that the tribes’ subsistence and their physical and cultural health will be threatened due to “potential contamination by oil spills directly impacting their drinking water.”

Rallies were scheduled and large groups of Native Americans held peaceful protests in North Dakota’s Standing Rock Sioux. Moreover, some tribal youths ran 2,000 miles from the Standing Rock Reservation to Washington to save their land and their future. The peaceful and prayerful protests, however, were met with violence by security guards hired by the company. The protesters in North Dakota’s Standing Rock Sioux were threatened, pepper sprayed and some were even bitten and injured by guard dogs. According to Georgianne Nienaber of Huffington Post, “prayers have been met with attack dogs, blockades re-routing traffic routes to the reservation, low flying planes constantly buzzing the encampments of the water protectors, and the militarization of roads by the National Guard.”

Along with Native Americans, large groups of peaceful protesters around the U.S. gathered in solidarity against the pipeline, holding signs and banners and chanting “Oil Kills.” Whereas the demonstrators enjoyed the support of big names such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Pharrell Williams, celebrities like actresses Shailene Woodley and Susan Sarandon also joined the rally. Likewise, U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, a former Democratic U.S. presidential candidate who was among the protesters, spoke at a rally in the nation’s capital stating that:

“We cannot allow our drinking water to be poisoned so that a handful of fossil fuel companies can make even more in profits... This pipeline must be stopped! ... Stop the pipeline, respect Native American rights and let us move forward to transform our energy systems away from fossil fuels.”

As the candidate whose priorities during his Democratic presidential nomination was to meet the challenges of climate change and Native American issues, Sanders pointed out the federal

government’s relationship to the Native Americans, proposing that, “the Native American people in this country have been taken advantage of for too long, they have been lied to, they have been exploited. That has got to change.” He also called on President Obama, demanding him to take action against the controversial Dakota Access oil pipeline and to react to violation of Native Americans’ rights.

In the first place, the federal government notified the demonstrators not to interfere with the rights of Energy Transfer Partners, since they have obtained the local, state, and federal approvals to construct the pipeline. The peaceful protesters, however, remained steadfast calling international attention to a renewal of Native American activism.

This led the federal government to step in on September 16, 2016 to halt the project and to ask the company for a spontaneous pause on construction of the pipeline near the reservation so that the court could have more time to review the initial decision and determine whether Energy Transfer Partners has correctly followed federal environmental law in granting permits. The government also agreed on meeting with Native American leaders later this fall to come to a conclusion on the subject based on evidence and observations.

In the meantime Archambault broke the news that the Cannonball Ranch—“where there are known and unknown burial grounds”—was sold to the pipeline company and that “months of prayerful and peaceful protest have come under additional assault with the sale of private land adjoining the protest area to Dakota Access LLC.” In a fait accompli, ETP has purchased roughly 9,000 acres of a privately owned ranch adjacent to the federal land at a price of \$18 million (not officially known), and is now the owner and is brazenly going to try to move forward without any consideration of Native American tribes.

It is also stated by Georgianne Nienaber that, “Constant emails and phone calls to the press officer in charge of inquiries regarding the special permit have gone unanswered. (Also) phone messages left for personnel in other departments go unreturned.” Therefore, it is crystal clear that unfortunately the gag order is going to remain in full effect and another tricky treaty with Native

Americans is now ready to be added to the glorious heresies of the federal government. But this case raises the question about who is behind the tragedy of building the pipeline.

As mentioned previously, (ETP) or Energy Transfer Partners’ majority sponsorship of the \$3.8 billion pipeline project reveals it has the most on the line. Behind ETP itself, is a billionaire—Kelcy Warren—who is very fond of taking advantage of tragedies and silver lining in disasters. Warren, who is a rock and roll aficionado, is ETP’s infamous chairman and CEO and known for systematic attempts to manipulate natural gas prices in Houston in the fall of 2005 and making \$12 billion on Hurricane Rita. The gold digger guy is also notorious for making \$7.3 billion out of oil bust. Swooping in and buying small oil companies out, during the dark times of oil industry is Warren’s obsession. As he mentioned in an interview with Bloomberg last year, “the most wealth I’ve ever made is during the dark times.”

The Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton was criticized in a Sept. 7 Los Angeles Times op-ed by Vermont author and environmentalist Bill McKibben for not taking a stand on the pipeline. McKibben believes there must be “a connection between her (Clinton’s) reticence and support from the fossil fuel industry and banks.” According to McKibben, “the people who’ve built Clinton’s campaign war chest and her personal fortune are the same people who paid for the dogs that bit young Native Americans.” Likewise, large groups of environmentalists and activists have recently accused Hillary Clinton of apparent support for the pipeline. “They’ve been using backdoor process to get the pipeline approved,” said Dallas Goldtooth, a Native American activist with the Indigenous Environmental Network.

In a last stitch effort, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe has appealed to the United Nations addressing the human rights commission in Geneva on Tuesday. But it is clear that the case of the Standing Rock Sioux is another shameful example of treaties broken and violated by the U.S. Government. The whole world is watching what is going on to Native Americans one more time, but will goodwill overcome the deep pockets of pipe line billionaire interests? |

Why has Trump never been a postmodern candidate?

By: Abbas Torabi

In some articles about Donald J. Trump's controversial stances on various issues during his presidential campaign speeches, a few analysts have been arguing for months that Trump is a postmodern candidate, since he rejects all norms and rules of politics.

For instance, owing to the fact that he has not raised almost any money or he would like to ignore being endorsed by GOP leaders and so on. These are few of many examples that have led a number of analysts to come to the conclusion that Trump is a post-modern candidate. But, what do these positions and statements really describe? Modernism, postmodernism, or neither? Can showcasing the kids instead of Republican Party's big names, be regarded as a postmodern approach? Is insulting rival presidential campaign nominee - by using taboo words like "world-class liar" and "crooked" - during a presidential debate in accordance with post-modernist rationality? What should a person like this be called, while he is mocking and scoffing at all political norms and rules?

It seems, for a more detailed study of the issue, we first need a more precise definition of both modernism and postmodernism. As a matter of fact, the emergence of modernism can be traced back to religious wars of Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the 16th-17th centuries that paved the way for ratification of the Peace of Westphalia signed on 24 October 1648, which brought to an end thirty years of war between Catholicism and Protestantism. Some characteristics of modernism in conformity with the Westphalian paradigm include: Nation-state building and the fact that every state has sovereignty over its territory and other states have to respect the principle of territorial integrity.



Self-sufficiency is the second one that modernist rationality proponents are trying to achieve. National security is the third characteristic and according to modernistic approach, a broad set of threats has surrounded national security. Frankly speaking, national security is a concept which developed mainly in the U.S. immediately following World War II, and generally means "the ability of a nation to protect its internal values from external threats." That is to say, national security is the protection of the state and citizens through different means: militarily, economically, and diplomatically. In short, in the realm of modernism, the strategy of national security becomes more and more a threat-based strategy.

The other cornerstone of the modernistic approach is so-called "controlled border" and border restrictions. Indeed, in accordance with modernism, every sovereign state has intended to impose harsh immigration restrictions on geographical boundaries. Strictly speaking, in modernism, we are facing harsh immigration policies and a severe treatment by the border patrol members, which makes border crossing very difficult. Therefore, in modernism,

the rules of geographical boundaries are drafted in such a way that are not in line with "free migration policy" and the "open border" idea. Truth be told, modernist rationality regards both "open border" and "free migration" policies as gravest threats to security and public safety. Nationalism is the next product of modernism. In actuality, the creation of modern societies and Nation-State based on Westphalian model, has led to nationalism and formation of a kind of social solidarity, which promotes national unity and patriotism among the given members of a specific territory.

We have seen unique heritage and culture of different ethnic groups within distinguished geographical boundaries, in view of the fact that, the idea of nationalism advocates controlled borders and territorial integrity. Literally, nationalism has the power to keep the people of one nation together and draw a red line between dissimilar nationalities. In a modern world, we have seen, clear national borders alongside strong traditional and national sentiments among the people of one nation. Based on nationalist approach, every real nation must have precise and controlled →

borders, otherwise, it cannot be called a nation. Moreover, nationalists believe that more safeguards are needed for a nation's cultural heritage, which is sacred and whose safety cannot be guaranteed except by controlled borders. Likewise, they consider floods of mass immigration from other countries as a great menace to society's sacred cultural heritage.

After studying modernism and its various aspects, now it's time to analyze postmodernism and its distinguished characteristics. Globalization is one of the prominent aspects of postmodernism. According to Anthony Giddens, a British sociologist who is famous for his "structuration theory" and his holistic view of modern societies, "globalization is identified as the intensification of worldwide social relations which links distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa." Globalization has become a familiar enough word and its meaning has been discussed as the elimination of barriers, particularly geographical barriers to trade, communication, and culture exchange. So, in this framework, globalization can be considered a threatening factor to nationalism, because this approach doesn't care about borders and regards nationalism as the manifestation of the greed of individuals. Globalists believe the nation-state is an invalid and outdated phenomenon as well, owing to the fact that it has been found inefficient and left from an antique Westphalia order that no longer works. In truth, they dismiss Westphalia as an inadequate system and obsolete world order that has tried to interrupt or obstruct the formation of any integrated and interdependent world for centuries.

In a postmodern world, nationalism and the sense of belonging to a specific country have dwindled and as such, through increased interdependence, national and territorial barriers would be weakened between countries. In this regard, the founder of China Pro-Democracy Support Network, John Kusumi, argues that, "globalization is the anti-thesis of nationalism as it suggests that there are

no boundaries, just one globe." That is, in the wake of diminishing borders and growing interaction between people of different regions, postmodern citizens will be able to see a more integrated, more interdependent, and more troubled and conflicted world. For this reason, when more people of disparate nationalities come together and commence interactions, this eventually would lead to more disputes. With the blurring of borders, in addition to the easy movement of people around the globe, mixed cultures would rise instead of national cultures.

Furthermore, by implementing "open borders policy", wealthy countries would be flooded by immigrants from poorer countries and this policy's unintended consequences most likely will introduce many risks and security challenges to postmodern citizens. In such a world, everything becomes interdependent and all human beings will share the same fate, because the fate of one nation is linked to the fate of other nations.

Now, it's time to answer why Donald J. Trump has never been a postmodernist presidential candidate. As we discussed above, postmodernism challenges the existence of borders between countries, in particular geographical boundaries, which according to modernist rationality, should be strictly controlled. Donald Trump believes that "a nation without borders is not a nation", and subsequently suggests that "there must be a wall across the southern border". In actuality, according to Max Weber argument, which implies politics as an isolated world of rational top-down decision making that exclusively belongs to the political sector, Donald J. Trump eyes politics as a square of modernist top-down decision making process as well. Trump's eighteenth-century style mentality on nationalism, leads him towards strictly controlled borders with its neighbors and far-flung immigrants. He argues that "we are the only country in the world whose immigration system puts the needs of other nations ahead of our own" and "that must change." In other words, Trump's conservative viewpoints on

nationalism, gender, race, immigration, culture, and border security, recall the eighteenth-century America of White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (WASP) founding fathers. And for this reason, Trump's white Anglo-Saxon Protestant model of behavior sets up a framework within which all the new immigrants have to be assimilated into the eighteenth-century style America.

Therefore, when we think of Donald J. Trump and his call for demonizing immigrants and their families, deportation of undocumented Hispanics, and building a wall along the border with Mexico, we find out that all of these perceptions have nothing to do with postmodernism and can actually be explained perfectly by Tharailath Koshy Oommen, Indian Professor of Jawaharlal Nehru University, who said "the rise and fall, the construction and destruction of various types of boundaries is the very story of human civilization." Likewise, his emphasize on "mono-cultural" nationalism, by threatening to ban Muslims, Cubans, and Mexicans entering the U.S. alongside his presidential campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" – which has been derived from Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign slogan "Let's Make America Great Again" – all of this is a sign of his hyper-nationalism and his most conservative attitudes that proceeds from old-school modernism. In this sense, Donald Trump, as an ultra-conservative, not only doesn't believe in multi-culturalism and recognition of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural minorities' rights, but also he wants to go back to the days of pre-multicultural America, to a time prior to identity politics and political correctness. Additionally, if we focus on Trump's presidential campaign programs, for instance, his immigration project, it is revealed that his favorite immigration scheme is a plan which "must improve jobs, wages and security for all Americans" because in his viewpoints "a nation that does not serve its own citizens is not a nation." Now, following these explanations, we have come to realize that all Donald Trump talks about are to some extent modernistic-oriented issues without any mention of postmodernist issues |



Iran Foreign Relations

Iran's constructive role in Iraq

By: Maryam Azish

The sectarian violence which deteriorated the peace and security in the region has been sponsored by foreign countries beyond the Iraqi boundaries.

The foreign countries endeavors for fanning the flames of violence in the region, have led to escalation of chaos and insecurity in Iraq and continuation of the crisis has deliberately inflicted heavy expenses on the Iraqi government and nation.

Following the escalation of ISIL terrorist groups' threats against the Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran more than any other countries stood by the Iraqi people and defended the territorial integrity of this Arabic country.

Iran's all-out support from Iraq also had played a pivotal role in diminishing Daesh threats in this Arabic country.

Considering important role of Iraq in the region, Iran believes that peace and security in the region should be restored by participation of all countries.

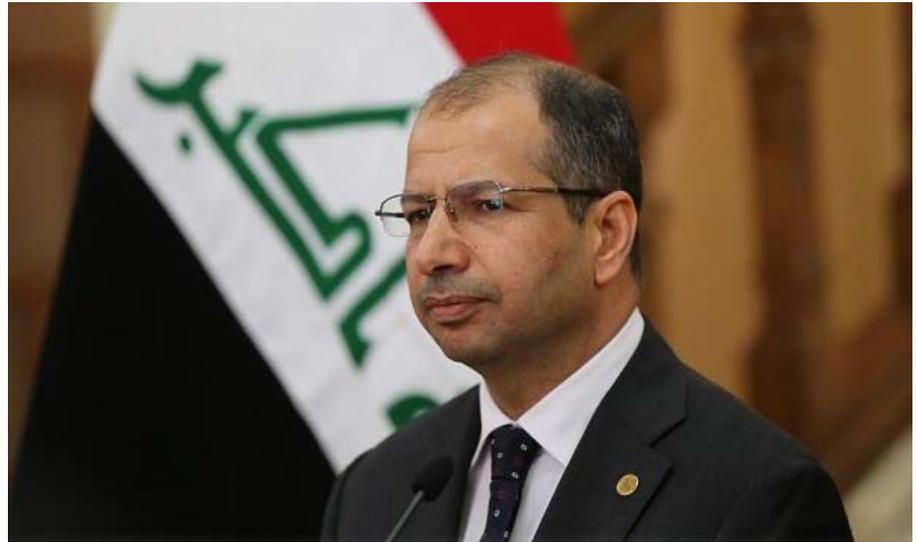
In an indication of fostering Tehran-Baghdad relations, Iraqi Parliament Speaker Salim Al-Jabouri arrived in Tehran on Aug 20 for holding talks with high-ranking Iranian officials including President Hassan Rouhani, Chairman of the Expediency Council Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Secretary of Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani and his counterpart Ali Larijani.

Prior to the visit, Al-Jabouri also visited Iran late August 2015, during which he held talks with a number of top Iranian officials.

Although more than a decade has passed following the US invasion on Iraq, this Arab country has so far not experienced even a single day of peace.

Uprooting Terrorism

President Rouhani in a meeting with Iraqi parliament speaker praised the recent victories of the Iraqi army and popular forces against terrorist groups, saying the reinforcement of unity among Iraqis of all ethnicities and faiths will certainly uproot terrorism in the country.



He underscored that Iraqi parliament is a symbol of unity and fraternity among Iraqis of all ethnicities and faiths and can boost national unity by taking on an integrated role in the fight against terrorism.

Rouhani further said that increasing consultations between Iran and Iraq is necessary for promoting peace and stability in the Middle East.

Sectarian Violence

Ayatollah Rafsanjani in a meeting with al-Jabouri warned against fanning the flames of Shia-Sunni conflict in Iraq, saying that it stirs up religious sentiments being misused by the enemies of Islam.

Rafsanjani underscored that the internal discords after destruction of the terrorists will prepare the ground for rising a dictator like Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

'The experience of history says that religious conflict will prolong wherever they occur and we should not allow the Muslims to fight with each other rather than unity and cooperation,' Rafsanjani said.

He expressed surprise with the clear and secret relations between certain Muslim governments and the Zionist regime, asking how such relations are possible while they know that the Zionists have pulled out the Palestinian Muslims from their own homes and lands.

Liberation of Mosul

Meanwhile, Shamkhani in a meeting with Iraqi parliament speaker said liberation of northern Iraqi city of Mosul from the Takfiri Daesh terrorist group could be the beginning of national and geographical unity in this Arab country.

Commenting on the importance of forging political stability in Iraq, Shamkhani believed that the total uprooting of terrorism is being pursued in this Arab country thanks to the army forces endeavors and all-out support of religious, political as well as ethnic groups.

'The Islamic Republic of Iran has always stood beside the Iraqi government and nation,' he said, expressing hope that the operation for liberating Mosul could start with participation of all Iraqi groups, the indigenous forces in the northern Nineveh province in particular.

Describing terrorism as the most important and immediate danger threatening the whole region, he added, 'we should try to restore peace to Iraq and the whole region with empathy, unity and defeat of terrorists.'

US Ominous Plot

In a meeting with al-Jabouri, Majlis Speaker underscored that the US assumed that Iraq will be a US state after fall of Saddam Hussein and was seeking to appoint American Generals as Iraqi governors, but, the eminent Iraqi personalities and Ayatollah Sistani on top and Iraqi people stood up to the ominous plot.

Larijani also believes that the two →

countries also enjoy many commonalities and have common stands on regional and international developments helping bolster relations, adding the unrest and the measures of the Takfiri terrorist groups will be to the benefit of US and Zionist regime.

Reciprocal Visa-Free Travel

In a mealtime, Iraqi premier also called for lifting visa requirement between the two countries and the Iranian side is ready to welcome the proposal.

Back in Jan 24, 2016, Larijani and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on the sidelines of the 11th session of Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (PUIC) in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, discussed a reciprocal visa waiver program to boost tourism and trade transactions between the two neighbors.

Al-Abadi said he will follow up on the issue of visa-free travel for the Iranian and

Iraqi nationals willing to exchange visits.

Anti-Terror Campaign

Talking to al-Jabouri, Zarif stressed that Iraq is on the front line of fight against terrorism and extremism and Iran stands by the Iraqi nation and government in anti-terror campaign.

Praising political stability in Iraq, Zarif reiterated that all Iraqi leaders including the parliament speaker have taken effective steps to create such an atmosphere, expressing that Iraqi government and nation have been successful so far in fight against extremism and terrorism.

He hoped that the campaign against terrorism and extremism in Iraq would be at the final stages and that confrontation with terrorism in Mosul would lead to unity of all Iraqi ethnic groups, tribes and followers of different religions.

Considering important role of Iraq in the region, Zarif said that peace and se-

curity in the region should be restored by participation of all countries.

In conclusion, it is also worth mentioning that Iran and Iraq, both, enjoy the unique opportunity to foster relation in the chaotic Middle East region, thanks to good neighborliness, regional common goals, threats and opportunities, unique historical and cultural affinities.

Following last year's nuclear agreement between Iran and the 5+1 group of countries, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Tehran believes that the Iranian and Iraqi parliaments should make use of the appropriate opportunity created to boost economic cooperation.

Touching upon the Iran's pivotal role in Iraq and the Islamic Republic readiness to expand ties with this Arab country in counter-terrorism efforts, the two sides also enjoy vast common interests in fostering economic relations |

New chapter of ties between Iran-Latin America

By: Maryam Azish

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes in 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 Latin American has always been on the agenda of Tehran.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani also believes that reinforcement of relations with Latin American countries is among the Islamic Republic's principled policies, stressing that no obstacle can hinder the expansion of mutual ties.

Due to political, cultural commonalities and congruity at international organizations and circles, particularly at the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Latin American countries are vital for Iran and the Islamic Republic intends to establish balance and moderation in re-

lations with Latin American nations.

The implementing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) clinched between Iran and the six countries of the P5+1 over Tehran's nuclear program, has led to progress of Iran's global situation, elimination of Western

sanctions and reopening of economic development routes have driven the country's foreign policy to boost mutual ties - evident in Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif periodic trips to Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

On Aug 21, Zarif, heading a group →



comprised of 120 merchants, businessmen and financial executives in government and private sectors embarked on a six-nation tour of Latin America including Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Chile, Bolivia and Venezuela respectively.

Whiteout doubt, the visits signify an opening of an era of mutual ties between Iran and Latin American countries that are mulling to expand commercial cooperation through the channel of private sector activists.

The visit is made following the President Rouhani repeated emphasis on reinforcement of ties with all members of the international community within framework of mutual respect, non-intervention in internal affairs, and securing mutual interests.

By the time of writing this article, Zarif has attended several meeting and held separate talks with several high-ranking Latin American officials including his Cuban counterpart Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment Rodrigo Malmierca Diaz, President Raúl Castro, Vice President Ricardo Cabrisas Ruíz and his Nicaraguan counterpart Samuel Santos.

1st Iran-Cuba Trade Session

On Aug 22, Zarif addressed the first joint trade meeting of Iran and Cuba attended by Cuban and Iranian officials and businessmen, including the son of former Cuban leader Fidel Castro and Diaz.

Addressing the first joint trade meeting of Iran and Cuba, Zarif underscored that resistance by the nations of the two countries has forced the dominant powers to give up their hostile policies and even tone down their rhetoric, citing removal of sanctions as an unique opportunity for fostering bilateral all-out ties especially in field of economy.

Top Iranian diplomat also appealed for expansion of cooperation between the two countries' private sectors, voicing Tehran willingness to pave the way for Cuba's engagement in the Central Asian countries and help Havana promote its health programs and other projects in the region.

Iranian foreign minister also believes that promotion of economic cooperation between Iranian and Cuban companies can help realization of Resistance Economy in Iran and at the same time



help rebuild the Cuban economy.

Enjoying over 19.1 million sq.km area and 634-million population, Latin America accounts for six percent of global trade and the region could be considered as reliable partner for the Islamic Republic of Iran thanks to its huge raw materials.

Call for Fostering Mutual Ties

The Iranian and Cuban foreign minister reviewed latest regional and international developments as well as promotion of bilateral cooperation in all fields and examined the ways of developing mutual ties between Tehran and Havana.

Holding the upcoming summit of NAM was another topic of dialogue in the meeting between the two officials.

Joint Cooperation Document

On the sidelines of the first joint trade meeting, the Cuban and Iranian officials and businessmen, including Zarif and Diaz also signed a Memorandum of Understanding to boost mutual economic cooperation.

The MoU was signed by Iran Chamber of Commerce Deputy of International Affairs Farhad Sharif and his Cuban counterpart Odalys Seijo Garcia.

Iran an Important Economic Partner

Diaz believes that Islamic Republic is not only an important economic partner for Havana but also it has the capacity to help Cuba access Asian markets.

Iran and Cuba share the same experience of living under embargos and they should use the experience as a roadmap for exploring new ways for furthering economic cooperation, Diaz said,

adding Iran as an economic partner can help Cuba achieve its goals and expand its economic outreach as far as the markets in Asia.

Zarif-Castro Meeting

Zarif and Cuban President Raúl Castro also conferred issues of mutual interest and discussed latest regional and international developments and explored ways of enhancing bilateral ties between Tehran and Havana.

Before meeting with Castro, Zarif had also a meeting with Ruíz and discussed promotion of economic cooperation between the two states.

Iran-Nicaragua Joint Economic Confab

On Aug 23, Zarif also attended Iran-Nicaragua economic conference attended by son of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega.

Zarif Meets Nicaraguan Counterpart

On Aug 24, Zarif held talks Santos on expansion of bilateral ties, especially in the economic field, regional developments and international issues. The meeting between Zarif and Santos took place at the venue of Nicaragua Foreign Ministry Palace.

In the end, it is worth mentioning that the Iran and a number of Latin American countries have numerous commonalities such as resistance against unfair sanctions.

Although Iran's trade with Latin American countries diminished to its lowest level during 2011-2014, consequently, the current government is fully determined to reinforce its political and economic cooperation |

Bright future on Iran-France relations

By: Maryam Azish

Following the nuclear agreement clinched between Iran and 5+1 on July 2015, fresh round of cooperation have been launched between Tehran and the European countries.

In an indication of fostering relations between Iran and Europe, French National Assembly President Claude Bartolone arrived in Tehran on Sept 6 to blow fresh air into Tehran-Paris relations, economic ties in particular.

While in Iran Bartolone held separate talks with several high-ranking Iranian officials including Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, President Hassan Rouhani, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Special Aide to Parliament Speaker for International Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Head of the Center for Strategic Studies affiliated to the Expediency Council Ali Akbar Velayati, Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Chief Valiollah Seif and a number of local officials in Isfahan.

Political Cooperation

Iran believes that European countries must play more active role in settlement of political crisis in Syria and strongly rejected the dichotomization of terrorism into good and bad forms anywhere in the world.

Talking to Bartolone, Zarif underscored that the threat of terrorism is a global threat and Tehran believes in the international community's more serious cooperation to remove this common threat, voicing Tehran's readiness to hold more consultations with Europeans, particularly France, about the crisis in Syria.

Iranian diplomat also added Tehran considers Paris as an "important partner in its economic relations", reiterating that the two sides have common views on many regional issues.

Bartolone also said France attaches great importance to the full implementation of the nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), between Iran and the 5+1 group of countries.

The French official noted that the JCPOA has opened up positive opportunities in Iran's ties with other countries, saying that several European and French banks have started cooperation with Iran.



In a meeting with Bartolone, President Rouhani called for coordinated and collective campaign against terrorism, adding there is no doubt that terrorism is a big danger for the regional countries and the entire world.

Rouhani said that as a victim of terrorism, the Islamic Republic of Iran is well aware of the magnitude of the threat of the dirty phenomenon and at the same time, France has well understood the momentous issue due to terrorist attacks over the past several months.

He said that the Islamic Republic of Iran helps the Iraqi and Syrian governments on their own demand to fight terrorism.

Parliamentary Cooperation

In a meeting with Larijani, the two called for expansion of parliamentary relations between Tehran and Paris and discussed regional and international developments.

Speaking at a joint press briefing after the meeting, Larijani lauded the parliamentary ties between the two countries and described Tehran-Paris relations as "good and age-old," saying that the two countries share common views concerning the fight against terrorism and the resolution of current crises in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and other countries.

Iranian parliament speaker also cited Bartolone's trip to Iran as a "new page" in fostering bilateral cooperation.

Commenting his talks with Larijani, Bartolone said the meeting has created suitable grounds to discuss issues of mutual interest, stressing that expansion of parliamentary relations would also help broaden ties between the two governments.

Economic Cooperation

Talking to Seif, Bartolone called for improvement of banking cooperation with Iran, adding France supports Iran to execute the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

FATF is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering.

Bartolone believes that Paris would help Tehran technically for implementation of the FATF by providing Iran with France experiences to this end.

He also called for the boost of economic ties between the two countries, adding that Paris is committed to help complete implementation of JCPOA.

According to Seif, Italian, Austrian and German banks have developed cooperation with Iran in the post-sanctions era but France banking system is very cautious about improving bilateral relations with its Iranian counterparts.

France can help resolve the problem of obstacles on the way of Iran's banking relations with other countries regarding Paris significant place among the European states, Seif stressed.

However, the implementation of JCPOA has led to more economic and political cooperation with the outside world to bring about prosperity and welfare for the nation.

So, a favorite opportunity has been available for the European states to develop economic cooperation in light of the international understanding created between Iran and the European nations following the nuclear accord |

Renewal of Tehran-Ankara relations



By: Maryam Azish

Since July 15 failed coup in Turkey, Iranian FM Zarif embarked on a visit to Ankara to hold close consultation with Turkish officials on the Syrian crisis since its outbreak some five years ago.

The visit was made after Turkey reviewed its stance on the humanitarian crises in the region, Syria in particular which has been gripped by a foreign-backed militancy since March 2011.

Currently, some evidences showing that Turkey's foreign policy on the humanitarian crisis in Syria have undergone major change.

Although observers believe that such changes are fragile, political and temporary, the move indicates that Ankara has made some changes in its relations with Tehran and Moscow.

Now it seems that Ankara has reached to the point that Syrian crisis should be settled through peaceful means and has no military solution.

Since the outset of the Syrian crisis, the Islamic Republic of Iran has emphasized on the political settlement of this crisis and has repeatedly declared that the Syrian problem has no military solution.

While in Turkey, Zarif, who was the first Iranian top-ranking official to visit Turkey after the failed coup, held separate meetings with his counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Iran that was the first country to condemn the coup in the very first hour, believes that coup has no place in our region and the vote and will of the people cannot be suppressed with the measures of a military group.

Such Tehran's immediate and rational behavior convinced Turkey to change its manner towards the Iranian stance.

Despite Tehran's disagreement with Ankara on the humanitarian crises in the region, Iran assured Turkey that it would support the Turkish legitimate government to administer the repercussions by the abortive military coup in that country.

Talking to reporters in Ankara, Zarif pointed to some differences between Iran and Turkey about some regional issues, noting that Iran, Turkey and Russia are three key regional countries that need to cooperate with each other.

Deep Mutual Understanding

Yildirim believes that Tehran and Ankara have deep understanding of the regional developments and will recommend the best ways to resolve the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

Speaking in Turkish parliament, he said that Turkish government reached settlement with Russia and decided to adopt the same approach with regards to Iraq and Syria.

The Turkish government has sense of responsibility to help resolve the regional crises and spares no efforts to maintain the territorial integrity of Syria, he

said, adding

Iran and Turkey have full knowledge about situation in the region; therefore there is no doubt that the two governments would put forward the best options to resolve regional issues.

Call for fostering ties

Meanwhile, Zarif and Erdogan in a three-hour-long meeting discussed regional issues, particularly the crisis in Syria, fostering Iran-Turkey cooperation and agreed to expand mutual ties energy, transport and environment sectors, and to raise the volume of bilateral trade to USD 30 billion.

Counter-Terrorism Efforts

During his joint presser with Cavusoglu, Zarif said Tehran and Ankara have a common goal to improve cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts and tackle extremism despite their differences on some issues.

Zarif believes that Iran and Turkey have a common opinion and goal to jointly fight terrorism, extremism and sectarianism, and despite the existence of different views on some issues and both share a common stance on [protecting] Syria's territorial integrity, fighting Daesh and Jabhat Fath al-Sham terrorists.

Hailing the improvement of Russia-Turkey relations and their new efforts to stem the conflict in Syria, Zarif said: "We also have great ties with Russia on the [Syrian] issue and we believe that all parties must cooperate to provide security and peace and stop the conflicts in the region.

In the end, it is worth mentioning that as Turkey is the main road of terrorists to enter Syria, Ankara can handle traffic of terrorists and their equipment to this Arabic country.

Without doubt, establishment of new relations between Iran, Russian and Turkey can be promising in line with finding a diplomatic solution to the Syrian crisis and acceleration of the process of international peace talks on Syrian.

Zarif's Ankara visit follows historical meeting of Turkish and Russian presidents in Saint Petersburg, which has had wide-scale reflection in the news and diplomatic circles in Ankara |

By: Maryam Azish

Following the conclusion of the nuclear deal between Iran and great powers, the European Union countries, Germany in particular, are fostering their economic cooperation with Tehran.

For decades before sanctions were imposed, Berlin was Tehran's biggest trading partner. 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 improved.

As per the latest German government data, German exports to Iran, especially of machines and equipment, rose significantly in the first quarter of the 2016.

So far, several numbers of the European officials have voiced their readiness to continue 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 enjoys considerably high number of young population and educated people which make it a promising trading partner and market for foreign investments.

Without doubt, Iran is considered as an eye-catching and lucrative market for several European countries like Germany with not only 80 million people it has but also with 400 million people given its access to the 400 million-strong neighboring markets.

According to the International Monetary Fund, Germany enjoys the largest economy in Europe with a nominal gross domestic product in 2016 of \$3.5 trillion.

Touching upon the economic growth rate in Iran, estimated at 5 percent this year, it would bring about positive prospect for the country to lure foreign investments.

Iran-EU Economic Center in Germany

On May 2016, in an indication of warming economic relations between

Bright future ahead of Tehran-Berlin economic ties



Iran and European countries, particularly Germany, Iran-EU center for economic cooperation was opened in Germany.

Iranian officials believe that the center can serve as a turning point in fostering Tehran-Berlin economic ties and would present the opportunity for a fresh round of cooperation between Iran and western countries, mainly Germany.

As long as, there is no political restriction for amending economic cooperation between the Iranian and European companies, the center could pave the ground for expansion of more economic relations.

Iranian Private Banks in Germany

On September 2016, Deutsche Welle reported that Iran's Middle East Bank and Sina Bank will open branches in the Bavarian city of Munich by the end of the year; Iran's central bank has dubbed it a development that could help boost German exports to the Islamic Republic.

Ilse Aigner, Bavaria's economy minister, told the Münchner Merkur newspaper that the new Iranian bank branches would help German businesses realize greater exports to Iran.

Aigner said having branches of Iranian banks in Munich is particularly important for our businesses; especially our small and medium-sized firms have enormous export prospects to Iran that

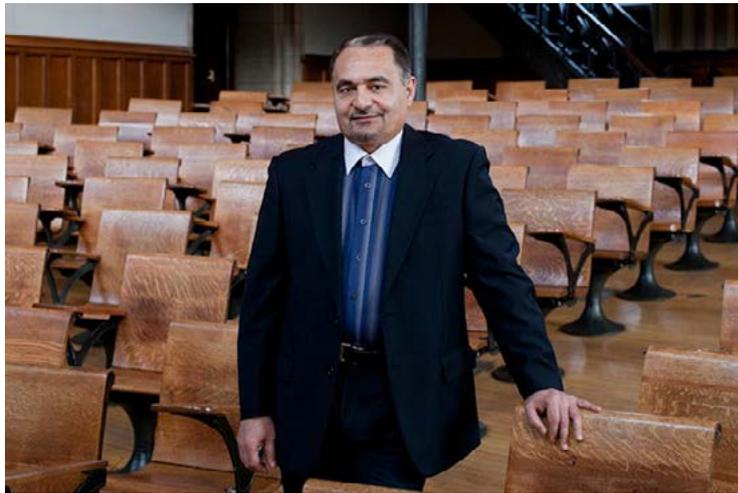
they will be able to utilize more easily in the future.

On May 2016, Iran awarded a major contract to the German company Abels Decker Kuhfuß Lenzen (ADKL) over the development of a petrochemical project in the country's southwestern city of Masjed Soleyman an initial value of €2 billion which will be increased to as high as €10 billion in the future.

As per the contract, the ADKL will cooperate with Masjed Soleyman Petrochemical Industries Company over providing the funds, transferring the technology and implementing contracts for the project within the framework of engineering, procurement, construction and finance (EPCF).

While Germany is practically the propelling engine of European economy and enjoys the most stable economy in the green continent, it can now play the leading role in renovation of relationships between Iran and European countries. Although banking transactions are not freed completely due to US pressures and threats, economic negotiations have marked significant rise and many MoUs and contracts have been signed since the implementation of nuclear deal. Berlin must take this opportunity in its best way and pave the way for better economic ties between Iran and Germany as well as other European states |

EU–Iran Relations after Brexit



By: Seyed Hossein Mousavian

The decision by British voters to leave the European Union coincides with improving relations between Europe and Iran. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's relationship with Europe's major powers has been characterized by periods of economic cooperation followed by near-complete disengagement.

The nuclear deal struck between Iran and world powers in July 2015 – which the EU played a major role in negotiating – removed the economic sanctions that since 2006 have stood in the way of deeper ties. A new chapter in Iranian–European relations has already begun. But the impending exit of the United Kingdom from the EU further paves the way for a new paradigm in Europe's relationship with Iran: strategic EU–Iran engagement that is separate from, but parallel to, high-level UK–Iran talks.

Separating the UK

London and Tehran have not had sustainably good relations since before the revolution. Over the course of the past century, Iranians of all walks of life have come to view Britain differently, and with far more suspicion, than they view other European states. At the root of this mistrust is Britain's colonial era history in Iran. Nearly every Iranian bitterly recalls incidents such as the Anglo-Russian Convention of

1907, which split Iran into Russian and British spheres of influence; the engineering by the British of Reza Khan's (later Reza Shah Pahlavi) ascension to the throne in 1925; Britain's opposition to the nationalization of Iranian oil; and its infamous 1953 plot with the CIA to oust prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. This history has been so seared into the consciousness of Iranians that many believe Britain is to this day still trying to manipulate events inside Iran to its benefit.

These feelings have been reinforced since the revolution by Britain's support for forceful US policies against Iran, and its continuing refusal to acknowledge its historical offences. This was most evident during the early years of the nuclear crisis, when Iran negotiated with the E3 powers (Germany, France and the United Kingdom) over its nuclear program. During this period, I served as the spokesman for Iran's negotiating team.

In spring 2005, I privately presented a similar proposal to my counterparts in Germany, France and the United Kingdom. While it was met with support in Berlin, my meeting with ultimately turn down the offer in my talks with him, French nuclear negotiator Stanislas Lefebvre de Laboulaye led me to conclude that France would accept the proposal only if the UK did. However, London's nuclear negotiator, John Sawers, would tell me that Washington would not tolerate even one centrifuge

spinning in Iran. This episode served as a striking example of America's hold, through Britain, on the foreign-policy decision-making of other EU states. Jack Straw, then UK foreign minister, would later say: 'Had it not been for major problems within the US administration under President Bush, we could have actually settled the whole Iran nuclear dossier back in 2005.'

The period of negotiations between Iran and the E3 from 2003–05 was nevertheless significant, as it marked an effort by the EU to play a strategic role in the Middle East. The subsequent eight years, however, would see Iran's relations with the EU, and the UK in particular, hit rock bottom. The format of the negotiations changed in 2006 to include other major world powers, adding the United States along with China and Russia to what became the E3+3, also known as the P5+1. As negotiations stalled during the second term of George W. Bush and President Barack Obama's first term, the US and its allies imposed an increasingly draconian sanctions regime while Iran increased the size and capacity of its nuclear program.

In late 2011, the crisis reached its peak. Iran's 'breakout time' – the amount of time it needed to amass the quantity of fissile material needed for a single weapon if it made the decision to do so – reached just a few months, according to some estimates. In November 2011, the United States and its allies also imposed what would be their hardest-hitting sanctions on Iran, effectively cutting the country out of most international trade and banking.

Immediately following this move, Iran's parliament passed a bill to expel the British ambassador to Tehran and reduce diplomatic contact. This was not a spontaneous decision, but rather the result of years of increasingly louder calls in Iran to downgrade relations with Britain. The origin of the feud went back to the protests that rocked Iran following Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election in 2009, during which Iranian authorities arrested nine local British embassy staff, including chief →

political analyst Hossein Rassam, for allegedly playing a 'significant role' in the post-election protests of that year. At the time, then-foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki warned that Iran would downgrade ties, and intelligence minister Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i even alleged that some of the violent protesters had been caught with British passports. Iranian authorities subsequently tried Rassam for espionage. The British government vigorously denied the charges.

A day after the bill was passed in 2011, a group of angry young protesters surrounded the British embassy in Tehran, chanting slogans and pushing up to the embassy walls. They eventually overcame police guards and stormed the embassy, setting fire to the first floor and causing extensive damage to the rest of the compound. The action spurred outrage across the world. The foreign ministry called it 'unacceptable'. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei later said of the protesters, 'The feelings of the youth were correct, but their behavior was not correct.' The British government argued, however, that the protests could not have taken place without a degree of institutional consent.

The 2011 attack on the British embassy exemplified the vehement animosity against Britain that continues to exist in segments of Iranian society. It also contributed to escalating EU-Iran tensions and tipped the EU into firmly supporting additional US sanctions against Iran. As a result, the EU's total trade with Iran dropped to €6 billion by 2013, down from a high of roughly €27bn in 2011.

With the election of President Hassan Rouhani in June 2013, and a decision by second-term President Obama to pivot from a position of no enrichment in Iran to no nuclear weapons, the path to reconciliation between Iran and the UK, and by extension the EU, was cleared. The British embassy in Tehran reopened one month after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was reached, nearly four years after it was attacked. For many in Iran, it had become clear that the EU's position was heavily influenced by the UK and that Iran could not have a mean-

ingful economic relationship with the EU if it continued to have poor relations with Britain.

One implication of an EU without the United Kingdom is that British, and by extension American, influence on EU-Iran relations will be diminished. This was one reason why Hamid Aboutalebi, Rouhani's deputy chief of staff for political affairs, tweeted after the vote that 'Brexit is a "historic opportunity" for Iran'. Continental Europe has always been friendlier towards Iran and far more willing to do business with it. This has been evident since the JCPOA was reached, with EU-Iran trade picking up dramatically (serious banking issues notwithstanding) and political delegations travelling back and forth.

Iranian leaders should bear in mind, however, that despite Britain's exit from the EU, Iran's relations with the UK will still affect the kind of relationship Iran can have with the West. If tensions between Iran and the US and UK

in their own framework and separately from efforts aimed at EU-Iran engagement. And for the UK-Iran relationship to be reconstructed, it is also imperative that regional policies be discussed, as many Iranian officials firmly believe that London has always pursued a strategy of dividing Iran from its Arab neighbors.

Britain today has strong ties with many of Iran's Arab neighbors, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. By engaging Iran at a deeper level, it stands to play an instrumental role in fostering detente between Iran and the GCC states and facilitating the creation of a regional cooperation system. This would have a stabilizing effect in the region and benefit Britain by diminishing the threat of terrorism, stemming refugee flows and securing the Persian Gulf as an economically prosperous area where investments can be made and safe passage for energy resources is guaranteed.



were to increase to the levels seen during the nuclear crisis, EU-Iran relations would almost certainly deteriorate again as well. As such, in light of Brexit, there is a vital need for direct high-level talks between London and Tehran aimed at defining a new relationship. These talks should focus on eliminating mistrust, and give Britain the opportunity to address Iranian grievances and acknowledge past wrongdoings. Given the unique history between Iran and the UK, the talks need to be held with-

A new relationship with Europe

Iran and the rest of the EU have a different history, and the opportunity exists for deeper, strategic engagement between them. Since 1979, tensions between EU member states and Iran have centered on four major issues: terrorism, human rights, weapons of mass destruction and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When I became Iran's ambassador to Germany in 1990, I tried to establish a joint working group to address these differences. These efforts led to a →

'critical dialogue' between Iran and the EU from 1992–97 followed by a 'comprehensive dialogue'. While then-German chancellor Helmut Kohl was receptive to these initiatives, he was met with opposition from the United States. Nevertheless, the EU and Iran developed amicable ties over time, and Europe even became Iran's largest trading partner, until the nuclear crisis emerged.

While EU–Iran relations suffered greatly during the nuclear-crisis era, especially from 2011 to 2013, the EU played an instrumental role in the diplomacy that eventually led to the JCPOA. EU foreign-policy chief Catherine Ashton and her successor, Federica Mogherini, spearheaded the negotiations between the E3+3 and Iran, and the EU's High Representative now holds the decisive role of Coordinator of the Joint Commission that will oversee the JCPOA's implementation.

Following the conclusion of the JCPOA, Europe has the opportunity to shift towards a more constructive approach towards Iran. The increasingly shared interests and threats between the two sides have created room not just for tactical cooperation and increased trade, but for broader strategic dialogue on a host of decisive issues.

Western Asia today is a significantly different place than it was a decade or even five years ago. Large swathes of Iraq and Syria have become battlefields or been occupied by violent terrorist groups, the most notorious of which is the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL). Other Arab states, such as Libya, Egypt and Bahrain, are either in complete disarray or on shaky foundations. Refugees in their millions are entering Europe, testing the continent's social cohesion and public services in unprecedented ways. A two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is also a more distant prospect than ever. Europe simply cannot turn its back on the turmoil in the Middle East, and urgently needs to help foster a stabilizing regional order for its own well-being.

In the face of all this disorder, Iran is a strong state with functioning institutions and significant influence throughout the region. It has a pluralistic political system, by regional standards, and regularly holds elections. It is at the

forefront of the fight against ISIS and other terrorist groups, and is engaged in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan. Simply stated, Iran stands to be an effective partner in helping the EU alleviate the trifecta of serious challenges it faces today: terrorism, migration and a stumbling economy. The differences that once existed between Iran and the EU are either no longer pertinent or can be mitigated through deeper engagement.

On the issue of terrorism, Iran is among the few countries in the Middle East fighting terrorist groups that have been responsible for the deaths of many Americans and Europeans, including ISIS, al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra (now Jabhat Fatah al-Sham). By contrast, US Vice President Joe Biden has accused US regional allies of supporting extremists in Syria in their eagerness to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Former secretary of state Hillary Clinton also stated at the Brookings Institution last year: 'Much of the extremism in the world today is the direct result of policies and funding undertaken by the Saudi government and individuals. We would be foolish not to recognize that.'

The nuclear deal also resolved, at least for the moment, the long-standing issue of Iranian nuclear proliferation. Through diplomacy, the EU, Iran and other world powers not only managed to reach the most comprehensive agreement on nuclear non-proliferation in history, but also established a model that can be used to address proliferation concerns in other countries, particularly in the Middle East. The initiative of a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (MENWFZ) was first proposed by Iran and Egypt in 1974. If the principles of the JCPOA are implemented regionally, it would finally be realized.

On the issue of human rights, differences will undeniably continue to exist. However, there is also room for dialogue on human rights that focuses on identifying ways to minimize differences and cooperate on common interests. One possible area for cooperation is the refugee crisis, which has had unique consequences for both the EU and Iran. Europe has found itself tak-

ing in more than one million refugees and migrants in 2015 alone, posing unprecedented security, political, demographic and economic challenges. Iran, on the other hand, is surrounded by several of the failed states from which many of the refugees are fleeing, greatly threatening its national security. Iran and the EU both stand to benefit from changing this status quo, and could work together to foster stable orders in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan in order to allow refugees to return.

On other human-rights issues, it is important for the EU to hold Iran to the same standards it does other regional countries, of which Iran is often far ahead on human rights. For example, whereas Iranian women are active in nearly all walks of professional life, vote and seek elected office, women in Saudi Arabia are not even allowed to drive.

An agenda for cooperation

Strategic EU–Iran engagement would entail deep and long-lasting cooperation in economics, security and regional stability. Iran is strategically located at the crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe, and in between the energy-rich Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf. Its geographic position also makes it an ideal alternative to conventional shipping routes to Asia, Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In short, Iran is a significant regional player that the EU can no longer afford to ignore.

Iran is resource-rich, with the fourth-largest oil reserves and the largest natural-gas reserves in the world. It could be an integral part of Europe's efforts at energy diversification. In order to foster broader energy cooperation, a working committee of European and Iranian energy executives could be set up to explore opportunities for EU companies to become commercial partners in investing in and developing Iran's energy sector.

On the security front, there is a vital need for the EU and Iran to cooperate in the fight against terrorism. Since ISIS and other terrorist groups established a foothold in Syria, there has been a dramatic rise in both the number and scope of terrorist attacks around the world. Whether in ISIS-inspired attacks →



like the Orlando shooting that left 49 dead, or the ISIS-directed attack at Istanbul's Atatürk Airport, which killed 44, it is clear that the group's reach is not limited to any specific territory. Terrorism from ISIS and likeminded groups is now the number-one security threat not just to the Middle East, but also to Europe. Iran is leading the fight on the ground against terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. While cooperation in Syria is highly unlikely until a settlement is reached between the Syrian government and members of the opposition, the EU can work more closely with Iran in Iraq to combat ISIS and strengthen the Iraqi government. Formal intelligence sharing is one possible and immediate step the EU and Iran could pursue.

Strategic engagement between the EU and Iran also promises to be a great boost to regional security. Iran and the E3+3 could agree to a model for crisis management based on the template of the nuclear negotiations, which succeeded in large part because the end state was agreed to at the beginning of the negotiating process. The conflicts raging in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain all share a common root cause: the social and political marginalization of a major group within society. In Syria, this group was the majority Sunni Arab population; in Bahrain, the majority Shia population; and in Yemen, the Zaydi Muslims who constitute a large minority. EU-Iran cooperation on solving the discord in these countries should center on bringing about a solution that emphasizes majority rule, minority rights,

power sharing and free elections.

EU leaders should be aware of the fact that the free flow of hydrocarbons out of the Persian Gulf is dependent on regional stability. While the EU imports most of its oil and gas from Russia, Central Asia and North Africa, stability in the Persian Gulf would ensure a lower price for energy and provide the EU with a viable alternative energy source, thereby lowering the leverage of its current suppliers. To ensure the continued secure flow of energy resources out of the region and boost regional stability at the same time, the EU could work with Iran and the GCC countries to develop plans for regional energy interconnectivity. Iran's natural-gas endowment, in particular, could serve as a source of energy for GCC countries whose own energy exports are being cut by their growing domestic energy demands. This would give countries on all sides of the Gulf a real stake in each other's well-being, promoting regional cooperation.

The EU can also help bring order to the region by supporting the establishment of a system that allows Iran and the GCC to have substantive dialogue on security issues. Establishing a regional security structure was once the initiative of former German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who pushed for a system of cooperation that would include Iran and the GCC states. Such a system would, importantly, allow Saudi Arabia and Iran to mend their differences, take into account each other's interests and cooperate to stabilize the region. It would

help to end the proxy wars that have for so long tormented the region, and usher in a durable peace.

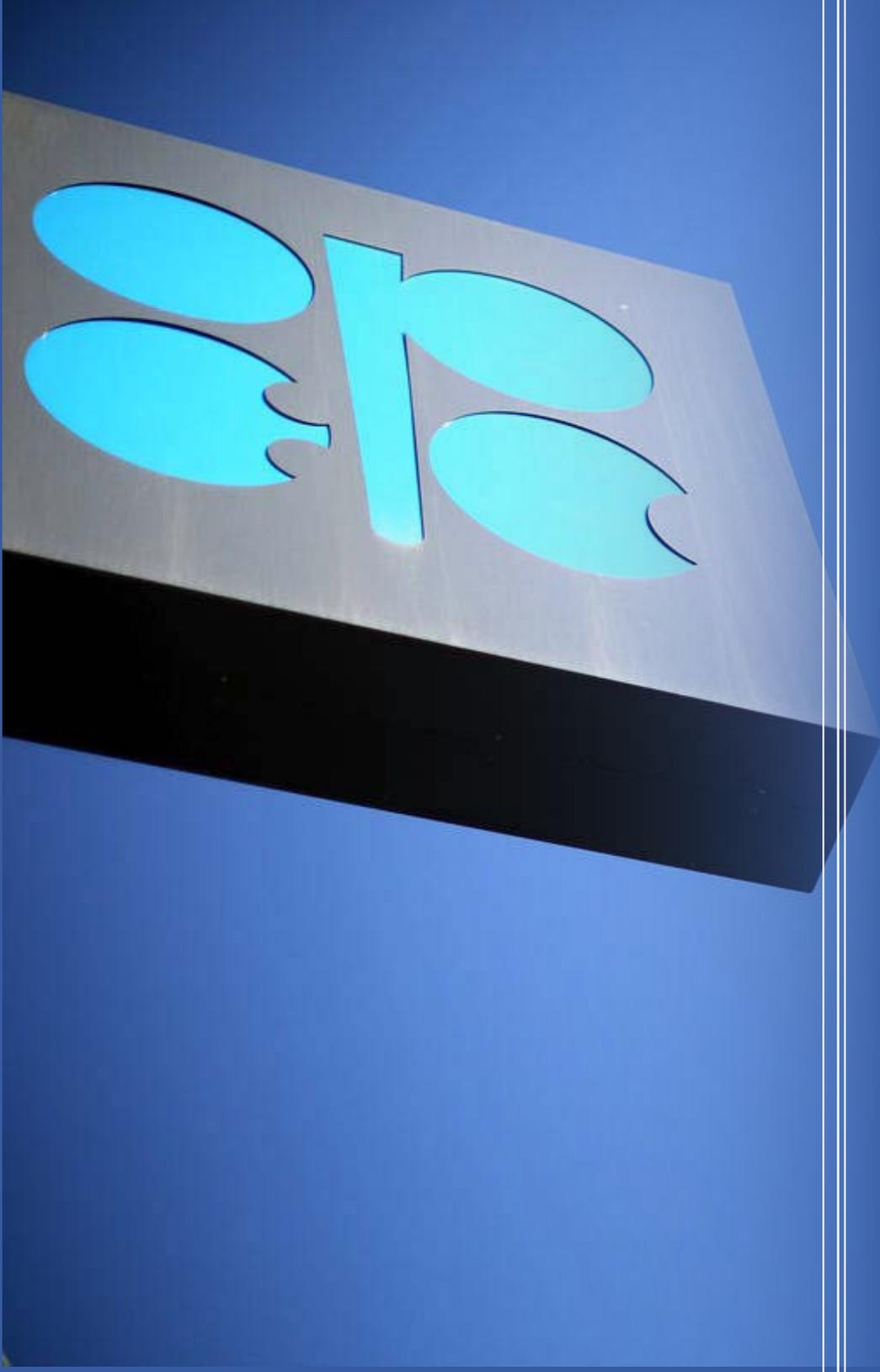
Another fruitful area for dialogue and increased cooperation between the EU and Iran is the environment, and averting man-made disasters more broadly. Iran is wrestling with severe environmental challenges, ranging from drought to heavy pollution. Its quest for nuclear energy has also seen it construct a nuclear power plant in the coastal city of Bushehr, which sits on seismic fault lines. European businesses and specialists can help in both of these cases: by developing water-efficiency programs, and sharing methods for enhancing nuclear safety.

The most immediate potential obstacle to strategic Iran-EU cooperation would be a failure to live up to JCPOA commitments. US sanctions legislation still in place has inhibited EU financial institutions from facilitating trade with Iran, preventing Iran from receiving the sanctions relief it expected under the nuclear deal. If this impasse can be overcome, the EU will find a strong partner in Iran. If not, Iran will turn further towards non-Western countries and the EU will be left with its hands tied in the Middle East.

The Middle East is on the verge of total collapse, and there is no surefire way to bring it back from the brink. There is no doubt, however, that strategic EU-Iran engagement would be a step towards order and away from further chaos. For decades, the Middle East has been a battleground for outside powers vying for control. In the past, the turmoil created in the region largely stayed there. Today, this is no longer the case. This new world calls for abandoning counterproductive policies of exclusion, and pursuing new partnerships that offer a real opportunity to make the region, and the world, a safer and more prosperous place.

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Economy

Winners and losers of cheap oil ahead of OPEC summit

By: M. H. Azari



The upcoming meeting of OPEC ministers in Algeria in late September has given rise to a great deal of speculation on possible beneficiaries and losers of a freeze deal.

Numerous factors exert slight or major effects on oil prices ranging all the way from an official handshake between petroleum ministers of two oil-producing states to supply and demand conditions of the market. Once a luxurious product in world markets, crude oil is now being traded at what many might call an 'unreasonable' price. Falling oil prices, though very much appealing to drivers, has caused serious financial worries amongst countries whose economies are solely based on oil and major crude producers, while seeking to invest in and develop non-oil sectors, are also looking for venues to ease the pressure on oil prices.

Regardless of its roots and causes, the sharp decline in crude prices is the main issue at stake in oil industry and any amendment to the ongoing matter would entail complete and effective coordination among all states at the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), a goal which might seem far-fetched at the first glance given the turbulent diplomatic ties and rivalry among certain members. The forthcoming meeting of OPEC to be held in Algeria on September 26 is be-

lieved to offer an excellent opportunity to bring back oil prices to normal levels in order to make production cost-effective. The mere thought of a production freeze helped an uplift, even though slight in amount, in price of oil over recent weeks to further attest significance of the meeting of OPEC countries.

The need for a robust oil deal can be better felt if current circumstances of the market are observed more meticulously. Market experts have warned that any failure on the part of OPEC member states to reach a deal on freezing oil output could lead to catastrophic outcomes as prices are likely to fall below \$30 per barrel. On the other hand, any effort to raise oil prices to over 60 dollars could encourage North American shale producers, who have now managed to cut down production costs, to boost production causing a significant glut in the market. America's plan to boost production can be implied by return of drilling rigs which had been left abandoned for several years. Moreover, members of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as an intergovernmental economic organization with 35 member countries, are constructing a growing number of storage tanks which foreshadows a rise in oil demands for the year 2017. Also, the amount of oil on water all around the world has hit a record high as well

as that Mexico has increased its crude production significantly following the cessation of seasonal tsunamis.

Accordingly, and as it was mentioned earlier, OPEC members would be better able to control the oil market by reaching a consensus over oil freeze plan. Nevertheless, some states, with Saudi Arabia on top of the list, seem to ignore realities of the market by putting rivals, Iran in particular, under pressure at any cost. Saudis, while possessing all geopolitical potentials to cooperate with Iran for both to rule over oil market, has been haplessly making efforts to prevent Iran from regaining its legal share in world markets.

Despite a recent claim made by the Saudi Arabian Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources Khalid al-Falih who said "freezing production is one of the preferred possibilities but it doesn't have to happen specifically today", several pieces of evidence exist to reveal that Saudis are in dire need of an oil freeze deal which would, in turn, ramp up prices.

First and foremost, 25 per cent of Saudi Arabia's Gross Domestic Production (GDP) relies on oil venues while the figure for oil giant Iran stands at only five per cent. In other words, any decline in oil market will undoubtedly bring about the greatest loss to Saudis than it would do to Iran's economy. Getting entangled in a proxy war against Yemen has proved to be far more exorbitant for Saudi's than their initial speculations causing a significant reduction in its natural resources. Additionally, economy of Saudi Arabia is faced with a greater turmoil as a result of weak GDP growth and the current trend has led Saudi government officials to raise taxes in view of their inability to meet obligations towards workers. Meanwhile, the future of thousands of workers from South Asian countries, like Pakistan and India, is up in the air since reports reveal that the Saudi government has been incapable even of providing food for the labor →

forces indicating the very dire financial condition of the Arab country. Compounded with the decline in oil prices, these factors have forced the government to implement austerity measures and Saudi contractors, in turn, are facing numerous problems as a result of delayed payments.

More specifically, firing of a rocket by Yemen to a power-relay facility in southern Saudi Arabia in early September led some analysts to warn that the military war against Yemen by Saudi Arabia poses a high risk for the country's oil production. Helima Croft, the head of commodity strategy at RBC Capital Markets said "the recent cross-border rocket attacks originating from Yemen are an ominous reminder of the dangers posed by Saudi Arabia's 18-month military intervention in Yemen."

Amid the drop in oil prices, Saudi Arabia's campaign in Yemen comes with certain overlooked risks to its oil sector, including the vulnerability of its oil infrastructure and pressures on its finances.

The rocket strike certified vulnerability of critical Saudi oil facilities and infrastructures including ARAMCO as the Saudi Arabian Oil Company, underlined the official at RBC Capital Markets, as the corporate and investment banking segment of Royal Bank of Canada.

Notably, the Saudi war in Yemen can cause grave pressures on its finances as regards security spending. Data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which tracks global arms expenditures, indicated that Saudis reached their highest level of military expenditure in 2015 comprising 13.7% of GDP share. Moreover, SIPRI noted that there were reports that 17% of total government overspending in 2015 was attributed to a \$5.3 billion increase in military and security spending due to the campaign in Yemen.

Also in the current year, Saudi Arabia hosted the least number of pilgrims while Hajj occasion has always been counted a major source of revenue for the Arab state. A recent report the General Authority for Statistics (GaStat) revealed that the quantity of remote and local travelers has descended to a minimal number over the past ten years. GoStat reported that this year 1,325,372 remote and 537,537 residential travelers are expected to perform

Hajj rituals giving an aggregate total of only 1,862,909 pilgrims while the figure for 2007 and 2012 amounted to 2.4 and 3 million explorers. All in all, the downward trend in the number of Hajj travelers would make Saudi Arabia even more dependent on oil income.

More importantly, unlike Iran, Saudi Arabia only produces crude oil lacking diversity in its energy basket. Only relying on crude oil has been the main cause for a 23 percent decline in SABIC shares this year. In January, Saudi Basic Industries Corp, SABIC, observed its shares falling after the company reported a drop in its annual profit. SABIC's shares were traded almost five percent lower after the company released a report revealing a reduction of 19.57 percent in its full-year net profit. As a result, the Saudi Tadawul All Shares Index (TASI) closed down 5.44 percent to hit a five-year low since SABIC reported a net annual profit of 18.78 billion riyals (USD 5.01 billion) for 2015, as compared to 23.35 billion riyals for the preceding year.

Taking advantage of international sanctions against Iran and in a bid to overcome US shale producers, Saudi Arabia dominated the market. In other words, instead of lowering its production levels to maintain the balance in market, Saudis flooded the market with oil hoping to win the lion's share though, much to their chagrin, oil prices dropped from \$155.71 per barrel in June 2015 to a minimum of \$43.16 per barrel in the current month. With present low crude price figures in mind, Saudi Arabia is obliged to find a way out since only last year their expenditures exceeded their revenues by \$100 billion and the budget deficit for the ongoing year is expected to be no less than \$87 billion. On top of that, the volume of foreign reserves for Saudi Arabia has dropped to \$555 billion while the figure once stood at \$737 billion hence their plan to raise \$10 billion through an international bond sale.

Oil Market Report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) reported that Saudi Arabia has left behind the US and become the world's largest oil manufacturer after adding about 400,00 barrels per day of low-cost production since May this year. Amid low oil prices, enjoying the largest share at the market would be a bitter pill to swallow, indeed.

On the other side of the spectrum

lies Iran who, having been freed from sanction, is legally growing production and regaining its lost share of the market. Iranian oil officials, in comments backed by the Russian President, have repeatedly underscored that any deal on freezing output should allow room for some growth in Iran's production until it reached pre-sanction levels. Iran's precondition for a freeze deal does not seem to be a lofty expectation as the country has spared no effort in restoring production to a level that is similar to that of before sanctions were imposed and now produces roughly 3.85 million barrels per day being only 150,000 barrels per day shy of pre-sanction levels. A consensus also exists among all OPEC members, except Saudi Arabia, that Iran owns the right to be excluded from the possible production freeze since current production levels could limit Iran's GDP growth.

Having taken an optimistic view, Iran has sent positive signals to a deal at the OPEC meeting realizing that upon approaching pre-sanction output levels, adding every barrel to production would require help of international companies. Relatedly, affecting the market psychology has been outlined by oil experts as a more important outcome of a possible freeze deal than its effect on supply levels.

Astute and shrewd, Iran has taken several other measures, in addition to boosting output figures, to gain profit from a myriad of opportunities present at oil, gas and petrochemical industries. One instance has been to benefit from the anticipated uplift in China's crude demand due to an increase in transportation fuel consumption and its petrochemical industries in the second half of the year.

Furthermore, Iran has set to improve its bargaining power for crude sales as well as to support exports of Iranian crude in the Persian Gulf by increasing the country's crude storage capacity in the Persian Gulf by 10 million barrels. Managing Director of Iran Oil Terminals Company (IOTC) Seyyed Pirouz Mousavi said given implementation of four new tanks in Kharg Terminal later in September, the total volume of storage capacity in the Iranian oil terminal has now reached 28 million barrels."

In another attempt to compensate for the fall in crude prices, Iran has kept an eye on producing various types of →

crude oil to meet specific demands of different world refineries. Blending petroleum products as a common method to both attract more customers as well as to increase their satisfaction holds momentous in strengthening the marketing strategy of Iran whose crude oil is now being consumed by two score of world refinery complexes, said Executive Director for International Affairs at National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Seyed Mohsen Ghamsari.

Additionally, Iran stands head and shoulders above oil rivals for it enjoys one of the heaviest crude types on earth which opens a new window of opportunity to produce custom crude oil, tailored to meet its clients' requirements. Even heavier than those of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and Russia, the Iranian crude, with an API gravity less than 20°, marks a gateway to enter markets that can only process this kind of oil. Simply put, as an unshakeable competitor in the global oil market, Iran possesses all necessary assets to attract new customers since dozens of its offshore oil wells are manufacturing various types of light, heavy, sour and sweet crude oil.

Almost unaffected by fluctuation in oil prices, petrochemical industries have offered Iran one more advantage over rivals like SABIC who lacks diversity in its petrochemical basket. Relevantly, Fariborz Karimaei, Deputy Head of the Association of Petrochemical Industry Corporation, pointed to the leap in exports of Iranian petrochemicals to African countries saying "Iran's share in deploying petrochemical and polymeric products to African states has climbed from 1 to 8.5 by the end of the previous

Iranian calendar year (ended March 20) while resumption of petchem sales to European Union (EU) member states has also been put on the agenda." Indeed, regaining the lost share of Iran's petrochemical sale to Europe would prove to be a tough task since Iran's share of the strategic market decreased from 12.5 percent in pre-sanction era to half a percent by the end of last year. Yet, Iran's ability to locally produce a wide range of catalysts and polymer grits has been tantalizing enough for companies from Italy, Germany and Austria who have made requests to import Iranian petrochemical products.

While reports of prestigious international institutions reveal that Saudi Arabia is faced with the crisis of acute shortage of natural gas and that even the launch of a development project at Karan gas field cannot meet the needs of OPEC's largest oil producer, Iran is now delivering the world's cheapest gas to complexes to be consumed as feed or fuel. Also, Iran has put expansion of South Pars gas field on the agenda and if financial channels are regulated, daily production at the joint field can rise by 700 million cubic meters. In fact, mathematically speaking, a daily average of about 40 to 45 million liters of several Iranian oil products have been exported to various world countries since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year and the capacity for export of Iranian petroleum products has reached a total of 400 thousand barrels per day while the figure is expected to hit 500 thousand barrels per day upon implementation of new harbors at Mahshahr Terminal.

To recapitulate, the market has observed OPEC's crude production at a record high figure of 33.47 million barrels per day as Iran, freed from sanctions, reached a threshold of about 3.85 million bpd in August and shipments from Saudi Arabia also increased to 10.2 million bpd. Still, Saudi Arabia considers Iran as a major competitor and Saudi Oil Minister Khalid al-Falih previously said that Iran's production was already high enough, a comment which indicates a fear held by Saudis that output freeze would mean a reduction in their market share. Nevertheless, several factors exist to reveal that Iran's rivals, Saudi Arabia in particular, would suffer more from failure to reach a freeze deal which would otherwise ramp up prices since Iran has already stood the test of time in dealing with low crude prices.

For one thing, Iran has seen and survived worse days than other producers since international sanctions were imposed in 2011, much earlier than the sharp decline in crude prices in 2014, and cut Iran's production to the shockingly low volume of 1.3 million bpd. Also, unlike the past, majority of Iran's oil and gas production are now consumed domestically thanks to an emerging diversified economy. Iran's inclination towards industrialization in energy sectors such as petrochemicals, cement and steel have led to substantial upswing in the country's real growth domestic product as compared with the time imposed war against Iraq taking domestic production of oil and natural gas from 10% then to 76% now.

Expansion of non-oil exports as well as recent release of blocked assets have brought Iran more decisive advantages over its rivals. Statistics indicated a reduction in Iran's non-oil trade deficit from 33.8 billion dollars in 2010 to only 2.7 billion dollars in 2015. Despite the fact that still 29 per cent of the Iranian government's income is accounted for by oil revenues, the figure resides way lower than the levels for other oil giants.

In conclusion, a leading rival of Iran inside the region Saudi Arabia seems to experience much further hardship if prices continue to remain at low levels since Iran enjoys the upper hand when it comes to withstanding low crude oil prices regardless of the outcomes of forthcoming Algiers meeting |





Sports

Kimia's bronze shines golden in Iranian women's eyes



By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Kimia Alizadeh, an 18-year-old taekwondoka, made history in Iran women's sports as she became the first Iranian woman to ever win a medal at the Olympic Games.

The flame of Rio Olympics 2016 went out on Sunday, Aug. 21, with the Iranian squad packing up 8 medals as they returned home from the 16-day extravaganza in the Brazilian seaside city. With two gold medals in weightlifting, one gold, one silver and three bronze in wrestling and one landmark bronze in taekwondo, Iran finished 25th, which was an eight-step drop from its previous performance in London Olympics 2012.

Admittedly, Iran's national freestyle wrestling team achieved its best result since Melbourne Olympics 1956, but more gold medals were expected of them and somehow, the one gold medal in this category won by Hassan Yazdani, even though after 16 years, still left much to be desired.

Although the end results showed a disappointing performance as compared to the previous Olympic Games

where Iran finished 17th with a total of 12 medals, this year's Olympics was not completely disappointing or devoid of any dramatic merit in certain categories for the Iranian athletes.

One such dramatic event that took the social media in Iran by storm was the match between Iranian wrestler Komeil Ghasemi and American opponent Tervel Dlagnev in the semifinal of 125kg freestyle wrestling where Ghasemi crushed Dlagnev in only 33 seconds. 'You can't put on your socks in 33 seconds, let alone do five wrestling throws,' an Iranian tweeted following the surprisingly short match. Unfortunately, Ghasemi's bout of good luck did not accompany him to the final where he was stripped of an Olympic gold as he lost against his Turkish opponent Taha Akgul.

Weightlifter Kianoush Rostami made another highlight during the Olympic Games, as he won Iran's first medal at Rio Olympics following days of disappointing performances. Eclipsing his own world record set in May by one kilogram, Rostami grabbed gold in the men's 85-kilogram category with a world record after lifting a total of 396 kilograms.

But perhaps more drama-laced and this time, highly frustrating, story happened in Men's over 105kg weightlifting division, where Iran's super heavyweight weightlifter and London Olympics champion Behdad Salimi, while beating the world record in snatch, was later disqualified in the clean and jerk by a controversial decision by the jury. Once again, the biased judgment infuriated Iranians' nationalistic sensibilities to the extent where the website of International Weightlifting Federation was hacked by an anonymous hacker and its Instagram page flooded with over 285,000 comments in support of Salimi as social network users expressed their objections over the unfair refereeing.

Head of Iran's National Olympics Committee Kiyoumars Hashemi retold the story as this; "all experts of weightlifting saw on night of August 16 the scope of bias and partiality of the juries under the illegal influence by the head of Asian Weightlifting Federation who had been sitting just behind the jury members; after all 3 lights were white, thus approving Salimi's second attempt in clean and Jerk sub-category, the jury

members renounced their initial decision effectively to deprive a champion of his gold medal which was inevitable.” He went on to add, “incontrovertible evidence is the list of jury members where the name of notorious Mohamed Hassan Jaloud is missing, but who, along with his wife, exerted undue influence on the final decision.”

But biased refereeing did not end there for Iranian wrestlers. During the match between Iran’s Reza Yazdani and Azerbaijan’s Khetag Gazyumov, the Russian judge Sergey Novakovskiy did not give Yazdani’s deserving two points. The Russian judge, along with two others, was later suspended by United World Wrestling due to ‘suspicious manner of judging’ during the controversial refereeing in the match for the bronze medal in the weight category +65kg among men, in which the Mongolian Mandhara Gantrisin lost to Uzbek Ataru Matrosov.

But all drama aside, this year’s Olympics had one memorable moment for the Iranian nation to savor, and that was thanks to Kimia Alizadeh’s inspiring achievement of becoming the first Iranian women to ever win an Olympic medal. She took the bronze in the -57kg class of taekwondo, beating Sweden’s Nikita Glasnovic 5-1, after defeating opponents from Croatia and Thailand and narrowly losing against Spain’s Eva Gomez who finished with silver against gold medalist Jade Jones of Britain.

This was a great moment in history for Iranian women, athletes or otherwise, for whom Kimia’s victory touched every corner of their hearts and rekindled the flames of hope for triumph in the face of limitations and hardship.

The 18-year-old taekwondo practitioner, affectionately known as the Iranian “Tsunami”, had already won a gold and bronze medal at the 2014 and 2015 Taekwondo World Championship, respectively, and went on to win gold at the World Taekwondo Grand Prix in August 2015 in Russia.

The historic bronze that she won at Rio Olympics did not weigh any less than a gold in the eyes of Iranian nation. In fact, many called her medal ‘the golddest bronze in the history of Iran’s sports’ and there were many tweets with a wordplay on Kimia’s name which

means ‘alchemy’ in Persian, saying that Kimia had in a sense turned her bronze medal into gold. But this trend did not stop at metaphors. Kimia, whose bronze medal was worth gold, was promised to receive \$10,000 as cash prize, the same amount for a gold medalist.

Kimia, who did not just win against her opponents but against limitations and lack of opportunities on her way to victory, was the only Iranian athlete at Rio Olympics to receive a tweet from the President himself: “My dear girl Kimia, you have brought happiness to all the Iranians, and particularly to the women. I wish you eternal happiness,” President Rouhani said on Friday, the day after Kimia’s historic win.

The message of Ayatollah Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, came on Aug. 23 wherein he hailed Iran’s Rio

doubt this victory will forever stay in the history of this land and the memory of our people, especially the women, and open up brighter horizons for women’s sports during the term of a government that promises ‘prudence’ and ‘hope,’” she said in a message.

The United Nations mission in Iran also commended Alizadeh for her great success, saying such a victory would pave the way for other Iranian female athletes to pursue their dreams in sports.

Popular Iranian actress Taraneh Alidoosti, known for her role in Asghar Farhadi’s award-winning film ‘The Salesman’ and ‘About Elly’, was also among the figures who found Kimia’s victory as the stepping stones for her other compatriots; “The future will tell what you have achieved for your



Olympic delegation for their efforts and victories, and directed a part of his message especially at female athletes “who displayed an honorable form of hijab as an Iranian code for all.”

Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Jaber Ansari also congratulated Alizadeh as well Hedaya Malak of Egypt, who landed the other women’s bronze in taekwondo, in a post on his Instagram page: “The presence of Kimia and another veiled woman from Egypt on the podium is the symbol of unity and efforts of Muslim women, who shine in new arenas while respecting their values.”

Shahindokht Molaverdi, Vice-President for Women and Family Affairs, also lauded Kimia for her exemplary hard work, courage and self-confidence; “no

peers,” tweeted Alidoosti, “You gave them self-confidence and showed them that (sports) belongs to them as well.”

Kimia, at the tender age of 18, might have been surprised and perhaps a little overwhelmed at the tremendous outpouring of support from such high-ranking officials and the public (her Instagram post after her victory received more 25,000 congratulatory comments), but she was not surprised that she had won a medal. In fact, she was disappointed that it was not a gold one.

“I was technically and psychologically ready, in fact I had never felt more prepared in my life,” Kimia told Mehr News reporter in Rio, “with this level of readiness, I expected of myself nothing short of a gold medal. Some

people find it hard to believe when they achieve success, but I had faith in myself for coming this far. What I still can't believe is that I lost to the Spanish athlete."

Her frustration is understandable, especially when one realizes that the Olympic Games are not only a sphere to prove your skills and capabilities to yourself and the world, but in many cases, as the athlete is elevated to the level of 'ambassador', they become a challenge, an opportunity, to prove your whole nation to the world, and to give your peers hope that if it had been possible for you to get this far, it would be possible for them to get further.

And Kimia definitely did that. The situation of women's sports in Iran and Iranian women athletes is far from ideal, yet far from stagnant and deteriorating. It is true that women's sports have been going through a rough patch mostly due to economic difficulties that slash budgets, but the situation is improving, and each year, a higher number of women participate in international games.

The share of female participants in the Olympic Games reached 45 per cent this year. This is while only 16 per cent (9 out of 63) of the Iranian Olympic squad were female. On the other hand, the share of Iranian women athletes has never been this much in any previous Olympics, and the increased share definitely worked in Iran's favor. With more female participation in the Olympics, one could expect more victories achieved by them, and perhaps this is exactly the kind of jolt women's sports in Iran need in their ongoing battle to win more recognition and financial and emotional support.

Kimia's winning of the first Olympic medal in female sports made many hopeful that the problems currently facing the Iranian athletes would be solved in part.

It was only last year that Iran women's national futsal team were on the verge of losing their chance at the 2015 Women's Futsal World Tournament in Guatemala, due to 'budget problems' and 'not enough time to obtain visas'. The decision made by the head of Iranian Football Federation, Ali Kafashian, came under heavy criticism in various media outlets, until President Rouhani



became directly involved and the Ministry of Sports and Ministry of Foreign Affairs followed up on the issue so that the problems would be solved and the women's team could participate in the international event. The team, although did not manage to make it to the quarterfinals at Guatemala games, became a champion in the 2015 AFC Women's Futsal Championship in Malaysia, as well as the 2012 and 2008 WAFF Women's Futsal Championship in Bahrain and Jordan.

Another more recent example of how women's sports in Iran receive less budget and recognition was the dissolution of one of the most active women's football team called Malavan (Sailor) due to, once again, 'financial problems'. What made the matters worse was a quote by the club CEO Rezaeian in 'defense' of his decision to dissolve the team; "we have many mouths to feed. When a storm-lashed ship is sinking, it starts unloading extra burdens," the quote went viral on social media and a great number of fans, activists, and female athletes lashed out at what was so obviously a gender discrimination.

Maryam Irandoost, previous head coach of the team, was completely scan-

dalized by the news of the dissolution of the most decorated team in history of women's football; "this will definitely dampen motivation among female athletes," she said in an interview, while noting that she had been forced to resign from her position as a coach and leave football behind because of the existing problems.

"I kept telling myself that better days were on their way and our efforts would be seen through championships," she lamented. "I do believe that such maltreatments and discriminations will have adverse effects on women's sports community and create a great chasm of despair."

'The better days' that Irandoost was hoping to see did come, this time in the form of the first Olympic medal achieved by an Iranian women athlete, and it made many hopeful for more inspiring achievements to come. There is no questioning the fact that the budget allocated to women's sports must be equal to that of men, and that any financial limitation will hinder the women's progress in society. But Kimia's medal radiated beams of hope on the hearts of all who need that little spark of motivation and confidence to take greater steps toward victory |



Culture

Puppet theater festival brings color to Tehran



Written by Marjohn Sheikhi

Tehran was host to a week-long International Puppet Theater Festival late August, where colorful puppets of all sizes and kinds brought happy smiles to the faces of children and adults alike.

“The world of puppets is the world of curiosity and asking questions; it is the world weary of anger and violence, wishing for happiness and peace for everyone on the planet,” this is how Mehdi Shafiee, Director-General of Performing Arts at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, described Tehran International Mobarak Puppet Theater Festival. Veteran puppeteer and director Marzieh Boroumand, who is known by many artists in the field as the ‘spiritual mother of puppet shows’, was the director of this year’s edition of the popular festival, now in its 16th year, and she, too, had the same vision of peace and love for the puppet show: “In a world brimming with violence, hatred and horror, in an air full of smoke, pollution and dust risen from poverty, war and ignorance, it is the puppets who are talking of love, of peace and friendship, of equality and justice,” Boroumand wrote in her message for the festival, “we are of the belief that with the help from art and artists, the earth will be one day cleansed of all evil and the sky will turn

a brilliant blue all across the globe.”

The puppet festival, first in its employing of dolls that symbolize childhood and in essence, innocence and purity, and second, for it being an effective and wonderful artistic medium that reaches out toward children and adults alike to link them back to the childhood they have forgotten in the humdrum of their everyday lives, is truly an occasion for much rejoice and excitement. For its opening on 22 August in Tehran, the festival had previously informed all who wished to attend the opening to come with their dolls. Children were holding onto their parents’ hands with one hand and with the other, grabbing onto their most beloved doll they had deemed special enough to accompany them on this wonderful journey through the metropolis. The number of public participation at the opening was so high that it even surprised the festival’s contributors. Giant dolls made in the shape of Persian folklore characters walked tall and proud among the gathering crowd; Rostam, the national hero of Greater Iran, Div, evil creature of chaos and disorder, and Kaveh, the blacksmith who led a popular uprising against a merciless foreign ruler, Zahhak, all of whom immortalized by the 10th-century poet Ferdowsi in Shahnameh, and perfectly familiar to the Iranian children. Mobarak, the mascot of the festival, as

the world’s tallest puppet standing at a six-meter height, was also one of the giant puppets that walked through the carnival to the excitement and enjoyment of all children and their parents. The puppet, made of recycled materials, was designed by French artist Fleur Marie Fuentes during Iran’s 13th Mobarak International Puppet Theater Festival, and unveiled during the Iranian Art Week held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in December 2010.

The carnival marched on for two hours to a tune familiar to children of the 80s and 90s, the soundtrack of a popular puppet TV show called ‘Grandma’s House’, directed in 1987 by none other than Marzieh Boroumand herself. It was actually the parents at the carnival who were singing the lyrics aloud, “Grandma’s house has thousand stories...grandma’s house has both joy and sorrow...”

Boroumand, who was leading the joyful carnival with a puppet in her hand, wished for peace and security in all parts of the world; “I wish that no child would spend a night in terror. I wish for justice to be upheld all over the world, and I wish for happiness and joy for all families and children, especially the Iranian people.”

According to Salma Mohseni, Board Member of Mobarak UNIMA, the first permanent venue for children theatre →

was established by Behrooz Gharibpour in 1979, in the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA, Kanoon). The second edition of international festival of puppet theatre was held in 1989, this time under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Since then this festival has been held every two years and attracts many artists from Iran and abroad.

For this year, the week-long festival included seven foreign plays performed on an indoor stage while two others were performed outdoors. The indoors plays were 'Writer' from the Netherlands, 'Piped Piper' from Czech Republic, 'Odysseus' from Russia, 'Images of Truth' from India, 'Peter the Tiger' from Ukraine, 'Shirin' from Afghanistan, and 'Extraordinary Voyage' from Germany.

The international outdoors plays

marionette, giant puppets and object theater in a bid to add more variety to the international section.

Notable among the list, was 'Images of Truth' about the life of Mahatma Gandhi, which was directed by Dadi D. Pudumjee, the UNIMA President who was also present at the festival in Tehran. UNIMA which stands for Union Internationale de la Marionette is the world's oldest theatre organization. The Iranian branch of UNIMA, called Mobarak UNIMA, revived its activities in 2009 after two years of hiatus, and its objectives center on providing support and training for various puppetry groups across the country.

The 'Mobarak International Puppet Theater Festival' also triggered a movement which led to the inauguration of the 'House of Puppets' in February 2015 in Tehran, to serve as an academy in the

techniques of puppetry while I work with them."

Puppetry in Iran, by contrast, goes as far back as to ancient times of pre-Islamic Persia where practitioners of the ancient cult of Mithras, an Indo-Iranian religion practiced in the 14th century BC, used masks and probably dolls in initiation ceremonies. But when one talks of puppetry of Iran, in the form that exists today, the roots go back to the 11th century, to the poetry of Omar Khayyam (1048-1131) and Attar of Nishapur (1145-1220) which contains many metaphorical references to string or shadow puppet shows. Although not as popular as it used to be and as it deserves to be now, puppet theater in Iran is still alive, either as a traditional form such as Kheimshab-bazi (literally, 'evening performance in a puppet booth', since 17th cent.), or employing more modern and experimental approaches for creating shows that most often target an adult audience. According to Hamidreza Ardalani, President of Iranian UNIMA, Iran is home to hundreds of various types of puppets and ritualistic puppet shows, most of which are still alive even in the remotest parts of the country.

But what is the appeal of puppetry, especially to those who do not have the same rich heritage of this beautiful art performance in their country? For Ms. Quade, it is the magical aspect of the performance and the scope that puppetry can reach, while other modes of theater simply cannot.

"Puppetry gives us a landscape to bring our dreams into the tangible world," she said of her own personal reason for practicing what is essentially nonexistent in her country. "It enables us to see the magic, to look at the world the way children do, and forget about being an adult."

"With puppet theater, you can manage what you cannot while working with actors instead of puppets," she added. "When you're a puppeteer, you put yourself back to show the great, magical world, but when you are an actor, all you can show is a human being. So the world of puppets is much bigger than just one person and you can accomplish more when you have puppets at your disposal."

Her 'Writer' opened this year's Mobarak festival at the main hall of City →



that were performed to an enthusiastic crowd of hundreds included 'Colorful Dinosaurs' from Spain and 'Poem about the Sun and the Moon' from Poland. The Spanish performance directed by Miquel Seto and Josep Maria Lai was about three gigantic, colorful dinosaurs that were trying to bring children outside of the world of computers. The Polish show directed and written by Viktor Viktorczyk, is the story of the creation of the world that moves through time and history to finally arrive at the era of aliens.

The performances used various puppetry techniques such as shadow plays,

field of puppet theatres and performing arts. This is while a number of countries in the world are deprived of a specialized center for puppetry education, and the line of interested audience is very short. One such country is the Netherlands, which interestingly enough, had a representative in this year's puppet festival.

The playwright and puppeteer of 'Writer', Ulrike Quade, told me that in the Netherlands, there are not so many puppeteers, in fact, "almost no puppeteers at all. There is no school for them, so I always work with actors or dancers or mime artists, and teach them the

Theater, which is the biggest performing arts complex in Tehran. The performance, which received an enthusiastic reception in its two show times, narrated the life of Knut Hamsun, a major Norwegian writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1920. The show, which was intended for an adult audience and used the English language for the dialogues while Persian subtitles were displayed on monitors, talked of the responsibility of journalists and writers during the war. Hamsun, who is considered as the father of modern literature with his famous novel 'Hunger' and his use of stream of consciousness and interior monologues influencing later authors such as Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, and Charles Bukowski, was in fact a supporter of Hitler, and his far-right political views have turned many readers away from him. He was a great writer, but his open support of the Nazis and his betrayal of his country and humanity, caused him to fall as a public figure and be shunned by the literary establishment. When he died, many did not attend his funeral, because he never apologized for his views and they did not want to pay respect to the body of a Nazi. Quade's 'Writer' was in a sense, a redemptive narrative for Hamsun, written in 2009 and on the occasion of his 150th birthday.

"I chose three different sizes of the

puppet to represent Hamsun," she said after the performance, while pointing to the puppets still on the stage behind her. "The small one is the one that receives the Nobel prize for 'Growth of the Soil' when he's about 60 years old; the life-size Hamsun is from the book 'Hunger' that he wrote and the giant puppet is when he's 92 years old and writing his last masterpiece before his death."

"Hamsun was living in the north of Norway, so he did not have much contact with World War II," she said, "and he was writing in praise of Hitler during that time, but afterwards he never said sorry, so in this last story he's writing in 'Writer', there's maybe a sense that he's trying to admit that he was wrong, that he regretted it."

Somewhere in 'Writer' the dichotomy between 'literature' and 'reality' came up, which made me ask what kind of 'lie' her performance was putting on display for the audience; "obviously, the redemption arc I allowed my Hamsun to have is made-up, as Hamsun never apologized for his Nazi sentiments. We received a lot of criticism in Norway because of that; people would say 'we have studied all history books and nowhere does he ever say sorry.' But this is fiction, so we can make up our own stories. We don't need to make it a historical paly."

"We wish that he had said sorry and by this performance, I want the German and Norwegian young generation to come together," she said, while adding that Hamsun would probably be fine with 'Writer' as she had used his technique of collage to make the performance.

The 16th edition of Tehran International Mobarak Puppet Theater Festival came to an end on August 28, after a week of over 80 performances from across the country and abroad. The closing ceremony was held in the memory of renowned Iranian cinema and theater actor and producer Davoud Rashidi, who passed away two days prior at the age of 83.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, Marzieh Boroumand expressed her satisfaction with this year's festival and called it a success; "I am happy to see that our festival managed to create happiness, starting with the carnival the scope of which had even bewildered me. The festival brought colors to our gray Tehran and cleansed the city of dust and pollution."

Deputy culture minister for artistic affairs, Ali Moradkhani, also expressed his content over the existence of such festivals in Iran, urging Boroumand to never give up on her hopes and dreams for bringing more happiness into this world |



Drought, intellectual abyss and ubiquitous sand: desert traveler

By: Samad Habibi

Desert of Khartouran has been home to villages virtually deserted by its inhabitants; as our desert traveler would document, the drought and dryness are causes to blame.

Torrid and scorched; these are epithets to define Khartouran desert region in Shahroud's Biarjmand County, in Semnan. To this natural harsh environment add the perennial drought which has hit the region out of its population: seldom would any one visiting the region spot young people; they had long abandoned their homes in the villages to seek their odds of success in cities miles from the heart of the desert: now here is the abode of the elderly.

Drought has found ample coverage by the local media, with headlines covering the dearth of water, either for meagre agriculture or for living; however, as Mohammad Hossein Abedi, Mehr News local correspondent would agree, only those who have the first-hand experience of the difficult life without water could bear testimony to the harsh realities of the desert life. The minds of 30,000 inhabitants of the county now entertain to come to terms grudgingly with the complete lack of water, a grim image indeed.

It is now for 17 years that drought has been keeping its sway in vast parts of the province which is an expanse starting from southern skirts of Alborz range and continuing to depressions leading to the heart of the desert. A drive of 300km to the south from Sahroud brings the tourists to the 'gate of the desert,' as the locals would call. Here in the last village of the county, Asbkeshan (Persian for 'horse-charioted cart'), the beast of drought growls more menacing than anywhere else; the people, hardened and patient, have migrated to the cities to curse the environment so ungrateful to its people. But not all seek their chances in cities and have preferred to remain in their homes for the blessed hope of the



coming rain; the migration however, has a strong footprints in the region, wrecking its share of havoc upon the economy and social life.

In most villages the only source of water is water tanks occasionally visiting the torrid villages provided by Biarjmand Rural Water and Wastewater Office; 20 out of 29 settled villages now receive their water solely from these tanks whose arrival triggers murmurs of happiness; but the 2,000-liter tanks of the village rapidly drains and the cycle of waiting and hydration will be go on interminably in the eyes of the villagers.

Continue 300km and you will arrive in Derazab, a village of 16 households. Only the elderly and women live in the village and the young had been too impatient to see the vanity of waiting in this desert of drought and left since long for better places to live. The remaining people usually sit in the shades of a tree; this is the only mode of life in the arid zone. The terrain and the road to the village are tortuous and difficult. For these people, the well, dug to the horrendous depths of 250 meters, has not provided a drop of water and now they would speak out to any visitor seeking their voices.

Ghodratollah is one of the village inhabitants. "Migration has reduced village population of once more than

25 households to now 16 households, each with one or two members. The life is difficult and dreary here, since Derazab has no water; a well, dug almost on the eve of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 had long been dried out," he tells to Mehr News correspondent. "Water from underground had been reaching to the village through a canal 9km long and going parallel to the road, hence the name 'derazab' (Persian for 'long waterway'); now, water is scarce and we restore it in 20-liter containers to be consumed. The heat rapidly evaporates this water within 2 hours; with the containers empty, here comes the painful 14 days of waiting for tanks to come to village; a shallow pond of stagnant water is the only source of water for washing our bodies," Ghodratollah continues.

The well Ghodratollah refers to is an underground water storage facility now home to the garbage and would only serve for bathing in a condition when women of the village have only chance to bath every 15 or 20 days in surrounding villages. In the dearth of water, the water storage is a gem in the hands of the villagers.

The second village in our desert visit is Asbkeshan, famously called by the locals as 'the end of the world,' since it leads right to the Lout Desert, not far from Bardeskan and the wastes of the →

desert which is horrific to trek in. The village hosts only 12 households; within half an hour of our stay in the village the only people appearing to us are four elderlies, mainly octogenarians and nonagenarians; an old man of 93 and his 88-year-old wife, and two other old women who refuse to speak.

Reza Karami accosts us. His calloused hands and a sun-burned complexion are tell-tale of his difficult times and life. He says the village has drink water only two days in a week; "today is a day of dryness and even a single drop of water would not be found in the village," he tells us. "A son of a co-villager brings us water with 20-liter containers; he would soon abandon us; indeed, we were indebted to him and would soon go for our water

nor administrator gives an account of the situation; "28 households of Garmab have only 6 hours a day of water which does not suffice for everyday life; in such conditions, no young man would stay and see the doomed fate of his village," he adds.

Fatemeh Akbari, however, is a different voice than Adeli's. She speaks out her grievances; "the water is contaminated here; long ago, we had plenty of water and grew vegetables; agriculture flourished, and livestock were also burgeoning; but the drought has wreaked havoc on all good days and now all that has gone," she complains.

Still deeper afield into the desert, we reach Kalateh Meri and Vahel, a village forlorn and abandoned to its own means amidst difficulties; the inhabit-

ter; the economy has crumbled thus."

An examination in city of Shahrud of the population newly settled indicates the wave of immigration from the villages; the average villager coming to Shahrud is under 40 and usually settle in cheap and low-quality government-sponsored Mehr Housing Scheme houses. The local government official believes severely declining precipitation had contributed to the drought along with global climate change; "the sector to be severely hit is drink water in desert regions; the situation is suboptimal for agriculture and livestock breeders; government measures included reviving the underground water canals and dredging of surface aqueduct system, but all these measures have been short-term responses and failed to address and solve drought once and for all," Rouhollah Karimi tells us; "outdated pipe networks, cracks and breakage, and decline in precipitation and in water levels are possible causes of drought."

"To seriously address the problem, local plans have been devised which include Khartouran Water Supply Scheme which will provide water for 9 villages when completed. The work on preliminary studies and excavations is underway by relevant government bodies; wells have been dug and we only invest hope in the water output of these wells," Karimi sums the measures.

"Village migrants comprise a new class of underqualified job seekers; their lifestyle is incompatible with city's cramped environment and most of them are hit by the sophisticated nature of life and become depressed and indulge themselves in menial lower-paid jobs or just engage in felony," says the county governor. "The rural economy has thus been hit, with long-term measures badly needed to redeem the life and activity in villages once burgeoning with the water present; the sum of measures rely only on the possibility of precipitations and would fail if no precipitation occurs."

Amid the local government measures, the human crisis in Khartouran is ubiquitous and ruling the deserts. All eyes and all minds await the ultimate redeemer, rain, which had been so far fleeting. All government officials should abandon the comfort of their office desk to dare into the deserts we traversed in this report to see the realities harsh as →



to an underground canal where bats live and water is far from hygiene to drink," he sobs, in convulsions.

Garmab is a village in queue for our visit after leaving Reza Karami in Asbke-shan miles behind. Garmab would have been a tourist resort of some reputation for its spa mineral water; now however, some haggard goats grapple with finding outcroppings of some desert bushes out of the sand. This is the image the village presents lavishly to visitors; all the drought is understood when we catch the glimpse of a fawn yearling trying to drink milk from his mother's breast far from the maddening crowd of other creatures suffering the drought. The village is almost dead.

The common chapter of life in all Tou-ran (Khartouran) villages is drought-induced migration of the youth to cities. A local, Valliollah Adeli, the village gover-

ants would not remember the worst of situations; of government officials, no higher-ranking official than the county prefect and local governor has ever come to the village; the situation is in shambles; the first picture is children playing merrily, albeit with decrepit and discolored clothes; the village is not home to even the elderly, since here is the absolute absence of water. In comparison, villages other than Kalateh Meri and Vahel are paradise. The locals rely on the spillovers from other villages in the upstream of a river for their daily water needs.

The village has been virtually deserted by its settlers, as Khanoum Goli, a villager, would say, "agriculture and animal husbandry needs plenty of water and here, where miles into the desert is dry, even resistant animals as camels would leave, since one day they will need wa-



they are, for an experience an insider would only understand properly.

We leave our real desert traveler to reflect upon the sad nature of events in the desert and begin a virtual journey where he finished in the gate of the desert. As he told us, the first city in the desert when we go deeper into the wastes of the central desert southward is Bardaskan, now in the Khorasan territories. The depression leading to the Lout Desert, the lowest point in Iranian plateau had been much envied for its challenges for any traveler either ancient or modern. The desert in central Iran consists of spectacular scenery of sand dunes and in some areas vast expanses of wind erosion material create hundreds of miles of the wilderness through which movement is difficult and cumbersome.

Our virtual journey brings us to some of the world's most notorious desert storms further south in Kerman and Sistan where Zagros's southeasterly tilt creates still difficult terrain and the rugged outcroppings of the rocks are visible when you have chances to spot them during travel. Few hundred miles to the east, Iranian plateau gives way to new territories where the desert gradually leads to mountainous regions of Afghanistan and where the flanks of Iran's northern Alborz leads to mountains over the border in Afghanistan.

The virtual journey to the south puts

us to a branch of the ancient Silk Road which crisscrossed the Iranian plateau and linked the cities and oases spread around the desert and provided shelter and comfort from the heat of the day. In all the inner depression of Iranian plateau to which the Lut desert is an important part, sophisticated ancient systems of underground canals provided the inhabitants means to prosper and resilience. In Tabas, which lies midway in the long road between Sabzewar and Yazd, the most inhospitable climate governs the lives of the sparse population of desert dwellers. Since the times immemorial, desert had been formidable, tantalizing as its mirages to the caravans of the Silk Road or lonely travelers of the Europe who dared to challenge the very concept of the desert by following the Silk Road right to the middle of nowhere. Such a traveler were Thesiger and Marco Polo who were intrigued to cross the central desert and the depression in the 16th century.

But the drought is not a ubiquitous as a single phenomenon as our traveler in Khartouran in the northern gate of the desert had so been impressed by; geological features of the desert are far from tantalizing; kaluts (yardangs) stand like enormous sand castles; broken teeth punctuating the landscape as far as the eye can see; meteorites are plenty in the Lut Desert further south

outside Kerman, since the dry climate provides excellent environment to lovers of meteorites to traverse the diverse landscape in their adventure; beautiful nights where the sky invites the inquiring eyes to behold the stars as if they were coming to sit on the sands.

Finally, desert has been inspiring for poets and prose writers of the Persian literature in providing them with themes of reflection of an intellectual upon the creation where the persona of Ali Shariati in his 'Night of the Desert,' combines religious musing with the night and its image of the Milky Way and diverse elements to share with the reader his own experiences of the nature of the creation. Out of such poetic sensations here lies the miles of sand before our virtual traveler and extreme heat; only water would quench the thirst invading the traveler; the imagination here becomes ever-creating, as desert is home to strange feelings of melancholy and the very vastness of the space instills the traveler with a brooding sense of loneliness: fear of intellectual abysses any reflection upon the desert poses upon our traveler and interminable sand dunes mocking the average courageous.

For the first part of the report, I am indebted to my colleague Mr. Mohammad Hossein Abedi, of Mehr News Semnan Service for his beautiful account of his visit to the drought-hit deserts |

By: Lachin Rezaian

In a speech last year, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei highlighted the numerous crimes which were committed by the US against Iranian nationals from June 26 to July 2, and suggested that the week should be entitled the "Week of American Human Rights".

"In this period, the true nature of American human rights was revealed in our country," the Leader said, back on June 27, 2015.

Accordingly, on January 11 this year, President Hassan Rouhani communicated a law designating July 2 in Iran's calendar as the "Day of Revealing American Human Rights".

Historically, one of the earliest uses of the term "human rights" is attributed to Frederick Douglas when he referred to the fundamental rights of enslaved African-Americans at the time when the United States did not recognize their humanity or their rights.

Since 1945 America has claimed exceptional leadership in promoting international human rights. At the same time, however, it has also resisted complying with human rights standards at home or aligning its foreign policy with these standards abroad.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its annual reports has repetitively talked upon the widespread abuses linked to prison overpopulation, racial disparity, capital punishment, solitary confinement, youth in criminal justice system, police killings, drug reform, immigration, and many other human rights violations instances in the US. In its annual review in 2016, HRW ranked police mistreatment of Blacks in America among human rights crises occurring across the globe.

It has presented high-profile police killings of unarmed African Americans, especially in recent years. Trayvon Martin in Florida, Freddy Gray in Baltimore, Walter Scott in South Carolina, Michael Brown in Missouri, Alton Sterling in Louisiana, are among hundreds of other unarmed black minorities recently killed by police in the US.

African American men are incarcerated at six times the rate of white men, and three percent of all black males are currently incarcerated in a state or fed-

Human rights violations in the name of democracy



eral prison. US police killed at least 102 unarmed black people in 2015, nearly twice each week most of them identified as unarmed, though the actual number is likely higher due to underreporting.

However, when it comes to human rights issue, the US exempts itself from any kind of violations and abuses upon its own citizens, and particularly regarding its own crimes against other nations of the world.

Issuing its annual list of human rights violators, the US has been accustomed to accusing other countries of human rights violations and claiming to be a champion in defending human rights, while there are many report coming out to prove the US holds the first place as the biggest human rights violator in the world.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, for the first time, has launched an art festival to display US policies completely opposed to human rights basic demands, and to promote public awareness and culture of human rights, and also to introduce the real face of international human rights claimants, through art tools, as Leader of Islamic Revolution believes, "any idea not integrated in art is ephemeral."

The event held on Sunday evening, August 28, to commemorate Iranian artists who have dedicated their works for fighting against arrogance.

The festival was introduced first in June 28, coinciding with American Human Rights Week, and is set at the national level and held in cooperation with the Iranian Lawyers Mobilization, Art Center, Islamic Propagation Organization, the Human Rights Council of the Judiciary, the Organization for Mobilization of the Oppressed, and some other public organizations and NGOs.

The most important approach of the popular event is to produce research-based art works on the nature, significance and instances of American human rights.

The study which includes a series of human rights violations of US governments is fully presented to the artists, and they have to produce all artworks of the festival based on the major research findings, using it as a reference which elucidates instances of the US violations against the US citizens, Iran and the rest of the world.

The collection of research-based instances was so comprehensive to become a book entitled "American Human

Rights” unveiled during the closing ceremony of the festival.

Javad Hajipour and Mrs. Es’haghi are the two researchers and authors of the book who commented that it includes the collection and documentation of American human rights violations developed in three main sections narrating instances of human rights violations in the US, its anti-human rights performance in the international arena as well as US hostile behavior against the Iranian nation in documentary form.

The festival received about 800 works in different sections and in the form of motion graphics, infographics, poster and paper boards, photography and cartoon.

The works were produced by 350 artists of ‘revolutionary values’ across the country, most of them based on research studies and have been adopted by the festival’s secretariat as accomplished particularly based on American human rights issues.

During the closing ceremony for the first American Human Rights Art Festival, Iranian artists were appreciated,

including Iranian film director, producer and documentary filmmaker Nader Talebzadeh and Organizer of Iran’s International Holocaust Cartoons Exhibition Seyyed Masoud Shojaee Tababaei who have contributed for years to the disclosure of real face of American and arrogance human rights violations.

US laws and practices routinely violate rights, often rights of those least able to defend their rights in court or through the political process—racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, children, the poor, and prisoners and they most likely to suffer abuses.

US national security policies, including mass surveillance programs, are wearing away freedoms of the press, expression, and association.

Muslim Americans are widely seen as victims of discrimination. Discriminatory and unfair investigations and prosecutions of American Muslims are alienating the communities the US claims it wants as partners in combatting terrorism.

Every US jurisdiction allows children under the age of 18 to be prosecuted as adults and sentenced to adult prison

terms in certain circumstances. At the end of 2013, 1,200 children were being held in adult state prison facilities.

Hundreds of thousands of children work on US farms. Child labor is common on tobacco farms in the US, the world’s fourth largest tobacco producer. Congress has not closed a legal loophole allowing children to do hazardous work in agriculture at 16.

US military veterans face systemic barriers in accessing health care, including long delays in obtaining adequate care at Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) health centers.

Millions of women in the United States had been victims of attempted or completed rape. At least one in five women is sexually assaulted in college, according to the reports released by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The list goes on. You can find millions of words in describing American crimes and human rights violations, something that is corresponding to the policies of authoritarian, dictatorial and greedy policies of the US |

To cycle or not to cycle: Controversy of female cyclists in Iran

Written by Marjohn Sheikhi

Women in Iran are still not sure if cycling in public for their daily commute is legal or conforms to Sharia law. Now with more and more people wanting to join the environmental campaign ‘Tuesdays without Cars’, the question has once again taken center stage in media outlets and daily conversations.

Google ‘bicycle laws’ and the search results will be, without fail, about whether wearing helmets is mandatory in a particular country or not. Now type ‘cycling’ in Persian (it is ‘دوچرخه سواری’ in case you were curious.) Among others, Google will also suggest to you ‘female cycling’. You may be wondering why ‘female cycling’ would need to be a ‘thing’, to be a specific topic for discussion, and in fact you are not alone in wondering about that. Female cyclists have long

been a subject of controversy in Iran, and once in a while, the topic will come up in discussion in media outlets and social networks.

Iran’s legal code does not ban women from riding a bicycle, but the old, religious and cultural texture does, in some parts of the country where the idea of women on a bicycle is so unusual that people may find it at conflict with their deep-seated religious values.

The controversy reared its ugly head a month ago in Marivan, the naturally beautiful county in Kurdistan province, western Iran, where a number of women were stopped by the police on charges of cycling. Reportedly, the police officers at the scene had deemed women’s cycling ‘haram’ and ‘illegal’, but there is no law in the Iranian legal system that would ban women from taking part in this sport activity. And that is the very heart of the controversy.

Religious figures in this small city with a population of about 100,000 have been very sensitive on this issue. Mamousta Mostafa Shirzadi, Marivan’s Friday Prayer Imam, reacted to the news on women’s cycling on the streets three days after the incident on July 29, saying “cycling in public is a sin for women and therefore, officials at the Sport and Youth Organization need to provide them with an appropriate indoor space [to do their cycling].”

Although women in Marivan will soon have their own exclusive space to ride bicycles and use other sports equipment provided for them at a ‘women-only’ park, that does not seem to have addressed the actual issue, which is the fact that women, as much as men, need to use bicycles, instead of cars or other means of transport, to commute. It is all well and good to have a special place to ride bicycles as a form →

of exercise, but the women who were stopped by the police had not come out to the streets with their bicycles in support of keeping fit and healthy – they were there as part of an environmental campaign, dubbed ‘Tuesdays without Cars’.

The idea of ‘Tuesdays without Cars’, or more generally ‘Clean Tuesdays’, which invites people to leave their cars at home on every Tuesday and instead commute on bicycles, was first introduced in November 2015 by environmental activities in Arak, a city where industrial pollution has for long harmed the activity and balance of citizens’ lives and brought many to the streets demanding that authorities take immediate action to reduce environmental pollution. The campaign soon gained popularity in other cities across the country to the point where less than a year after its tentative execution in a number of cities, all provinces joined in to bring the campaign on the verge of becoming a national event.

Mohammad Pouyesh, Director of Public Participation of Department of Environment, said the simple message of ‘Tuesdays without Cars’ is that each one of us should be the change in order to be worthy of living in a land of diverse plant and animal species. If the change needs to first happen within us and then spread to our surroundings and the planet on which we live, then every one of us, including all men and women, need to work together in order to make this world a better place.

Being one of the oldest civilizations in the world with its cultural roots going centuries upon centuries back to ancient traditions, Iran is home to unique and remarkably diverse ethnic and religious customs. In some parts of the country, such as Marivan, women are making far slower progress for being an active participant in the social sphere, but the progress is happening, slowly but surely, and their efforts are supported from the rest of the country where modernity has already found a comfortable place in people’s lives for a peaceful coexistence with tradition.

One such example of this civil support came last Tuesday, Aug. 23, from a number of young male and female cyclists in Tehran who were both promoting ‘Tuesdays without Cars’ and also



the women’s rights to cycling. They had a piece of paper sticking to their bicycles with a picture of Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, and beneath it, a quote attributed to him as saying ‘women’s cycling is both legal and conforms to Sharia law.’ There was no report of any confrontations between officers and the cyclists in Tehran, although a few number of media outlets voiced their objections over the move.

Interestingly, three days later on Aug. 26, Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, posted a tweet on her official Twitter account in which she quoted Ayatollah Khamenei as saying ‘Women’s cycling is permissible on the condition that religious customs are observed,’ and finished the post with a ‘Clean Tuesdays’ hashtag. It appears that it is not the actual act of cycling that seems problematic for women, but rather the sensitivities are focused on the observance of the Islamic dress code and other religious customs. Therefore, as long as there is no violation of the dress code, women should be free to ride bicycles on the streets, without being worried that they are breaking a law in doing so. According to Article 2 of the Islamic Penal Code, “any conduct, including action or omission, for which punishment is provided by law, constitutes an offense.” And since there is no law against women’s cycling, the act by itself should not be considered an offense. In a similar vein, opinion

No. 5152/7 of the Legal Department of Iran’s Judiciary dated 26.08.2000, maintains that “due to the legality of offences and punishments, since no punishment has been defined for wearing neckties, women’s cycling on main streets and men’s hairstyles, these acts are not legally an offence.”

On the other hand, a number of officials have voiced their support for female cyclists, including Mohammadreza Mahmoudi, then deputy head of civil affairs for Governor of Tehran, who said in 2012, “based on our investigations, there is no ban on the use of bicycles by women and one cannot confront them solely for cycling.”

Despite official and civil supports, the controversy of female cyclists is not settled yet. The ‘Houses of Bicycles’ which were set up by the Municipality of Tehran in the capital in 2009 still refuse to allow women to use the bicycles. A number of religious figures believe that female cyclists should be restricted to women-only spaces. In certain cities where tradition is still strongly observed, such as Yazd, women who decide to commute around the town on bicycles may run the risk of being stopped by officers. But the general consensus is that as long as women fully observe the dress code, there should be no objection to their cycling on the streets. ‘Tuesdays without Cars’ is already campaigned by men and women alike in many cities across the country and officials have promised to settle the remaining issues in other cities as well |

When it thunders...

By: Lachin Rezaian

Iran in general and Azerbaijan in particular have been the land of growth and flourishing of many poets and mystics in all ages; a place for literature myths, from Shams to Shahriar.

Azerbaijan has been a breeding ground for many well-known poets like Parvin Etesami, Ghatran, Nezami, Shams Tabrizi and Sheikh Mahmoud Shabestari, and a place for emergence of prominent Muslim scholars like Al-lameh Amini, Mohammad Taghi Jafari, Allameh Tabatabaei and many political and cultural figures and libertarians like Sattar Khan, Bagher Khan, Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani and Ayatollah Madani.

Mohammad Hossein Behjat Tabrizi, mainly known by his pen name Shahriar, is among famous and valuable national figures of Iran's cultural heritage, at the top of eloquent poetry and literature.

Born in 1906 in a village near Tabriz, Shahriar was the first Iranian to write poetry in Azeri language and his most famous poem Heydar Babaya Salam (Hello to Heydar Baba), known by many as one of the best modern poems in Azeri language and the pinnacle in Azerbaijani literature which gained great popularity in Turkish world, has been translated to more than 30 languages and adapted into a few plays.

In Tabriz, Shahriar received his elementary education, including the study of Divan of Hafez, under his father's supervision. Shahriar's formal education started at Motahari (former Mansour High School) Secondary School in Tabriz. He published his first book of poems in 1929. His poems are mainly influenced by Hafez, a famous Persian poet, and Khasta Qasem, an old Azeri poet.

He came to Tehran in 1921 and continued his studies in Dar-ol-Fonoun High School and studied medicine there in 1924.

Shahriar lived in a house in Naser Khosrow Street with his mother; there he fell in love with a girl in their neigh-



borhood. Due to the financial situation of Shahriar, the girl's family decided to say yes to a richer suitor.

His failed love at a young age made a huge impact on his life; he dropped out just before getting his diploma and went to Khorasan, where he found a job there.

He returned to Tehran in 1935 and started working in the Agricultural Bank of Iran. Shahriar was the first Iranian Azerbaijani to write significant poetry in Azeri Turkish.

In 1954, her beloved mother died, the first person who put the nature of poetry in his heart and Shahriar had repeatedly confirmed his sense of poetry dates back to the time his mother sang to him the Turkish lyrics. Shahriar's bitter memory is his separation from his mother to whom he wrote the viable masterpiece of "Alas, My Mother."

When she passed away, Shahriar moved to Tehran and got married with his aunt's granddaughter.

The most important feature of Shahriar's poetry is its popular nature which is desirable for special and general interests; from a rural child who whisper Heydar Babaya Salam to those intellectuals who make researches and investigations on his lyrics, are enchant-

ed by the beauty and elegance of the words of Shahriar in his poems.

Shahriar's skill and proficiency in both Azeri and Persian literature and culture, made decision makers to unanimously choose September 18 as the National Day of Persian Literature and Poetry marking the death anniversary of Shahriar.

Shahriar's poems take diverse forms, including lyrics, quatrains, couplets, odes, and elegies. One of the major reasons for his success was the sincerity of his words. The poet made use of slang and colloquial language in his rhymes to make them understandable for the public.

In an article published in International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences, Nasrin Jafari names 4 factors to recognize a poet: poet's art, poet's lyrics influence among the people, emotional depth of human excellence (concepts and content), and cultural support.

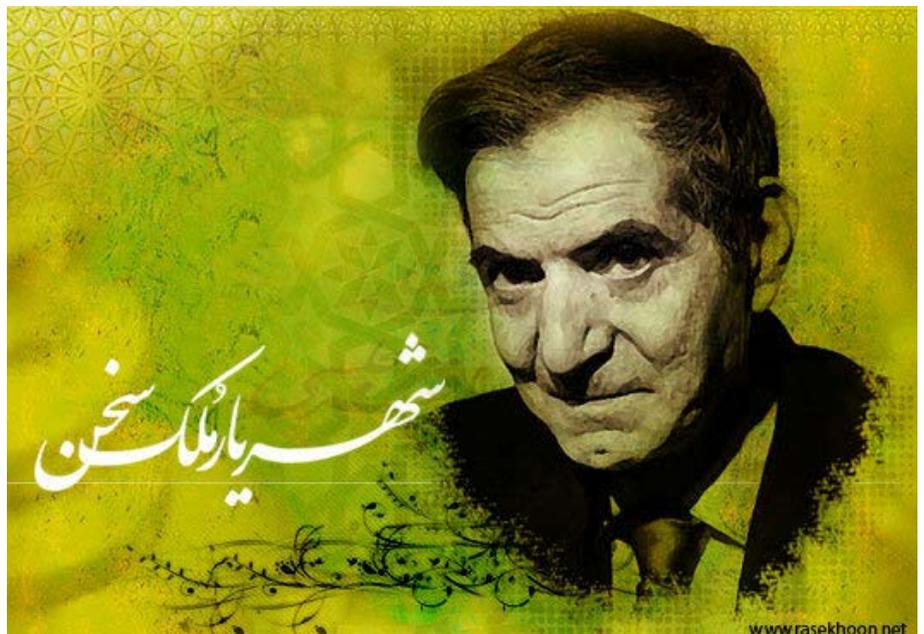
She says Shahriar first was master in literary prosody and rhyme and had familiarity with literary poetic form. Second, because of his fame among people and high status and reputation of his poetry among people, most of them came in circles of literary and read his

poems. Even people had memorized most of his lyrics. Thirdly, his poems are full of spirit, of love, emotion and personal and social kindness. In most of his poems, love, emotion of human or even divine love, is quite visible. In his poems, we see all nouns, proverb, and rate of customs and understanding of world literature, especially West literature, as well as Russia.

Shahriar is best known for his straightforward language and easy-to-understand poems. Hello to Heydar Baba is a long poem in two parts addressed to Heydar Baba, a mountain near Tabriz, using slang and colloquial language which has contributed to the appearance of some grammatical or lexical lapses in his poetry, he is generally admired for the elegance of his language, and his fame has surpassed almost all the poets of his time:

Heydar Babaya Salam
 Heydar Baba when it thunders,
 Floods rush down
 Girls stand back and watch,
 I hail your glory and your people,
 May you remember our names too?
 When your partridges take flight,
 When the rabbits hop out of the bushes,
 When your gardens have burst into blossoms,
 May you remember our name too?
 And make our depressed hearts happy.
 When Norouz gales uproot garden shelters!
 And Norouz flowers and snow drops blossom!
 When the clouds wring out their clothes!
 Greetings to those who remember us,
 Let our sighs turn into mountains.
 Heydar Baba may the sun warm your back
 Make your smiles and your springs shed tears,
 Your children collect a bunch of flowers,
 Send it with the coming wind towards us,
 Perhaps my sleeping fortune would waken!
 Heydar Baba may you be fortunate!
 Be surrounded with springs and orchards!
 May you live long after us!
 The world is paved with events, deaths

and losses!
 This world has long been childless and an orphan.
 Heydar Baba my way differed from yours,
 Life passed, I could not come until late!
 I could not learn what happened to your beautiful ones,
 Did not know there were perilous paths, losses, separations and death.
 Heydar Baba good sons are faithful,
 Life passes, regrets are wasteful,
 Disloyal sons won't live long,
 Believe me we have never forgotten you,
 Forgive us if we failed to see you.



This passionate poet began by composing tragic poetry. Many of his bitter memories are reflected in his books Hazyan-e Del, Heydar Baba, and Mumiyai. Heydar Baba, composed in Azerbaijani and later translated into Persian, was for a long time on the top ten best-seller list in Tehran.

Shahriar was interested in humanistic issues and in his poem "A letter to Einstein" he criticized the result of his scientific work that was abused as nuclear weapon. Shahriar was a talented calligrapher, played the Sitar very well, and had a keen interest in music.

As Nima was a legendary inventor and step by step opened new field of literature for the contemporary Persian literature. Shahriar told new concepts and used novel designs for classic poems. To the extent, that he gained the

highest achievement in this method. He had created a balance in his poetry. Using the old style and new style, he launched a new convention that it can be taken up as his personal style.

He died on September 18, 1988, in one of Tehran's hospitals and his body was transferred to Tabriz and was buried in Maqbaratoshoara (House of Poets).

Every year, several ceremonies and conferences are held to commemorate Shahriar in Tehran or Tabriz. Many people specialized in studying his poems come together to discuss various dimensions of his character and works.

There is also Shahriar Literary Award in remembrance of this Iranian renowned contemporary poet. The prize is to be awarded to institutions, organizations and individuals whose efforts contribute to the works and life of contemporary Iranian poet and scholar Shahriar.

No doubt Shahriar is a genuine mirror of Iranian culture and identity. Such geniuses emerge once every few centuries, having a large influence on a nation's literary history.

Such figures are the pillars of poetry and play a major role in the development of important literary periods. Shahriar is among those who keeps a special position in Iran and Azerbaijan's poetry and literature and one who has left a brilliant footprint on Iran's literary history |



2015 Mina Stampede

Dossier

Leader's Hajj message:

'Faithless' Saudi rulers responsible for crimes in Muslim world



In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

And all praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, and Allah's greetings be upon our Master, Muhammad, and upon his immaculate household and chosen companions and upon those who follow them rightfully until the Day of Judgment.

Muslim brothers and sisters across the world!

For Muslims, the season of hajj is the season of pride and glory in the eyes of God's servants, the season of enlightening hearts, the season of humility before the Creator and of solemn prayer.

Hajj is a heavenly, earthly, divine and communal obligation. On the one hand, the commands "then remember Allah as you remembered your fathers, rather a greater remembering" [the Holy

Quran, Sura al-Baqara, Ayah 200] and "remember Allah during the appointed days" [the Holy Quran, Sura al-Baqara, Ayah 203] and on the other hand, the declaration "whoever shall incline therein to wrong unjustly, We will make him taste of a painful chastisement" [the Holy Quran, Sura al-Hajj, Ayah 25] shed light on its infinite and diverse dimensions.

During this unparalleled obligation, temporal and spatial security bestows tranquility on the hearts of human beings like a clear sign and a brilliant star and draws hajj pilgrims out of the siege of insecurity by domineering oppressors that constantly threatens humanity and it helps humanity taste the pleasure of security during a particular period of time.

Abrahamic hajj, which Islam has pre-

sented to Muslims as a gift, is the manifestation of pride, spirituality, unity and glory. It demonstrates to ill-wishers and enemies the greatness of the Islamic Ummah and its reliance on God's eternal power. It highlights the distance between Muslims and the cesspool of corruption, humiliation and tyranny that international oppressors and bullies impose on human communities.

The Islamic and monotheistic hajj is the manifestation of being "firm against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves" [the Holy Quran, Sura Fath, Ayah 29]. It is the stronghold of renouncing unbelievers and promoting friendship and unity among believers.

Those who have reduced hajj to a religious-tourist trip and have hidden their enmity and malevolence towards →

the faithful and revolutionary people of Iran under the name of “politicizing hajj”, are themselves small and puny satans who tremble for fear of jeopardizing the interests of the Great Satan, U.S.

Saudi rulers, who have obstructed the path of Allah and Masjid ul-Haraam this year and who have blocked the proud and faithful Iranian pilgrims’ path to the Beloved’s House, are disgraced and misguided people who think their survival on the throne of oppression is dependent on defending the arrogant powers of the world, on alliances with Zionism and U.S. and on fulfilling their demands. And on this path, they do not shy away from any treason.

Almost one year has now passed since the horrifying events in Mina, as a result of which several thousand people tragically lost their lives- under the hot sun with thirsty lips- and this happened on the day of Eid while they were in the clothes of ihram. Shortly before that, another group of people were crushed to death in Masjid ul-Haraam while they were worshiping and performing tawaf and salat.

Saudi rulers were at fault in both cases. This is what all those present, observers and technical analysts agree upon. Some experts maintain that the events were premeditated. The hesitation and failure to rescue the half-dead and injured people, whose enthusiastic souls and enthralled hearts were accompanying their praying tongues on Eid ul-Adha, is also obvious and incontrovertible. The heartless and murderous Saudis locked up the injured with the dead in containers- instead of providing medical treatment and helping them or at least quenching their thirst. They murdered them.

Several thousand families from different countries lost their loved ones and their nations were bereaved. From the Islamic Republic, close to five hundred people were among the martyrs. The hearts of their families are still broken and bereaved and our people remain grief-stricken and angry.

Instead of apology and remorse and judicial prosecution of those who were directly at fault in that horrifying event, Saudi rulers- with utmost shamelessness and insolence- refused to allow the formation of an international Islam-

ic fact-finding committee.

Instead of being tried as the accused, they acted like the plaintiff and with increased malice and vileness, they revealed their long-standing enmity towards the Islamic Republic and towards any flag of Islam raised to confront kufr and arrogance.

Their propaganda mouthpieces from the politicians whose behavior towards the Zionists and U.S. is a source of disgrace for the world of Islam, to impious and haraam-eating muftis who blatantly issue fatwas against the Book and Sunnah, and to media minions who are not even deterred by codes of professional conduct from spreading and telling lies- are making futile efforts to show that the Islamic Republic is at fault for depriving Iranian pilgrims of this year’s hajj pilgrimage.

The fitna-promoting rulers who by forming and arming wicked takfiri groups, have plunged the world of Islam into civil wars, murdering and injuring the innocent and shed blood in Yemen, Iraq, the Levant, Libya and other countries- the godless politicians who have extended the hand of friendship towards the Zionist regime, have closed their eyes on the Palestinians’ sufferings and heartrending tragedies and have spread their oppression and betrayal to the cities and villages of Bahrain- the irreligious and unconscionable rulers who gave rise to the great tragedy in Mina and in the name of being servants of the two holy places, sacrificed divine sanctity and God’s guests on the day of Eid in Mina and in Masjid ul-Haraam shortly before that- these same people are now claiming the need to avoid politicizing hajj and are accusing others of the great sins that they themselves have committed and caused.

They are the perfect example of the enlightening Quranic description: “And when he turns his back, his aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the earth and to destroy crops and cattle and Allah does not love mischief. And when it is said unto him: Be careful of your duty to Allah, pride takes him to sin. Hell will settle his account, an evil resting-place” [the Holy Quran, Sura al-Baqara, Ayahs 205-206].

Based on reports, this year as well,

besides barring the participation of Iranian pilgrims and pilgrims from certain other countries, they have placed pilgrims from the participating countries under unprecedented surveillance with the help of the spy agencies of U.S. and the Zionist regime. They have made the divine sanctuary unsafe for everybody.

The world of Islam, including Muslim governments and peoples, must familiarize themselves with the Saudi rulers and correctly understand their blasphemous, faithless, dependent and materialistic nature. They must not let those rulers escape responsibility for the crimes they have caused throughout the world of Islam.

Because of these rulers’ oppressive behavior towards God’s guests, the world of Islam must fundamentally reconsider the management of the two holy places and the issue of hajj. Negligence in this regard will confront the Islamic Ummah with more serious problems in the future.

Muslim brothers and sisters! This year enthusiastic and sincere Iranian pilgrims are absent from the hajj ceremonies, but they are spiritually present among the pilgrims from different parts of the world and they are concerned about them and they pray that the evil progeny of the taghut do not succeed in harming them.

In your duas, worship and prayers, remember your Iranian brothers and sisters and pray that the sufferings be removed from Islamic communities and that the Islamic Ummah be liberated from the hands of the arrogant powers, the Zionists and their followers.

I commemorate those who were martyred in Mina and Masjid ul-Haraam last year and the martyrs of Makka of the year 1987. I pray to Glorious God to bestow clemency and mercy and the highest positions on them.

I extend my greetings to the Imam of the Age- may my soul be sacrificed for his sake- and I ask Allah that the accepted prayers of that honorable Imam improve the Islamic Ummah and save Muslims from the fitna and malevolence of the enemies.

And providence belongs to Allah and reliance is on Him.

Dhu al-Qa’dah, 1437-September 2016 |

Leader calls Saudis 'sons of accursed tree'

By: Mohammad Pourgholami

Leader of the Islamic Revolution has issued a message on the occasion of Hajj rituals where he has used a Quranic term to describe the ruling Saudi family.

The term used is 'evil progeny,' rendered in different translations of the verse as 'accursed tree,' when it reads "When We said to you, 'Indeed your Lord comprehends all mankind,' We did not appoint the vision that We showed you except as a test for the people and the tree cursed in the Qur'ān. We deter them, but it only increases them in great rebellion." (17:60) The verse relates a dream by the Prophet (AS).

What is the 'accursed tree' which had been considered by God as an evaluation to test people? No place in the Quran did the God curse any 'tree' or 'progeny.' Some of interpreters believe the 'tree' is the same as the Zaqqum tree which appears in verse 62 of Surah Saffat: "Is this a better hospitality, or the Zaqqum tree?" (37:62). But in the verse, it just says that it is a measure of testing people and no mentions are made to 'being accursed;' some others still believe that the literal translation of the Arabic shajarah would lead nowhere, and support the idea that it should be translated as progeny, which had been to the most probability meant by God. In verses 24 and 26 of Surah Ibrahim, "Have you not regarded how Allah has drawn a parable? A good word is like a good tree: its roots are steady and its branches are in the sky." (14:24) and "And the parable of a bad word is that of a bad tree: uprooted from the ground, it has no stability;" (14:26) the 'good tree' and 'bad tree' are mentioned to distinguish between good and evil.

Contemporary interpreters, notable among whom Allameh Tabatabaei, believe it is accurately to be understood as 'progeny' and 'genealogy,' an in-



terpretation with many examples in Arabic literature, as in 'he is of good genealogy,' designating the individual described with originality of birth and social status. The term has precedent in traditions of the Prophet and Shia Imams. Prophet (AS) addressed Ali (AS) with this: "I and thou are from the same [shajarah] genealogy." Examples thus indicate a different meaning than the word's literal meaning of 'tree.' But what families had been designated as 'evil' or 'accursed' for their deeds?

According to Nemooneh Interpretation of Quran, in both Sunni and Shia exegetes, the dream of the Prophet (AS) is cited as the reason behind the verse. Prophet Muhammad (AS) once saw a dream where apes were swarming his pulpit. This angered the Prophet (AS). The dream is authentic to the testimony of many of Arab historians and Sunni traditionists such as Khateeb al-Baghdadi, Termedi, al-Tabarani, Beihaqi, bin Mordoviya and Shia exegete Sheikh Koleini. The dream thus had been widely in-

terpreted by both Shias and Sunnis as the ascendancy of the Umayyad family after the demise of the Prophet to the other world. Umayyad were notorious in their breaking the sacrosanct rules of Islam and are believed to have created a deviation from the correct Islamic practice.

Now, modern parallel of Evil Progeny drawn in message of Leader of Revolution for Al Saud dynasty represents the same deviation in world of Islam which has sowed discord and caused Fitna among Muslims by its acts and words. Saudi Arabia is a close ally to the United States and Zionist regime and actively supports, funds and arms Al-Qaeda and ISIL, is red-handed in killing of innocent civilians in Yemen, and displayed monumental incompetence in the case of Mina stampede in September 2015, and before that, in the crane collapse, which totally killed more than 6,000 hajj pilgrims along with 1987 opening fire on rallying hajj pilgrims from Iran and other countries |

Al Saud's black history to exclude Iranians from divine duty of Hajj



By: *Lachin Rezaian*

Almost one year has now passed since the horrifying events in Mina which left thousands of pilgrims dead including many Iranians.

The Hajj is among the five pillars of Islam, and any Muslim who can afford it must perform it at least once in a lifetime. During the month of the Hajj, Mecca must cope with as many as three million pilgrims.

One of the world's largest annual gatherings of people, Hajj, for years was marred by numerous deadly stampedes, fires, protests and riots due to failures of crowd control.

Despite many years of experience in managing massive crowds, there are still signs that the Saudi government has been negligent in its duty to protect the people within its borders. Saudi Arabia has failed to utilize lessons from previous disasters to reduce or eliminate future consequences. A failure which has cost many faithful believers, particularly in Iran, the right and opportunity to fulfill their religious duty.

Iranian pilgrims' absence is truly felt

in the Hajj this year; this is the second time that Iranians are deprived of traveling to Mecca to take part in the annual Muslim Hajj pilgrimage after Riyadh failed to address the Islamic Republic's concerns regarding the safety and dignity of the Iranian nationals participating in the Hajj pilgrimage.

What made 2015 Hajj turn into a tragic event for Iran was a host of incidents happening during Hajj ceremony and affected both Lesser and Greater Hajj pilgrimage by Iranian pilgrims.

The first incident happened on April 5, 2015, when Saudi officers sexually harassed the two Iranian teenage boys at the King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah as a result of which Iran stopped sending pilgrims for the Lesser Hajj until the fate of that case is determined at court, a case which Saudi officials did not take it seriously and defined the minimum sentence for them, which even was not carried out later. Saudi Arabia did not punish the officers, nor did it offer apologies to the Islamic Republic, while, in a letter to the Islamic Republic of Iran's consulate in Jeddah, the Saudi foreign ministry had announced that the two officers

would receive maximum penalty; a claim which has so far proved to be a sheer lie.

Meanwhile, years ago in 1987, more than 400 pilgrims, most of them Iranian Shia pilgrims, were killed when security forces of Saudi Arabia crushed and opened fire on the pilgrims, during an anti-US and anti-Israel protest in Mecca. After the Saudi scandal, Imam Khomeini boycotted the Hajj for three years, from 1988 to 1990, inclusive. In 1991, Iran and Saudi Arabia renewed diplomatic relations after coming to an agreement to allow Iranian pilgrims to perform the Hajj again.

For more than a decade, Iranian pilgrims participated in the rituals without any major problems (minors including quality of services provided to them). However, it doesn't mean that there has been no more incidents; as in different years, many people have fallen casualty in dozens and hundreds to misconduct of organizers in stampedes, fire incidents, construction failures, etc. Iran had by then learned how to organize its own pilgrims in the best possible manner to avoid such incidents.

During 2015 Greater Hajj, two dead →

ly incidents killed thousands of people, among them hundreds of Iranians, and received the title of deadliest disaster in the history of hajj pilgrimage, once again indicating the Saudis' inability to guarantee the safety of pilgrims.

On September 11, 2015, a crane fell in the grand mosque, ten days before official beginning of Hajj rituals and left 118 people dead and 394 injured. 11 Iranian pilgrims lost their lives and more than 30 others suffered injuries.

On September 24, 2015, at least 460 Iranians were among thousands of pilgrims who died in a stampede which broke out in Mina, near Mecca, during the Hajj pilgrimage. The incident happened in Mina at the intersection of two streets leading up to Jamarat Bridge.

Head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization Saeed Ohadi expressed regret over the event saying that there were three tragedies in the Mina incident; the first catastrophe happened when Saudi government deliberately blocked ways of the pilgrims and led them to the direction which made the way highly tumultuous and eventually due to negligence of the Saudi government, the tragedy happened.

He also slammed Saudi government for failing to provide appropriate emergency facilities, saying 'it would have been possible to save many of the victims,' if they had simply given water to people caught in the stampede or had not kept all the injured and the dead altogether in locked-up containers.

Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei declared three days of national mourning in Iran strongly criticizing Al Saud for lacking ability and management in controlling the pilgrimage, saying the running of the Hajj must be handed over to Islamic states.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani also said that the tragic incident showed lack of foresight on the part of Saudi rulers which led to the killing of thousands of men and women from across the Muslim world, including Iran.

Following the deadly incidents in 2015, Saudi Arabia once again came under fire for their inability to ensure

the safety of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who converge on Mecca every year.

Following the diplomatic tensions between Riyadh and Tehran which ended up in cutting the diplomatic ties between the two countries, Iranians lost the opportunity to participate in Hajj. Iranian officials came into negotiations with Saudi officials to pave the way for visa issuance and set the ground for Hajj travelers from Iran, but Saudi government showed no flexibility and curbed the path of negotiations.

After months of efforts, Iranian Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization announced on May 29, it won't dispatch pilgrims this year to Mecca. The Saudis ignored the absolute right of the Iranians to perform Hajj.

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Ali Jannati also announced on May 29, that due to obstructionist measures taken by Saudi Arabia, it would not be possible for Iranian pilgrims to attend the Greater Hajj ceremony during the current year.

The announcement came after two rounds of negotiations between representatives of Iran and Saudi Arabia aimed at providing necessary conditions for presence of Iranian pilgrims in this year's Hajj. Both rounds of talks, however, ended up in failure due to impediments created by the Saudi side.

One year has now passed since the ominous incidents in Saudi Arabia, however, they have refused to offer the smallest amount of cooperation in this regard and provision of com-

ensation for the victims. They even refused to return bodies of many victims to their countries and many were buried without their relatives' consent and even some without any identification. This also could have happened to Iranian victims if it was not for strong and serious position-taking of Ayatollah Khamenei; "Saudi officials fail to do their duties and act against their responsibilities and show slyness in some cases; if Iran wants to react, Saudi Arabia's conditions will not be good. We have so far shown self-restraint in several cases. In case of reaction, our response will be firm and severe," had asserted the Leader.

Families of the victims of the Mina tragedy have taken legal action with Iranian courts of Justice against the Saudi government to seek compensation in line with Universal Jurisdiction, the other substantive law governing relationships of member states of the United Nations.

Saudi Arabia is accused of blocking the path leading to Allah, and raising obstacles against Iranian pilgrims. As the Islamic Revolution Leader has repeatedly underlined, all Muslim pilgrims across the world must fundamentally reconsider the management of the two holy places and the issue of hajj due to constant and frequent mismanagement and oppressive behavior of Saudi rulers towards God's guests.

"Negligence in this regard will confront the Islamic Ummah with more serious problems in the future," Ayatollah Khamenei had emphasized |



Mina stampede compensation, stepping stone toward mending ties

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Iran and Saudi Arabia's damaged ties could have a chance to mend if the Saudi rulers addressed past injustice by paying compensations to families of victims of the Mina tragedy, and thus expedited the process of healing and reconciliation.

The first anniversary of the Mina stampede which took the lives of over 7,000 people from some more than 30 countries, including 465 Iranians, during Hajj rituals on Sep. 24, 2015, came as a great source of grief and continued desolation for the families of innocent hajj pilgrims who had been the victim of Saudi ineptitude and mismanagement in the land of what was supposed to be peace and security for Muslims. The anniversary came against the backdrop of many unresolved issues that from a humanitarian point of view, if nothing else, should have been handled by the Saudi regime by now, but they weren't.

The Arab country has yet to issue an apology – official or otherwise – to the bereaved families of the martyrs for what has been so obviously the fault in its mismanagement, negligence and complete disregard for sacred human lives that the Kingdom should have protected but instead left them under the burning sun and buried under piles of bodies for a horrifying, gradual death.

The Saudi regime's hostile attitude was also the reason hundreds of Iranians did not attend the Hajj pilgrimage this year. According to the head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization Saeed Ohadi, after lengthy negotiations, Riyadh added 11 articles to a memorandum of understanding signed between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which were not there in last years' Hajj agreements between the two countries. Riyadh's new restrictions and conditions for Iranian pilgrims, including limiting use of various medicines, refusal to raise Iran's flag over their residential buildings, banning certain ceremonies and prayer gatherings, refusal to guarantee the safety of pilgrims, halting flights to and from Iran following the severing of diplomatic ties, and their disregard for political courtesy during the negotiations, were all to blame



for the canceling of Hajj by Iran.

And last but not least, another unresolved issue that needed to have been addressed by Saudi Arabia in the immediate days following the tragedy was the offering of financial and moral compensations to the injured and the families of victims of the Mina stampede; a promise that the Arab Kingdom, with its secure place at the heart of the UN's human rights machinery, is very good at breaking. Just remember the deadliest crane collapse in modern history that happened in the Grand Mosque in Mecca on September 11, 2015, which killed more than 100 people, including a number of Iranians, and left over 300 others wounded. Saudi minister of Hajj had promised to pay compensations to the families of the martyrs of the crane collapse, but 11 months after the incident, Saudi officials have not paid any compensations to any countries whose nationals were killed in Mecca. Iran had also reached an agreement with Saudi Arabia for receiving compensations over the crane collapse before this year's Hajj ritual, but the agreement did not materialize.

Except for Iran, other countries whose pilgrims had been killed in the Mina stampede did not put much effort into pursuing the case through legal and political channels. Saudi Arabia has enough money and deeply-rooted ties with the US to be granted a privileged perch at the UN

Security Council and buy the international silence on many of its atrocities, be it the current inhuman war the regime is waging in Yemen, or their irresponsibility toward protecting the lives of millions of Muslim pilgrims, or even their complicity in the 9/11 attacks, which only just came to the surface – after 15 years since the catastrophic incident – as the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee released a 28-page report in July that determined 15 of the 19 Sept. 11 hijackers were Saudi citizens, and exposed links between some of the hijackers and officials in Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic of Iran is among the few countries that does not care for Saudi dollars, neither is it swayed or impressed by the regime's powerful allies, including the US, the UK and the rest of Persian Gulf Arab states. The head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization said in August that a legal committee has been formed to deal with the legal and political aspects of the Mina case and using the French legal expertise to restore the rights of Hajj victims.

Furthermore, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, in his latest remarks on the Mina tragedy during a meeting with the families of those who lost their lives, criticized other governments that have not raised issues with what happened in Mina, and deemed their silence and indifference a 'great dis-

aster for the Islamic Ummah'. Ayatollah Khamenei described Saudi rulers as 'Evil Progeny' in his 2016 Hajj message published on Sep. 5, and blamed them for the deaths of the thousands of pilgrims in both incidents in Mina and Mecca. "Because of these rulers' oppressive behavior towards God's guests, the world of Islam must fundamentally reconsider the management of the two holy places and the issue of hajj. Negligence in this regard will confront the Islamic Ummah with more serious problems in the future," he warned.

But is there any possibility for Iran to file a case of compensations against Saudi Arabia? According to a Professor of International Law, Saber Niavarani, the government of Saudi Arabia has been, with no doubt, obliged to ensure the safety of these passengers, and as such, it is bound to two international commitments: 1) legal prosecution of offenders in case of an offence, and 2) financial or even moral reparations to the families of victims. Niavarani believes that if Saudi Arabia does not observe these two commitments, the government has violated an international law. Meanwhile, Iran's Chief of Police announced that the country has filed a complaint against Saudi Arabia with the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) over the Mina stampede, and the police department will follow up on the issue in cooperation with Foreign Ministry and the Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization in the future.

While Iran is mobilizing every resource to make sure the grief-stricken families of the victims are compensated for both material and psychological injury, Saudi rulers still refuse to address past injustice and expedite the process of healing and reconciliation. They have also blocked attempts at forming a truth commission to investigate into the incident and expose the truth of what had happened to the public. The severed diplomatic ties between the two countries is also another hampering factor that allows Saudi Arabia to circumvent acknowledging its wrongdoing, which could help repair damaged relationships and ensure that wrongful acts would not be repeated.

Addressing injustice and redressing past abuses by responsible governments is critical for building peace and helping victims to put the past behind them. Throughout history, reparations have been able to repair damaged ties and allow countries to restore their positions on the international scene. The following is a list of some of the most important cases of compensations:

Treaty of Versailles (1919)

The treaty required "Germany [to] accept the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage" during World War I, and forced Germany to concede territories and pay 132 billion gold marks (US\$33 billion) in reparation to the Triple Entente. The Reparation Commission and the Bank for International Settlements, however, state that only 20.598 billion gold marks (US\$5.12 billion) was paid by Germany.

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918)

Russia agreed to pay reparations to the Central Powers consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria, when Russia exited the war in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918). Under the treaty, Russia was forced to give up close to half its European territory including Ukraine, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania and part of Latvia, and pay six billion marks in reparations.

Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine (1919)

After its defeat in World War I, Bulgaria was required to cede various territories, reduce its army to 20,000 men, pay reparations of £100 million, and recognize the existence of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

Pan Am Flight 103

In 1988, after a Libyan national was found guilty of planting a bomb in the cabin of Pan Am Flight 103 from Frankfurt to Detroit, which crashed over Lockerbie, Scotland, and killed all 243 passengers and 16 crew as well as 11 more people on the ground, the Libyan government agreed to pay \$10 million to each family of the victims.

Malaysia Airlines Flight 17

The international passenger flight from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was mistakenly shot down on 17 July 2014, killing all 283 passengers and 15 crew on board. Ukraine and Western powers have been blaming Moscow for the downing of the plane, while Russian President Putin said that Ukraine bore responsibility for the incident which happened in its territory. Unless investigators determine who fired the missile, the Malaysia Airlines' reinsurer will be required to pay reparations of about \$1 billion.

Iran Air Flight 655

On July 3, 1988, 290 people were killed in a U.S. missile attack on an Iranian pas-

senger flight from Bandar Abbas to Dubai across the Persian Gulf. The United States never took any responsibility for the attack, called it a justifiable self-defense, and went so far as to award all the men of the USS Vincennes combat-action ribbons for what Iran deemed as a "criminal act" and a "massacre". The incident was brought to the International Court of Justice eight years later during which the U.S. agreed to pay \$131.8 million in compensation to the Iranian government, including \$61.8 million to the families of the victims, although without any apology or accepting legal liability.

9/11 attacks

In a recent development, and 15 years after the September 11 attacks of 2001 which killed about 3,000 people, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation that would allow the families of victims to sue Saudi Arabia's government for damages. The 28-page report on Saudi Arabia's involvement in the attacks exposed links between some of the hijackers and officials in the Saudi kingdom and identified fifteen of the 19 hijackers as Saudi citizens. This is while Riyadh continues to deny any responsibility and the Obama Administration confirmed that the bill would be vetoed by the president, as the bill would make "the United States vulnerable in other court systems around the world." The possibility still remains, however, that Obama's veto would be overridden with a two-thirds majority vote from both houses of Congress.

Conclusion

The international law provides the legal basis for victims of human rights violations to receive appropriate remedy, including official apologies, financial compensations, psychological and social support, as well as the prosecution of the offenders and public condemnation of the committed crime. These reparations, throughout the history, particularly in regard to the two world wars, have been a tremendous help for allowing the countries to compensate for their wrongdoings and move on toward a better future. If Saudi Arabia acknowledges its responsibility over the death of thousands of Muslim pilgrims during the Mina stampede and agrees to pay reparations to the families of victims, this move could be a stepping stone toward mending the severed diplomatic ties between Iran and the Saudi Kingdom and expedite the healing process of the injuries suffered by the Iranian nation |

5 reasons Iranians hate Saudi rulers



By: Ali Rajabi

Hajj 2016 is proceeding while Iranian pilgrims didn't attend one of the biggest Muslim ceremonies due to conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Meanwhile, some pilgrims from Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq were also prevented from travel to Mecca because of harsh policies of the new generation of Saudi rulers. Since 2011, Saudi Arabia has been supporting salafist groups in Syria and Iraq and have tried to spread insecurity to Lebanon and Iran as well. Consequently, in December 2015 German intelligence had warned that Saudi Arabia was at risk of becoming a major destabilizing influence in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Leader of Islamic Revolution on Monday September 5 issued an important message to all Muslims around the world in which he paralleled Saudi Arabian authorities with the Quranic term "evil progeny of the taghut" which refers to Umayyad dynasty in Islamic history. The message and its harsh rhetoric reflects deepened conflict between Tehran and Riyadh. The conflict, however, doesn't seem to be only at political levels and majority of Iranians are strongly opposed to the Saudi regime.

Here are five major reasons Iranian people hate Saudi rulers:

1- The hajj stampede in 2015 caused a new flare-up in tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The September 2015 stampede and crush of pilgrims killed at least 7,477 people, according to a list that was published by Saudi Ministry of Health. Tehran has said 464 of the dead were Iranian and those who survived blame the catastrophe on Saudi mismanagement of the annual pilgrimage. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called on the United Nations to investigate the incident. Iran has urged Saudi Arabia to apologize for the disaster and form an international Islamic fact-finding committee, but it has so far been refuted by Saudi rulers. In his recent message, Iran's Leader highlighted the problem; "instead of apology and remorse and judicial prosecution of those who were directly at fault in that horrifying event, Saudi rulers – with utmost shamelessness and insolence – refused to allow the formation of an international Islamic fact-finding committee."

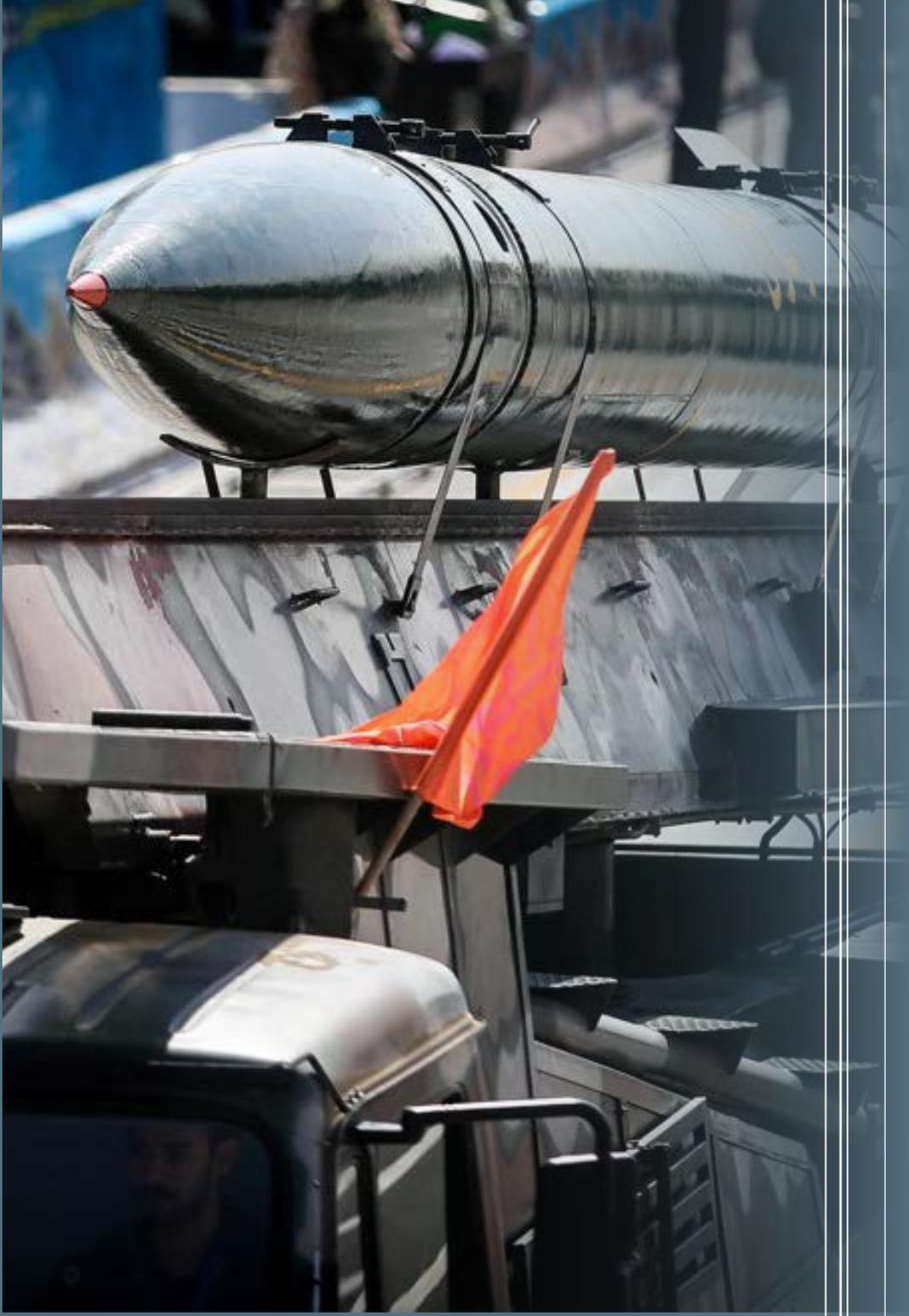
2) In April 2015, 2 Iranian teenage pilgrims were sexually harassed by two Saudi security officers at Jeddah Airport. After that, thousands of Iranians protested outside Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran over the abuse of these two Iranian pilgrims. On April 13th, Iran suspended minor hajj trips to Saudi Arabia until the Saudi government "applies a strong attitude" to the case. Although Saud al-Faisal, FM of Saudi Arabia, has

pledged to Iran's ambassador that his government will punish the two Saudi policemen very soon, nothing has happened yet!

3) On 31 July 1987 around 400 pilgrims, out of which two thirds had Iranian nationality were killed by Saudi security forces during a gathering. Iranian officials maintain that the Saudis had opened fire on the demonstrators without provocation, and that the demonstrations had been peaceful. For people of Iran and perhaps for the families of martyrs in other countries, that event is a sad event and that year's Hajj is known and recalled as 'Bloody Hajj'.

4) As the leading global exporter of oil, Saudi Arabia has refused to cut production in the face of plummeting oil prices to defend its market share. As a result, the world is now awash in cheap oil. The drop in prices already has forced Iran to splash its government budget. Saudi Arabia has used the oil price as a leverage to put pressure on Iran's economy just at a time when the sanctions were imposed on Iran's economy.

5) About a month ago, Saudi Arabia hosted Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) leader Maryam Rajavi and supported the militia group's gathering in France. This group initially did find its place on some Western state's terror list. The MKO terrorist organization has a long record of assassinations taking lives of around 12000 high ranking Iranian officials and civilians. One of the most terrible of such terrorist attacks by the MKO was the bombing of the Islamic Republic Party's headquarters. During this terrorist attack then-Head of Iran's Supreme Court, Ayatollah Beheshti along with 72 of Iranian ministers, MPs and politicians were killed. Saudi Arabia is trying to reinvigorate MKO and other terrorist groups against Iranian People. Moreover, Saudis have long supported separatists groups such as 'Pan-Turkism Party,' 'Democratic Solidarity Party of Al-Ahwaz,' 'Jundallah,' etc |



News in Vision



Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim officially welcomed Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Sep. 28 in Ankara.



During the Sacred Defense Week on Sep. 25, Iran's Minister of Defense Hossein Dehghan inaugurated Zulfaghar missile production line, Iran's first solid-fuel missile.

Iran's Armed Forces held annual military parades on the first day of the Sacred Defense Week on Sep. 21, which marks the 36th anniversary of the eight-year Iraqi war on Iran.



President Hassan Rouhani addressed the 71st session of the General Assembly on Sep. 22 in New York.

President Rouhani met with Prime Minister of Britain Theresa May on Sep. 21 on the sidelines of the 71st UN General Assembly Session in New York.





UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien spoke in a press conference in Tehran on Sep. 6.



Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Claude Bartolone, President of French National Assembly, met in Tehran on Sep. 6.



Ayatollah Ali Khamenei paid a visit to a defense ministry's exhibition on Aug. 31 displaying cutting-edge technology of defense and products of tech incubators in defense sector.



Tehran hosted the International Social Security Association (ISSA) South Asian regional expert seminar on Aug. 30.

تعامل نظام بانكدارى بدون ربا با بانكدارى بين الملل

Interaction of Usury Free Banking With International Banking



MEHR NEWS AGENCY
Photo: Mohammadreza Abbasi

“Interaction of Usury Free Banking with International Banking” conference gathered the experts in Tehran on Aug. 30.

Ségolène Royal, French Energy and Environment Minister, headed a delegation of businessmen and trade entrepreneurs to northwestern city of Urmia on Aug. 29.



The first phase of Iran's National Information Network (National Internet) was launched on Aug. 28, after a gap of 11 years, during a ceremony attended by First VP Es'haq Jahangiri.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Venezuela on Aug. 29, as the sixth destination of his first leg of Latin American Tour.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Bolivian President Evo Morales met on Aug. 27 in Sucre.

Foreign Minister Zarif and Chilean Parliament Speaker Osvaldo Andrade Lara met at the building of the former congress of Chile on Aug. 26 to talk about expansion of parliamentary relations.





Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Norwegian counterpart Boerge Brende met here on Aug. 17

The 13th International Open Chess Tournament, Avicenna Cup, was held on Aug. 27 in Hamedan, home to the Avicenna monument.





Iran's delegation landed in the 25th slot of the medal count table at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio.



Iran's Paralympic caravan managed to scoop eight gold, nine silver and seven bronze medals to stand in the 15th place in Rio with a total of 24 medals. Iranian shooting representative Sareh Javanmardi won two gold medals for the Iranian squad.