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**Mehr
Vision**
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**EU's clash with US over JCPOA,
widens transatlantic gap**



Mehr Vision

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Interview

Internally weak EU cannot be strong int. player: Italian expert

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Commenting on the EU capabilities to protect its interests against the US unilateralism, Italian political science professor, Dr. Pastori Gianluca believes that an internally weak EU cannot be a strong international player.

The US president's decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) despite the US key European allies' opposition has raised so many questions about the global weight of the EU.

Despite many promises from EU key states to keep the JCPOA alive without the US, many believe even if the EU decides to do so the block won't be able to challenge the US President's decision due to its internal disunity and limitations.

The issue was discussed with political science associated professor of Milan Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Dr. Pastori Gianluca.

Following is the full text of his interview with Mehr News:

How can the EU protect the right of its companies working and investing in Iran? Is it feasible?

European companies have always had good economic relations with Iran and these relations have grown even stronger in the last few years. I do not think that this attitude will really change in the coming months. In the past, the US already adopted secondary sanctions against countries investing in Iran (e.g. with the 'Iran and Libya Sanctions Act' in 1996), but their impact on the behaviour of foreign investors was quite limited. At that time, even some US companies managed to bypass the sanctions operating through foreign branches. Moreover, US-EU relations are currently quite tense, also due to the US will to introduce tariffs on European export. For this reasons, I think that, while the European govern-



ments will take a low profile in face of new US sanctions, on the political level they will keep on supporting their national presence in Iran.

Despite being an economic superpower, the EU is not able to protect its interest against the US unilateralism in recent year. Why?

The main problem is that the EU still faces difficulties in transforming its economic power into political power. Traditionally, the EU has been quite effective in promoting and protecting the economic interests of its members but has been far less effective in the political field. There are many reasons to explain this state of things. As an economic community, the EU exists since 1957, when the European Economic Community was established, while the political union is far more recent. Moreover, the different member states have different visions of the international system and different interests to pursue. Finally, many of them are very jealous of their own sovereignty in international matters and are not ready to submit this kind of matters to a meaningful coordination or – even more

-- to subordinate them to a common foreign and defence policy.

The EU officials have talked about independent EU over the recent years. Considering the existing facts and EU potentialities, how feasible is it? What are the obstacles to this end?

The EU is currently facing one of the most difficult phases in its history. Anti-European parties are gaining strength in several member states, while the results of the referendum held in 2016 on the exit of the UK from the Union ('Brexit') have shown that integration is a reversible process. In the long term, this is the main problem that the EU has to face to affirm its international role. An internally weak EU cannot be a strong international player. At the same time, the development of a strong international profile can help to re-launch the European project, showing to the member states that the EU can be helpful even in the political field. Worth noting, since 2017, several countries are striving to implement a more effective common security and defence policy, largely due to Donald Trump's proclaimed will to reduce the US engagement in Europe.

EU too weak to challenge US hegemony: Prof. Entessar

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Chair of Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice at the University of South Alabama believe the EU is too weak politically to challenge America's global hegemony even if it decides to do so.

The US president's decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) despite the US key European allies' opposition has raised so many questions about the global weight of the EU. To shed more light on the issue, we reached out to Professor Entessar, who is the Chair of Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice at the University of South Alabama.

Following is the full text of his interview:

How can the EU protect the right of its companies working and investing in Iran? Is it feasible?

The EU can lodge a complaint against the United States with the World Trade Organization (WTO) if the United States decides to impose secondary sanctions against European firms that trade with or invest in Iran. The EU can also invoke its own laws and/or pass additional legislation designed to protect European companies against American retaliation. In other words, there are legal and practical steps that the EU can take to protect its companies that have trade and investment agreements with Iran. The big question is: will the EU take these steps and risk a political and economic confrontation with the United States for the sake of protecting its trade with and investments in Iran? Given the vast discrepancy between Europe's economic ties with the United States compared with its economic relations with Iran, I am not very optimistic that the EU would do anything to jeopardize its relations with Washington. In other words, although it is feasible for the EU to take measures to

protect its trade with Iran, it is not very likely that it would do so. The United States is just too important for Europe, and the EU will not sacrifice its relations with the United States for Iran's sake. Besides, the European companies working and investing in Iran are private companies, and they cannot be forced by their governments to trade with a foreign country. The very threat of US retaliation against these companies is powerful enough for them to refrain from dealing with Iran, as has been the case in recent years.



Despite being an economic superpower, the EU is not able to protect its interest against the US unilateralism in recent year. Why?

The EU is a fractured entity with many competing political, economic and social entities. Notwithstanding its economic might, the EU has so far failed to develop into an independent political force on the global scale. The EU's many divisions and its internal rivalries have prevented it from acting as a deterrent against Washington's unilateralism. The EU is simply too weak politically to challenge America's global hegemony even if it decides to do so.

The EU officials have talked about independent EU over the recent years.

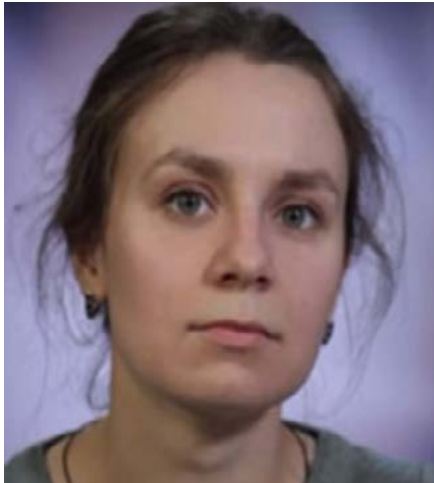
Considering the existing facts and EU potentialities, how feasible is it? What are the obstacles to this end?

I don't anticipate the EU's emergence as an independent political player in the near future. As I mentioned in my answer to the previous question, the EU is a divided and weak political entity, and it is become even more divided in recent years. The rise of nationalism, especially in its right-wing and xenophobic manifestation, in many European countries in recent years will make it even more difficult for the EU

to develop into a cohesive global force.

What measures can EU take to gain more independence? Can more cooperation with Russia balance the EU relation with the US?

For reasons I mentioned in my previous answers, it is very difficult for the EU to take practical measures that would allow it to become a truly independent global political player. Of course, more cooperation with Russia or China will be useful, but such cooperation will only be marginally helpful. Russia's economic weakness is a major obstacle, and China has its own economic priorities that require balancing its relations among several competing global forces.



Interview by Payman Yazdani

Maria Khorolskaya a research fellow in Moscow based Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations says lack of unity among the EU member states is a main obstacle in the way of the Union to protect its interests against the US unilateralism.

The US president's decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) despite the US key European allies' opposition has raised so many questions about the global weight of the EU.

Despite many promises from EU key states to keep the JCPOA alive without the US, many believe even if the EU decides to do so the block won't be able to challenge the US President's decision due to its internal disunity and limitations.

To know more the issue Payman Yazdani from Mehr News agency discussed the issue with Maria Khorolskaya a research fellow in Moscow based Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations.

Here is the full text of the interview with her:

How can the EU protect the right of its companies working and investing in Iran? Is it feasible?

American sanctions will affect not only the Iranian economy, but also foreign companies and banks that have business with Iran. A number of politicians, including the German Fed-

EU suffering lack of unity to guarantee its interests: Russian expert

eral Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy Peter Altmaier, advocated for European support to firms that might suffer from US sanctions. Europe already had a mechanism to counteract American sanctions. In 1996, during the conflict with the United States over the Cuban sanctions, the European Commission had already adopted a "blocking statute", which prohibited European companies to obey the requirements of third countries unless non-compliance would seriously damage their interests, and also stipulated reparation for campaigns at the expense of person, causing the damage. But "blocking statute" has to be adapted to the new situation, that would require a unanimous decision of all EU member states. The German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas pessimistically assessed the chances of German companies to continue their business in Iran. Later, Altmaier also noted that support of the affected businessmen from the state fund is impossible, but for export guarantees there is a proven Hermes cover, an export credit guarantee. But lack of sustained serious support measures can lead to the fact that the enterprises and banks will come to the conclusion that the American market is more important to them than the Iranian. It seems that European governments must find a solution that allows them to keep trade with Iran in order to convince Tehran that the deal is still beneficial for it.

Despite being an economic superpower, the EU is not able to protect its interest against the US unilateralism in recent years. Why?

The main reasons of it appear to be lack of unity on this issue among the member states of the EU, as well as the desire of the EU leaders to maintain their Atlantic ties.

Due to the fact that the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries, especially Poland and the Baltic states, are traditionally pro-American, they do not support the complication of relations with the US.

However, for Germany, the informal leader of European integration, Atlanticism remains important, which is explained by historical cooperation (The USA has been the main ally of West Germany since the end of World War II) and by economic ties (The EU has the largest volume of total trade with the US. For Germany, the US is the first export destination and the 4th in terms of imports to Germany). Therefore, even after the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, US threats to free trade, the breakdown of the Iran Nuclear deal and the incorrect demands of the US ambassador to German, the German political forces except for the Left party, remain modest in criticizing of America. It seems that the German establishment hopes that after Trump's end in office the relations with the US will come out of the crisis. As the Free Democratic Party stated, criticism of Trump should not develop into anti-Americanism.

The EU officials have been talking about independent EU over the recent years. Considering the existing facts and EU potentialities, how feasible it is? What are the obstacles to this end?

Despite Macron's proposals and Merkel's declaration that Europe needs to take on more responsibility, it seems that in the near future the EU will not be able to achieve independence. This is due to a number of reasons.

First, the European Union, as before, has not found a way out of its own crisis, which is manifested in the support of populist parties, the growth of Euro-scepticism in the CEE countries. →



It is still not clear which development strategy the EU will choose and how it will be implemented in the context of political and economic differences within the European Union.

Second, the EU still needs military support from the United States. The annual defense budget of the EU member states is 3 times smaller than the US annual defense budget. The Pooling and Sharing and PESKO are only the first steps towards military integration.

The European army is not on the agenda at the moment.

Third, as noted above, European countries do not seek complete independence from the United States. In the CEE countries, pro-Americanism is strong, as they see the United States as the only defense against Russia. All German political parties, with the exception of extreme leftist and rightist ones, in their programs stressed that European integration in the military

sphere does not mean competition to NATO, but the creation of a European pillar of defense for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The idea of German parties that NATO should remain an instrument of intimidation, overcoming military conflicts, and the EU will ensure the maintenance of peace and stability in the region mainly by political and economic means also does not contribute to the strengthening of EU independence. Thus, although there has been an increase in the independence of the EU, which was contributed not only by D. Trump's actions, but also by G. W. Bush's policies and B. Obama's statements, this is a time-consuming process.

How do you assess the Russia's stance toward collapse of the JCPOA?

The collapse of the JCPOA is unprofitable for Russia, as Russia is concerned about further destabilizing the situation in the Middle East, as well as about restoring the Iranian nuclear program. It seems that Russia's firm position for preserving the Iranian deal will allow it to prove itself in this matter as a reliable partner.

Ankara needs understanding with Kurds in Syria, Turkey: Ex-Turkish FM

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Former Turkish Foreign Minister Yaşar Yakış says Turkey needs understanding with Kurds both inside the country and in Syria.

Turkey has been opposing to the possible Syrian Kurds' participation in Astana peace talks. After two Turkey's military operations in northern Syria which resulted in containing of the US backed Syrian Kurdish armed groups, some believe that Turkey may agree to talk with the Syrian Kurds both to decrease the US influence in the region and to its economic and security benefits.

Answering Payman Yazdani's question from Mehr News agency on the possibility of the changes to Turkey's policy toward the presence of the Syrian Kurds in Syria peace talks on the sideline of the "future of the Iran and Turkey relation" in Tehran university initiated by Middle East Strategic Studies Center, Yaşar Yakış former Turkish Foreign Minister and politician said, "any way Turkey needs understanding with Kurds

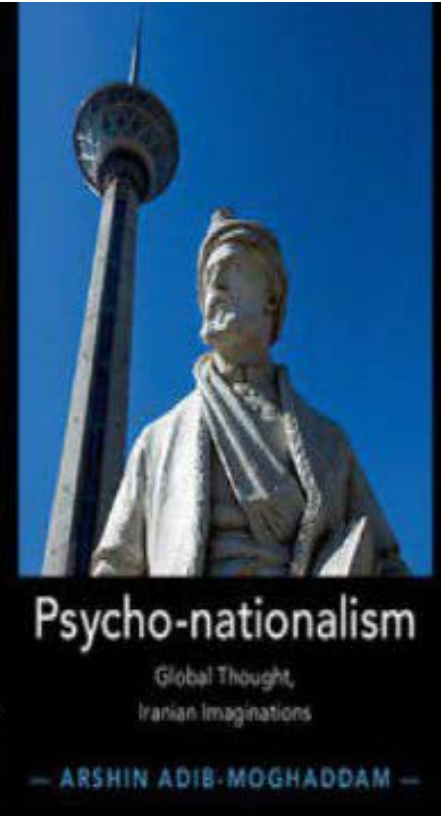
both inside the country and in Syria, otherwise Ankara won't be able to get rid of difficulties."

He added, "ignoring the issue is impossible and it should be settled peacefully in order to avoid a major regional problem in the future."

Turkish politician said, "I wish the issue was settled couple of decades ago before becoming so complicated."



Saudi Oligarchy can't run in long run without democratic legitimacy: Expert



Interview by Payman Yazdani

Professor Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute says no Oligarchy without democratic legitimacy can run in long term including Saudi one.

Commenting on the reasons behind Saudi Prince Bin Salman's reforms, he said, "Saudi Arabia is dealing with unprecedented socio-economic challenges, in particular youth unemployment. The charter is meant to ease the political repercussions of these problems and to signal to the world that Saudi Arabia is modernizing. Of course, there are more intricate economic reasons such as diversification away from the oil sector which go beyond the scope of this interview. I think the dynamics primarily internal as indicated."

Commenting on the success of the social and economic reforms initiated by him without political reforms in Sau-

di Arabia and its possible consequences for the royal family, Adib Moghaddam said, "It is true that in traditional/liberal political economy there was a strong link between economic modernization and democratization. China seems to have challenged this paradigm, at least until now. But the real point is of course whether any state in the world can afford, in the long term, to be dependent on one person, or an Oligarchy without democratic legitimacy. I think it impossible in the long run. There will always be this emphasis on freedom, even in its abstract form in any human society and this is largely because human beings are born free. If the Saudi monarchy doesn't democratize it will lose the support of the middle class and other strata of society in the long run."

Referring to differences between some strong religious figures and the Prince bin Salman on the reforms and its effect on the success of the reforms, he added, "Clerics have a tendency to be conservative and against change be-

cause their world-view is affected by religious ordinances, rather than empirical reality. It is very likely that in Saudi Arabia, some of the rather more orthodox clerics will protest social reforms if they don't yield economic and political dividends. But as a self-interested strata of society connected to the state through institutions that have matured for centuries now, it is unlikely that there will be open revolt against the House of Saud. We should all hope for stability in Saudi Arabia, and I don't deem the current reforms a major threat to that end."

Answering a question about the possible positive effect of the reforms on the living standards of the poor people including Shia minority in the country, Abib Moghaddam added, "

This remains to be seen and it can't be forecasted at this stage. There are many socio economically challenged strata of Saudi society. Whilst some Shia are discriminated against, the specter of poverty goes beyond religious affiliation."

Interview by: Lachin Rezaian

Research Director of International Business at the India, China & America Institute Dr. Dan Steinbock underlined that EU has begun putting new emphasis on enhancing European defense cooperation and concluding trade agreements with other countries and regions which can be seen as systemic efforts to reduce EU dependence on the US.

Steinbock described US President Trump's recent approach to Iran nuclear deal as "a wrong decision in the wrong time and one likely to compound global political, economic and security risks."

He noted that Trump's unilateral efforts rest on economic pressure, political intimidation and, when necessary, military force, which rely on "divide and rule" principles - that is, splitting Iran internally, splitting EU members from a common policy, splitting Asia to "contain" China, splitting Mexico to redefine NAFTA, and so on.

President Trump has not only reversed US Iran policy but nearly seven decades of American foreign and security policy, he stressed.

Steinbock elaborated more in his

Europe can save JCPOA; EU makes systemic efforts to reduce dependence on US

comments addressed to Mehr News correspondent Lachin Rezaian:

What do you think about Trump's withdrawal from JCPOA and EU's position on his move?

It was the wrong decision in the wrong time and it is likely to compound global political, economic and security risks. Yet, the Trump decision was not unexpected. For some three years, the comprehensive nuclear accord (JCPOA) offered Iran relief from US, UN and multilateral sanctions on energy, financial, shipping, automotive and other sectors. Nevertheless, the shifts in the US policy ensued already in late 2016, before Trump's arrival in the White House, when the Senate, following the House of Representatives, unanimously extended the Iran Sanctions Act for a decade in late 2016. Not only most

Republicans, but many Democrats that had supported the JCPOA in the Obama era, reversed their positions surprisingly quickly.

Upon his arrival in the White House, Trump began developing a far more muscular policy against Iran. Regionally, it leans on Saudi Arabia for economic and geopolitical support, as evidenced the \$350 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia a year ago, and Trump's efforts to cement security ties with Israel, as reflected by the decision to relocate the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Last October, the Trump administration also designated for sanctions additional missile and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-related entities, while threatening to cease implementing the JCPOA.

Along with economic pressures, Trump seized covert operations nam-



ing the highly controversial CIA officer Michael D'Andrea the head of CIA's Iran operations, as Mike Pompeo replaced Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State. Reportedly, D'Andrea, who was deeply involved in the US interrogation program after 9/11 attacks, and Pompeo, an ultraconservative hawk, favor regime change in Iran. A new, far more assertive US foreign policy ensued when Trump made the neoconservative John Bolton his national security adviser and seeks to make Gina Haspel the new head of CIA. While Bolton contributed to the "weapons of mass destruction" pretext that paved the way to the war in Iraq in 2003, Haspel served as chief of a CIA black site torture prison and played a role in the destruction of some 100 interrogation videotapes.

President Trump has not only reversed US Iran policy but nearly seven decades of American foreign and security policy.

Britain, France and Germany have issued a joint statement, emphasizing their continuing commitment following Trump's announcement that US will pull out of the agreement and reinstate sanctions against Iran. However, they seem to seek changes to JCPOA, putting limitations on Iran's missile program. How do you evaluate E3 efforts in this regard?

The key question is, Will the key European powers - Germany, France, the UK, and the EU itself - walk the talk. Prior to Trump's decision, EU leaders tried to stress the importance of the full implementation of the JCPOA. As a proponent of the deal, French President Emmanuel Macron warned that "the nuclear non-proliferation regime is at stake." Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas argued that the JCPOA "makes the world safer." UK Foreign Minister Boris Johnson, too, failed to persuade Trump, while arguing that the "UK remains strongly committed to the JCPOA, and will work with European partners and other parties to the deal to maintain it." Finally, in Brussels, the top EU diplomat Federica Mogherini pledged that the EU will remain committed to the "continued full and effective implementation of the nuclear deal."



However, if the EU leaders will seek changes in the deal to accommodate the new Trump goals, that would amount to tacit acceptance of the new US sanctions. Of the European leaders, President Macron, following the Sarkozy footprints, has been perhaps most eager to seek common ground with the Trump White House, despite different views on many issues. And recently, France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said that Europe's foreign leaders would meet with Iran's representatives to talk about the future of the JCPOA, while Macron said that "we will work collectively on a broader framework, covering nuclear activity, the post-2025 period, ballistic activity, and stability in the Middle East, notably Syria, Yemen and Iraq."

Such statements suggest that some EU leaders may seek to redefine the EU approach by leaving the JCPOA largely intact, but coupling the deal with new and broader conditions. That would not be constructive.

Regarding the close ties between US and Europe and their common interests, can Iran put trust in E3 over JCPOA (as Iranian Leader has announced clearly on Wednesday that he does not trust them either)?

As a deal-maker, President Trump has a track record not just in New York real estate, but in international trade and increasingly in international security. Through his 2016 campaign, Trump

described the JCPOA with terms such as "disaster", "the worst deal ever", and so "terrible" that could lead to "a nuclear holocaust." Assertive rhetoric is a key element in Trump's deal-making style. It is followed by redefinition of the terms. Just as he has undermined free trade agreements in North America (NAFTA), Asia Pacific (TPP) and with the EU (TTIP), he seeks to mitigate the JCPOA. It is all a part of the effort to re-define, re-negotiate or reject US legacy deals. These unilateral efforts rest on economic pressure, political intimidation and, when necessary, military force, which rely on "divide and rule" principles - that is, splitting Iran internally, splitting EU members from a common policy, splitting Asia to "contain" China, splitting Mexico to redefine NAFTA, and so on.

Here's how this general approach could apply in the case of Iran: Following the JCPOA, Iran has enjoyed some relief from sanctions on energy, financial, shipping, automotive and other sectors. These primary sanctions were lifted after the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) certification in January 2016 that Iran had complied with the agreement. Yet, secondary sanctions on firms remained in place, along with sanctions applying to US companies, including banks. It is thus to be expected that the US may seek to strengthen the secondary sanctions, while seeking to restore the primary sanctions.



Since fall 2017, Trump's actions also provide other signals of what's to come. Last October, he demanded the JCPOA to limit Iranian ballistic missile development and Iran's regional activities. Both before and after that policy statement, the administration has imposed sanctions on additional entities related to Iran's missile program, Navy operations in the Persian Gulf, and other activities in the region. Since both US Congress and the EU refused to tweak the JCPOA for Trump's geopolitical goals, he withdrew the US from the deal himself. That, in turn, will return highlight to Iran sanctions legislation enacted or under consideration in the Congress, such as the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act of 2017 (CAATSA), plus additional pending legislation relating to Iran's ballistic missiles, the assets of numerous Iranian leaders, stricter oversight on Iran's access to finance, re-imposition of waived US sanctions. Additionally, there is a number of other possible sanctions that could receive consideration in the US and, should the EU blink, in multilateral international framework targeting both entities and persons.

In the EU view, the US JCPOA debacle is the latest friction in a long chain of transatlantic disagreements. If President George W. Bush almost crashed the transatlantic ties with a unipolar security policy, President Trump seems intent to do the same with his "America First" stance in trade and geopolitics. Through the Trump campaign, many European leaders expressed grave concern about the future of US-European relations, particularly regarding to the commitment to the NATO, EU integration, multilateral trading system, global migration, environment, human rights, international multilateral organizations. Europeans have been especially wary with the Trump administration's approach to Iran, the withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement, and the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

From Iran's standpoint, it is vital to build on the international legitimacy of the JCPOA and its implementation.

In this regard, Iran has walked the talk; the Trump White House has not. As a consequence, the ball is in the court of the non-US JCPOA parties. If one party of the deal seeks to violate its terms, then others should intervene to sustain the JCPOA. Moreover, if European leaders give in, that is likely to contribute to new shifts in the White House's policies; shifts that could be even more detrimental to both EU values and interests.

How will Iran-Europe economic ties suffer if the US resumes Iran sanctions?

As with the buried free trade agreements, the Trump administration will start by economic pressure by targeting those European businesses that have done business in and with Iran since the JCPOA. As the White House seeks to strengthen secondary sanctions and re-impose primary sanctions against Iran, it may extend those sanctions over to companies that represent other JCPOA parties - that is, China, France, Russia, UK, Germany and the EU - while conceivably raising risks for their US access. It was this signal that was delivered by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, after Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA, when he said that European-Iran business agreements would be voided as "the existing licenses will be revoked."

Along with Renault, PSA Peugeot Citroen and Sanofi, French companies have significant stakes in the deal, thanks to the Airbus contract to provide Iran Air 100 airplanes for some \$21 billion and the oil giant Total's \$2 billion deal to develop the South Pars oil field. As Germany has historically had relatively greatest trading ties with Iran with exports totaling \$3.1 billion in 2016, German Chamber of Commerce and Industry has strongly supported the EU commitment to the JCPOA. Some 120 German companies, including Volkswagen and Siemens, already operate in Iran and another 10,000 do business with Iran. Along with Total, Royal Dutch Shell would be adversely affected. While UK's Foreign Minister Boris Johnson has been vocal about the UK not walking out of the deal, trade between the UK

and Iran has not taken off as broadly as with some other EU countries, except for the retailer Debenhams, BAT Dunhill and Kent cigarettes and some other firms. Last year, Iran received 400,000 tourists, but uncertainty could undermine expansion.

Economic pressure could harm most significantly Iran's most important sector, the oil industry in which the largest single buyers include China, South Korea, Turkey, Japan, Italy and India. In this economic blackmail, the message is simple: "Get out of Iran, if you want to stay in the US" It is an effort at regime change by another name - but without any internationally acceptable legitimacy since Iran has fully and effectively implemented the JCPOA conditions.

Iranian President Rouhani said he will remain committed to JCPOA with remaining parties (without US). How do you evaluate the future of nuclear agreement without US (Will JCPOA survive without US?)

A year ago, German Chancellor Angela Merkel famously said that the days when Europe could depend on others - read: the US - were "over" to some extent. As a result, the EU has begun putting new emphasis on enhancing European defense cooperation and concluding trade agreements with other countries and regions, including Canada, Japan, and Latin America. Such moves can be seen as systemic efforts to reduce EU dependence on the US.

The JCPOA debacle is still another critical area of disagreement. Naturally, the outcome is of huge importance to Iran. But many other countries will monitor the events with equal interest. What's in line is the very credibility of the EU powers.

Dr. Dan Steinbock is an internationally recognized strategist of the multipolar world and the founder of Difference Group. He has served as research director at the India, China and America Institute (USA) and visiting fellow at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (China) and the EU Center (Singapore). For more, see <https://www.differencegroup.net/c>

Trump does not say anything in contrary to Israel's interests: senior analyst

Alexander Azadegan, college professor from Southern California says "Trump is the first US president who is fully owned subsidiary of the Israelis in this case."

Geopolitical senior analyst also adds "he is not going to say anything in contrary to the interests of Israeli side."

Following is the full text of the interview:

Will the US congress be able to reach a deal on the JCPOA that can meet Trump's demands? How will such agreement be?

I don't believe US congress can reach such a deal. As I told you, I don't think the European mechanism be helpful at all and one of the European signatories, I mean Britain, is already on the exit door of EU.

Keep in mind that Trump is the first US president who is fully owned subsidiary of the Israelis in this case. He is not going to say anything in contrary to the interests of Israeli side.

Israelis have always been very critical of JCPOA. Of course this is nonsensical to me because it was a horrible deal for Iran not for the west. The Israel haven't been so emboldened and now they are supporting Saudis who are practically in a de facto coalition with Israelis.

They feel emboldened and untouchable. As I told you this deal has already been terrible for Iran and this country has no idea to renegotiate it. The situation is the result of Trump coming into power.

Perhaps if Hillary Clinton was in the position, the Obama administration policy which was based on cooperation rather than conflict would have continued.

I'm afraid Trump tends to pursue conflict with Iran. We have to keep in mind that this president's foreign visit after he got elected was to Saudi Arabia as Iran's arch enemy in the region.

Let's not forget \$300 billion weapons contract was signed with Saudi Arabia making the country the third largest spender when it comes to weapons after



the US and China.

So all these signals are out there and I don't believe that it is just symbolic but they are preparing for war with Iran. The coming into power of John Bolton a neocon warmonger is an important sign. As you know Republicans has a majority in US congress.

Of course we have the November election later in this year which would be basically an election that presents the approval and disapproval of American voters feeling towards Trump.

So even if Democrats regain seats in the House of Representatives, I don't think there would be any change in policy. This is the sad situation Iran is facing right now.

What can the EU alternative be if the US withdraws from JCPOA, given the fact that the investment and working condition in Iran will probably be affected as a result? In that situation, what real guaranties can the EU offer to Iran ?

There will be a transitory period in Iran if Trump doesn't certify the nuclear deal this May. There will be many challenges for the European if they want to pursue their own policies when it comes to this.

My prediction is that Europeans will do everything possible and they are actually doing it right now and they also have the contingency plans and

they are having this for 2 years now ever since Trump nominated himself as a candidate for the presidency in 2015 and Europeans had enough time to come up with contingency plans in order to deal with the US possible exit that now seems to be very much probable.

It is possible that the contract they signed with the Iranian counterparts could actually be implemented nevertheless it is going to be quite difficult because of the financial and the banking arrangements as well as the situation that exists between EU and the US It is going to be quite difficult maybe because the parameters for such steps could be taken so that Europe would not be bullied so much or be taken hostage by the US in the future.

Maybe renegeing of Trump and the exit of Washington from JCPOA would create that opportunity for EU to pursue more independent policy. Let's not forget that the biggest ally for Germany and Britain will continue to be the US in the decades to come and these are the 2 out of 3 signatories of the JCPOA from the European side.

Franc has already given some hints that perhaps the Iranian missile technology program can be negotiated- a red line for Iranian side that is never going to happen and I think that Emmanuel macron French president should come in terms with reality.

British ambassador says successful on Tehran mission

By: Yasser Nazifi Gilavan

In his last press conference in Tehran, Nicholas Hopton, the UK envoy to Tehran, who will be replaced by Rob Macaire on Thursday, said that he had been successful in pursuing the goals in his mission to Tehran.

"I am very happy with my accomplishments in bilateral relations during the course of my term in Iran," said Nicholas Hopton, the British diplomat on the last day of his stay in Iran as the UK ambassador to Tehran, on Tuesday. He made the remarks in response to questions posed by the reporters of Mehr News Agency and some other Iranian news outlets. On Thursday Robert Macaire will arrive in Tehran to assume the posting while Hopton will leave Tehran a day earlier, on Wednesday.

During the press conference on Tuesday, a reporter asked the British diplomat if the rumors about western embassies in Tehran taking bribe for issuing visas were connected with his early dismissal. He rejected that UK embassy in Tehran had done anything illegal in terms of providing visa services in Tehran and reassured that nothing was unusual in his replacement with Mr. Macaire.

Then he was asked why the British embassy is not meeting the expectations of Iranian visa applicants, as there are many Iranian people who have family in UK and want to visit Britain but are not given visa on time and proportionately.

In response he said that he has been doing his best, and after the reopening of embassy in Tehran, the relations have been growing and as a result the number of visas increasing. He said that currently the embassy is issuing 250 visa in a week.

Then the diplomat was asked by the Mehr News reporter if he saw himself successful in materializing the objectives of Britain in Iran. The ambassador said that his term in Tehran was important in two aspects of reopening of dip-



lomatic relations with the reopening of the embassies of Iran and UK in London and Tehran.

He hailed that the embassy was opened in Tehran in August 2015 and visa issuance was provided since February 2016. He added that since the signing of the JCPOA the embassy has been collaborating with Iran to lift all sanctions and commercial interactions between the two countries have doubled and increased to half a billion euros. Hopton said that now British products are gaining their own share of market in Iran.

On difficulties obstructing the expansion of ties, the envoy said that there are problems but at the same time the two sides are talking and having dialogue on differences is the positive side of the story. He added that Iran and UK are having different approaches to regional issues in Syria and Yemen but they are keeping to have dialogue.

On UK probable response to US possible exit from the nuclear agreement, something that Mehr News asked him, Hopton said that the British position is quite clear and it has been reiterated by PM Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson that interests of all sides

is in continuation of the nuclear agreement.

Then the UK envoy to Tehran was asked about the unilateral attack on Syria in which France and UK accompanied US. The reporters asked him how the unilateral action could be legal and legitimate while it was not authorized by the UNSC or the OPCW had not given out his final verdict on the alleged chemical attack on Douma. Mr. Hopton claimed that humanitarian reasons urged the British government to act. He said that UK was sure that "Assad regime used chemical weapons against its own people."

Then Mehr News agency reporter told him that some commentators are drawing parallel between the unilateral attack of last week on Syria and UK alignment with US in 2003 attack on Iraq. Reminded him that at that time US provided evidence at UNSC to win the yes vote for attack on Iraq but later it was found that there was no chemical attack facility in Iraq and even the then UK PM Blair was seriously censured in Britain. Mr. Hopton said in response that the two issues are of different nature and he could not draw a parallel between the two events.

US failure in Syria means end of uni-polar international order: Expert

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Anthony Cartalucci is of the opinion that the US exit from Syria without toppling Assad will announce to the world that America's uni-polar international order has come to an end.

Accusing Syrian government of chemical attack in Douma, Donald Trump rhetorically threatened to assault on Syria.

On Wednesday, trump tweeted "Russia vows to shoot down any and all missiles fired at Syria. Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and "smart!" You shouldn't be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!" But just in 40 minutes he softened his tone and tweeted, "our relationship with Russia is worse now than it has ever been, and that includes the Cold War. There is no reason for this. Russia needs us to help with their economy, something that would be very easy to do, and we need all nations to work together. Stop the arms race?"

To shed more light on the real rea-

sons behind the US assault on Syria, we discussed the issue with Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher Anthony Cartalucci just one day before the US, UK and France attack.

Here is the full text of the interview with him:

Commenting on the US attack on Syria under the pretext of using chemical weapons by Syrian government in Douma, Cartalucci said, "US efforts to attack Syria after this supposed "chemical attack" come at a time when Syria and its allies just finished securing the last major pockets of militants around the capital of Damascus."

"They are rushing ahead before any sort of investigation can be undertaken - this includes directing the Israelis to carry out a tentative first strike. They rush because the results of any investigation are likely going to reveal the attack was staged. But the results of such an investigation will be moot if the world is already talking about the consequences of America's rushed military intervention."

He went on to say, "The goal of the attack will depend on how big the attack

actually ends up being. It could range from a small, symbolic attack carried out in the vain hope that Syria or its allies overreact and justify a wider US military response - to a much larger attack aimed at either destroying Syria's air force or finally toppling the Syrian government itself. There is the possibility that the US may carry out a limited strike while Israel targets more significant Syrian government targets, providing the US with plausible deniability ahead of possible retaliations against Israel and wider war."

Referring to the possible consequences of US failure in Syria, he added, "For the US to leave Syria now without accomplishing regime change, will announce to the world that America's uni-polar international order has come to an end. Other nations facing US meddling or military aggression will be bolstered by and contribute to the accelerated emergence of a multipolar world order led by the nations that have defended Syria. US actions now appear to be a desperate attempt to reassert US primacy and prevent that from happening."



US to destabilize Syria and Challenge Astana talks: Expert

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Filip Kovacevic, professor of geopolitics is of the opinion that the US is not going to leave Syria just tries to destabilize the country and challenge Astana talks.

Trump has been the most rhetorically bellicose commanders in chief in modern American history since he took office 15 month ago, but at the same time he has been very cautious when it comes to using force.

The last couple of weeks could be seen as a major turning point in his presidency. In selecting John Bolton as his new national security adviser and Mike Pompeo as his secretary of state, Trump two the most hawkish Republicans in Washington.

To shed more light on the issue we reached out to Dr. Filip Kovacevic, professor of geopolitics, University of San Francisco, California.

Following is the full text of interview with him:

Recently there have been some changes to Trump administration. During last 15 month since Trump came to power Mr. Bolton is his third national security advisor. What are the main reasons behind so many unusual changes?

The US president Donald Trump is applying his business model to the US government. He fires all those he disagrees with. He is surrounding himself with those who will praise his every word and support any decision he makes. Trump has always been extremely nationalistic and militaristic in his views and now he is assembling a team that is ready to be loyal to him in his future war projects. John Bolton is known as one of the most hawkish US diplomats. Trump needs him because he plans to disrupt and de-construct the present world order and this will lead to serious confrontation with other global players, both allies and opponents. The US under Trump is becoming a rogue state.



Will these changes affect the US foreign policy toward the EU? Will these changes lessen the differences between two sides on some issues like differences between Germany and US over NATO?

The US has taken a nationalist turn and will no longer service the concerns of other countries. Trump wants to make European states pay for NATO at the level of 2 percent of the GDP. I think they will have no choice but to do that. However, the citizens of these countries will oppose such measures and we are likely to see the rise of the anti- US sentiments across Europe. This will be beneficial to those political forces that advocate the lifting of economic sanctions against Russia. In many ways, Trump's arrogant stance toward Europe works in Putin's favor.

I expect the differences between Germany and the US to grow, especially regarding the issue of Russian natural gas. The US wants to make Germany purchase its (liquefied) gas, but this will be more expensive for the German businesses. The anti- US sentiment will grow in Germany and will be reflected in the results of the next parliamentary elections. The radical conservative forces will grow in strength and there will be talk of the re-animation of the German empire. In fact, nationalism will gain the upper hand in many European states and this will threaten the existence of the EU itself.

Will these changes affect the US policy in Syria?

The US is not about to leave Syria. It will continue helping the anti-Assad Syrian opposition and the Kurdish forces. Most of this work will be done covertly. Syria will be destabilized for many years to come. The Astana peace process will face serious challenges from the US and its allies.

It is said the new Trump team will increase the pressure on Tehran at the same time the US is putting more and more pressure on Russia under different excuses. Can this affect Tehran-Moscow regional and economic cooperation?

I think one of the main reasons Trump is making overtures to Putin is the fact that he knows that he can't do anything militarily against Iran while Iran and Russia are on the same geopolitical side. Trump wants to convince Putin not to continue supporting Iran. He might offer Putin a "sweetheart deal" regarding Ukraine and Moldova, which are much important to Russia than Iran. We'll see what Putin does.

There is no reason for Putin to trust Trump, but there is a tendency of the Russian leaders' falling for the promises of the West, which are later broken. Consider, for instance, Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin and the issue of NATO expansion. According to declassified documents, the then- US Secretary of State James Baker promised to Gorbachev "not an inch eastward," and now NATO is on the Russian borders and St. Petersburg is in the range of NATO artillery.

Will Trump's new changes pave the way for cancellation of the JCPOA?

I think so. Trump's nominee for the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (if approved by the Senate) is one of the most anti-Iranian US politicians active today. In his new position, he will exponentially increase the US anti-Iranian diplomacy and covert operations, which are also wholeheartedly supported by John Bolton. As I see it, these individuals are seriously preparing to fight a war against Iran.

Trump pressure not to affect Tehran-Ankara security cooperation: expert

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Lecturer at Marmara University Institute for Middle East Studies Dr. Bilgehan Alagoz, says, the US pressure would have a negative impact on the economic relations but would not affect bilateral relations in the area of security.

Trump has been the most rhetorically bellicose commanders in chief in modern American history since he took office 15 month ago, but at the same time he has been very cautious when it comes to using force.

The last couple of weeks could be seen as a major turning point in his presidency. In selecting John Bolton as his new national security adviser and Mike Pompeo as his secretary of state, Trump two the most hawkish Republicans in Washington.

To shed more light on the issue we reached out to Dr. Bilgehan Alagoz, Lecturer at Marmara University Institute for Middle East Studies, Istanbul.

Following is the full text of the interview with her:

Recently there have been some changes to Trump administration. During last 15 month since Trump came to power Bolton is his third national security advisor. What are the main reasons behind so many unusual changes?

During President Obama's administration, the US has implemented an inefficient foreign policy. Russia annexed Crimea and gained power in Black Sea. In addition, due to US failure in Syria, Russia's growing presence in the Mediterranean became inevitable. Therefore, Trump became president on the legacy of Obama's failures. At this point it would be right to focus on Trump's foreign policy vision. According to him, China's increasing power is one of the emergent threats against US global interests. Secondly, the ISIS threat in Syria must be eliminated. Thirdly Iran's growing influence in the Middle East must be framed.

Thus US needs to cooperate with Russia especially in containing China's growing power. However, there has been a great prejudice against Donald Trump both in mainstream media and the establishment, which is a prominent obstacle for Trump to fulfill his promised policies. In this context, it seems as one of the reasons for the changes in his team.

John Bolton is known as a person who is very critical against Iran and Russia. Thus, his appointment as a national security advisor can be implemented as a reflection of harsher US policy towards Russia and Iran. Although President Trump has a desire to cooperate with Russia in terms of balancing China, the recent appointment indicate that the tension between United States and Russia will continue.

Will these changes affect the US foreign policy in Middle East?

It is a necessity rather than a preference for United States to change its foreign policy in the Middle East. Russia as a global actor and Iran as a regional actor is an emerging power in the Middle East which is contrary to US interests. Therefore, the recent changes in Trump national security team will result in shifts in foreign policy toward the Middle East.

Will these changes help Turkey and US to mend relation?

As a result of Obama's Syria policy, Turkey- US relations have become problematic and the Trump administration has not been able to overcome these problems yet. Turkey is struggling against PKK (Marxist-Leninist terrorist group) for decades. It is ironic that PKK is on the US terrorist organizations list, but the United States is arming YPG, which is the branch of the PKK in Syria. Operation Olive Branch has showed that Turkey is determined to fight against PKK. Thus, in order to open a new chapter in US-Turkish relations, United States should stop supporting PKK and its branches in Syria. The recent changes in Trump team can



be an opportunity to reevaluate bilateral relations.

By offering new missile systems to Turkey, it seems the US is trying to avoid more Turkey closeness to Russia and Iran. At the same time the US is increasing pressure on Iran and Russia under different pretexts. Will new changes in Trump administration affect Turkey and Russia economic and regional cooperation?

Turkish, Russian, Iranian Initiative for Syria is in a delicate balance. It is very important for these three countries to come together for a solution even though their plans for Syria do not overlap. United States is not pleased by Turkey's deepening relations with Iran and Russia. However, as long as the United States does not change its current Syria policy, it is impossible for Turkey to have any position together with United States.

Will US pressure on Iran affect Tehran and Ankara good regional and economic cooperation?

Trump is in favor of a tough policy against Iran. He is critical about the JCPOA. Since the JCPOA is an agreement with the initiative of the United Nations, it is necessary for the United States to convince the parties to the deal. On the other hand, it is clear that the United States will continue to implement its own congressional sanctions against Iran. At this point Turkish banks are at risk. As the Hakan Atilla case revealed, the US has a tough stance on this issue. In this context, it will be a difficult period in terms of economic relations between Turkey and Iran. However, the two countries have common national security concerns. Thus, the US pressure would have a negative impact on the economic relations but would not affect bilateral relations in the area of security.

Pompeo, Bolton to present challenge to Iran's foreign policy: Entessar

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Professor Entessar is of this opinion that the Pompeo-Bolton team will present the most significant challenge to Iran's foreign policy in more than 30 years.

Trump has been the most rhetorically bellicose commanders in chief in modern American history since he took office 15 month ago, but at the same time he has been very cautious when it comes to using force.

The last couple of weeks could be seen as a major turning point in his presidency. In selecting John Bolton as his new national security adviser and Mike Pompeo as his secretary of state, Trump two the most hawkish Republicans in Washington.

To know more about the reasons behind Trump's decisions and its possible effects on the US foreign policy in the Middle East, we discussed the issue with Professor and Chair of Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice, University of South Alabama, Prof. Entessar.

Here is the full text of interview with him:

Recently there have been some changes to Trump administration. During last 15 month since Trump came to power, Mr. Bolton is his third national security advisor. What are the main reasons behind so many unusual changes?

The list of top-level personnel changes that President Trump has made in his administration since coming to power has been extensive and unusual in the recent history of the American presidency. The changes in Trump's national security advisers certainly fit the governing style of Donald Trump's leadership. A lot of these changes have been rather impulsive and personal in nature and not necessarily based on significant policy differences between Trump and his subordinates. We should not be surprised to see vacillations of this nature in months or years ahead.

Will these changes affect the US foreign



policy toward Turkey? Can these changes help two sides to resolve the differences or not?

These changes may affect the US-Turkish relations only marginally. Washington's relations with Ankara are complex and are affected by a range of variables. They do not change drastically based on personnel changes in the executive branch of the United States government.

Will these changes affect the US policy in Syria and its support to Syrian Kurdish groups like YPG and PYD?

I don't think the Trump administration has had a clear policy towards the Syrian Kurds. Washington's policies with respect to Syria and the Syrian Kurds have been in the constant state of turmoil for some time now. There is, of course, a degree of coordination between the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia but so far Washington has been unable to chart a clear policy towards Syria and its main Kurdish parties.

It is said the new Trump team will increase the pressure on Tehran. Can this fact affect Tehran-Ankara regional and economic cooperation?

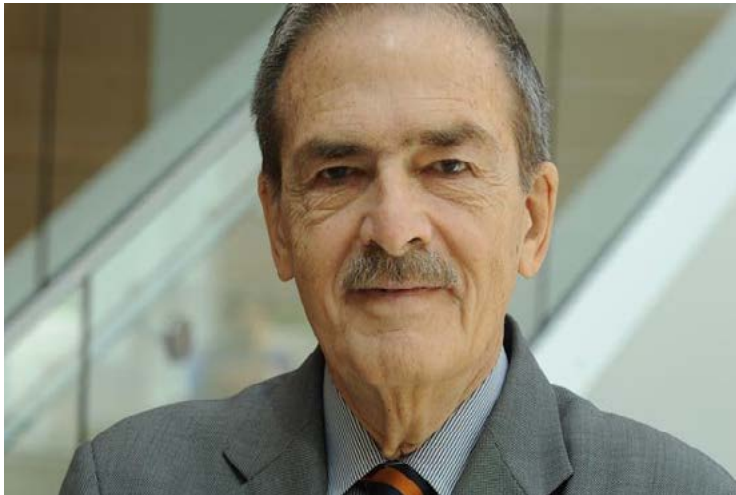
Trump's new foreign policy team will certainly increase pressure on Tehran

from all angles, including putting more pressure on regional countries and US allies to distance themselves from Tehran. This will have a negative impact on the Tehran-Ankara cooperation not only in economic and trade matters but also in other areas. The Pompeo-Bolton team will present the most significant challenge to Iran's foreign policy in more than 30 years.

Will Trump's new changes pave the way for cancellation of the JCPOA?

For all intents and purposes, the Trump administration has already withdrawn from the JCPOA, albeit informally. Trump's new foreign policy team will accelerate the practical demise of the JCPOA. For Iran, it shouldn't matter if the JCPOA's cancellation is announced formally or not. From Washington's vantage point, the Iran nuclear agreement has already been a dead deal. Rather than sitting on the side and incessantly arguing about what Trump's intentions towards the JCPOA are or will be every three or four months, Tehran needs to move on and devise and implement a post-JCPOA foreign policy. Otherwise, Iran's foreign policy will remain a hostage to President Trump's whims for the foreseeable future.

Trump's tariff policy global effect to be less than expected: Prof. Zonis



Interview by Payman Yazdani

Professor Marvin Zonis believes that due to many tariff exceptions to be offered to other countries by Trump administration the overall effect of his decision on global economy will be less than expected.

The United States President Donald Trump's decision to impose stiff tariffs on steel and aluminum imports opened up another debate among politicians and experts.

The US will institute tariffs of 25 percent and 10 percent on imports of steel and aluminum, respectively, as early as next week, Trump said. It will apply the tariffs broadly, without targeting specific countries, and will not impose quotas.

Trump argues the tariffs will help the US industries and workers "destroyed" by unfair trade practices. He told steel and aluminum executives that their industries will have "protection for the first time in a while."

Though Trump cast the move as a win for Americans, many experts warned of possible cost increases for consumers and manufacturers.

To shed more light on the issue we reached out to Marvin Zonis, Professor of international political economy and leadership in the University of Chicago.

Following is the full text of the interview with him:

How will President Trump's decision to

boost tariffs impact US domestic steel and aluminum producers?

It will boost domestic production and increase domestic costs so a net loser for the entire US economy.

How will it actually impact the aluminum and steel industries globally then?

Many exceptions will be offered to other countries so the overall effect will be less than expected.

Considering some of the beneficiaries behind his decision are there other internal or external beneficiaries in addition to the companies in America, or is it just American companies who are going to benefit from this decision?

Canadian and Mexican producers will benefit as they have already received exemptions.

How much will this decision to increase tariffs affect countries like China, Japan and South Korea then?

South Korea has just agreed to lower tariffs on US products, for example, on US manufactured cars. In that sense, Trump's "trade war" is receiving positive results from another country. The big issue is China. It is important to keep in mind that in China has been playing unfairly on so-called "free" trade for years — providing various hidden subsidies for their domestic producers, e.g. electricity costs, shipping costs, low cost credit, et, etc., while simultaneously excluding

American made products from the China market all the while stealing technology. US leaders figured that as long as those practices and concomitant high levels of economic growth were driving China towards a more liberal type of democracy, it was a price the US was willing to pay. Now, under President Xi, it is clear the dream of a liberal China is over. It is time to stop allowing China's trade war against the US to go unanswered.

How likely will the European Union retaliate by imposing tariffs on the US products?

Only very delicately.

Will Mr. Trump's acts result in a trade war between the US and world's other economic powers? What can be the consequences of such a possible war for world?

I think there will less here than meets the eye—negotiations will be held, exceptions will be granted, things will calm down.

After world war, the cooperation between the US and Europe was based on trade, security and military regimes like NATO. Don't you think possible trade war between the US and Europe can spill over other security and military fields, too?

I think the dangers from President Trump's likely cancellation if the Iran nuclear deal is a far greater challenge since the major US allies plus Russia and China all support the deal.

Rising of rightist in Europe is a threat to the future of the EU and from the other side this can result in more independent trade relation without the EU considerations. Considering this fact how do you see the future of EU?

The EU faces staggering challenges, most recently from the results of the Italian election, not to mention Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic. But there is just massive support for the EU among European elites and they will manage to keep it stumbling along

Possible Saudi-US nuclear agreement to include “gold standard”: Experts

Stimson's experts believe that the United States will want a nuclear cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia, including the 'gold standard.'

The Obama administration efforts to reach an agreement with Saudi Arabia on transferring civil nuclear technology faltered over the Kingdom's refusal to accept a legally binding commitment to forgo uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing, which could be used to produce fuel for nuclear weapons. Contrary to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates made a commitment to forgo uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing in its 2009 agreement.

Now Saudi Arabia is negotiating a new nuclear agreement with the Trump administration, but there are questions about what limits the White House would set, and the Saudis would accept, as part of the agreement the two sides are about to start negotiating.

The United States insistence on strict conditions may force the Saudis to buy from Russia or China instead of the US.

However, a failure to incorporate crucial restrictions in any possible nuclear deal can cause Saudis to repurpose the civil technology for nuclear weapons.

To shed more light on the issue we reached out to Cindy Vestergaard, the Director of Stimson's Nuclear Safeguards Program, and Jackie Kempfer, a Research Associate with the Nuclear Security program at the same center.

Following is the full text of the interview with them:

After few years, US administration announced its will to negotiate a nuclear agreement with Riyadh. Why is the US convinced to restart nuclear negotiation with Saudi Arabia?

It is all about timing. Riyadh plans to sign a deal by the end of 2018 with winning developers for its first two nuclear power reactors. US based Westinghouse has entered the competition, along with companies in Russia,



China, and South Korea.

The Kingdom wants to have uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing facilities. Will the US accommodate Riyadh in these issues?

The United States will want a nuclear cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia, including the 'gold standard' (which includes a commitment to not pursue enrichment or reprocessing abilities). If the US accommodates Riyadh, the US may consider timelines similar to the JCPOA's phased implementation of limiting and monitoring the number of centrifuges and enrichment material in country, including monitoring of the production of uranium ore concentrates. It should be underscored however that these monitoring timelines are specific to Iran and the JCPOA.

Some argue that if the US does not meet Saudi Arabia's demands regarding its nuclear program, Russia and China may do it and this can lead to weakening of the US nuclear influence in the region. What do you think of this?

The biggest competition to the US is actually South Korea. It has the strongest history of successfully operating nuclear exports. If South Korea wins the bid for Saudi Arabia's nuclear power

project, the US will still pursue a 123 agreement with Riyadh, as they did with the UAE when the Korea Electric Power Corporation signed a deal to build their plants.

Which model for Saudi's nuclear plan is likely? The JCPOA or the US agreement with the United Arab Emirates?

Other than potentially adding timelines similar to the JCPOA, the JCPOA is an entirely different arrangement than bilateral nuclear cooperation agreements. The JCPOA is a multilateral agreement between Iran, Germany, the European Union and the P5 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States). It took 12 years of negotiations. It was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231 in July 2015 and is verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Conversely, bilateral nuclear cooperation agreements (known as '123 Agreements' in the United States) are agreements negotiated between two states to frame trade in nuclear materials and technology. They are bilateral – not multilateral – and generally not verified by the IAEA (unless requested by parties involved to apply 'item-specific' safeguards to items subject to the cooperation agreement, not the country as a whole).

Prof. says US-China trade war not likely

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Commenting on recent the US and China tit-for-tat tariff disputes, Prof. Larry Backer says that the deep structures of economic integration cannot be undone by a series of shocks with offers of renegotiation.

As the US and China ratchet up a tit-for-tat tariff dispute, it has been said often in the last few weeks that no one wins a trade war.

The issue was discussed with Larry Backer, Professor of Law and International Affairs in Penn State University.

Following is the full text of the interview with him:

How will President Trump's decision to boost tariffs impact US domestic steel and aluminum producers?

My apologies, the answer to this question will be the longest of this interview precisely because the simplest questions may pose the subtlest problems. In contrast to many experts, and others, who might be eager to provide a simple and direct answer to this simple and direct question, I can only offer complexity and contingency. At the greatest level of generalization, it is not clear, even to experts and policymakers, whether the tariff boost will have a positive or negative effect. Steel and aluminum production are now part of integrated production chains only a portion of which concerns steel and aluminum production. The idea appears to be that the tariffs will protect US based steel and aluminum production by making the import of like products more expensive—and thus US producers will substitute domestic production over foreign. That may well work for domestic production and consumption but may not work for domestic production for export—especially where other states match the tariff to equalize pricing (and reduce the foreign subsidy) that the tariff represents. And yet domestic production and consumption is an important element of US macro-economic policy and may produce positive short-term



effects in terms of domestic investment and employment.

Yet the tariff discussion must also be understood within a more complex context produced by the deep embedding within global production and ownership chains. The key here is that there is no identity between the location of production (in this case steel and aluminum production) and the nationality of ownership (that is, the “citizenship” of the apex enterprise that owns or controls the steel or aluminum production chain with respect to which production might be located in any number of states). It has been reported, for example, that some US companies may be negatively affected because they are subsidiaries of foreign enterprises from which, for example they receive steel for finishing and then export. And the effect will have little to do with the nationality of the owners of steel production. Consider the irony of these tariffs if, as a result, foreign owned enterprises establish factories in the US for steel production, boosting US production while repatriating the profits of that enterprise back to the home states of parent company. That insight, in turn, produces some variations in the answer to the question you posed.

First, even if the tariffs have an effect (positive or negative), it is not clear that the extent of that effect will be large. Again, the issue of tariffs can only be viewed in a vacuum within the cloistered towers of those who find such detached analysis useful for purposes of advancing policy without relation to real world effects. Thus, the amplitude of the effect may be difficult to distill apart from the ecology within which tariffs may have both direct and indirect effects. This provides an opportunity to seek to distill effects using a variety of techniques all of which will be dependent of a set of assumptions and approaches that might well skew the results in ways that serve objectives. These effects, of course, are further complicated by the distinction between the effects on domestic production (an objective of the tariffs, of course) and the effects of the nationality of the benefits of this production. It is not clear how one deals with the situation where domestic production increases (and increases local economies) while the profits of that production are repatriated elsewhere.

Second, even if there is significant effect, it is not clear whether the effect will be generally felt or will affect different parts of the country, and different →

industrial sectors differently. To speak of the effects of the tariff boost generally produces an answer that aggregates effect. But aggregated effects only serve political interests, it does not reflect the reality within a large country like ours. It is much more likely that the effects will be felt differently, positively and negatively in different parts of the country and with respect to different industries and companies. Yet that might well have been the point—to ensure a targeted boost to economic activity within specific portions of the US with the hope that this boost in activity will then have indirect effect over a broader area.

Third, the answer to the question must take into account the time horizons for change and the sectors with respect to which differing time horizons might matter. Thus, for example, to the extent that the tariff is meant to foster greater steel and aluminum production, that effect will take years to be felt in terms of actual significant increases in production. Also important here is the question whether that production can be sustained. Tariffs as subsidies may have an immediate effect on decisions to invest in production (and hire labor to aid in its production), but eventually the sector and the heightened production will have to be economically viable—especially since over the middle and long term global consumers and producers may adjust their activities to take the tariffs into account.

Fourth, on the other hand, the immediate effects of the tariffs have already been felt—not in the changes to the location of steel and aluminum production (inside or outside the US), but in the reactions of financial markets, lenders, political leaders and the like. And perhaps that is the most telling part of tariff policy in the contemporary age—tariffs appear to have greater effects on global finance than on global production, on the allocation or distribution of the placement of portions of the production of commodities (in the long term), and on its value in mobilizing mass opinion to some political end or other. In that respect, tariffs may not pose the same problems that they produced a century ago in the European inter-War period. Globalization has substantially reduced the power of tariffs precisely because the borders necessary to make them

effective have been substantially eroded—and it is unlikely that they will be reconstructed in the manner of 1920s thinking.

Fifth, the impact will vary from the short to the long term. Most people may be tempted to consider the question in light of immediate or short-term impact. Indeed, global analytics have tended to increasingly favor short term thinking and reaction rather than long term or strategic responses or adjustment. And the short-term impact—politically—will be significant. One sees that already as the “usual suspects” have already aligned themselves and their media outlets to amplify their support or opposition to the tariffs, and to begin to seek to mobilize mass opinion to some end or other. Yet it is the long term strategic adjustments that are far more important and most likely to be missed by a media and analytic culture with a short attention span.

How will it actually impact the aluminum and steel industries globally then?

There are two answers here. The direct answer is that impact will be a function of the way industry and states respond. Industry might be able to avoid the effects of the tariff by strategic shifting of the operations of their global production chains to minimize the effects of the tariffs—but such adjustments might take time. States, on the other hand, are less flexible. They will either support their own industries or risk losing them. If they do not reciprocate tariffs, they might be induced to apply enough support to their industries to wash out the price effects of tariffs. The indirect answer, however, may be more important. The impact to states and enterprises will depend on the ability of both to mitigate the effects of tariffs through changes in the ownership of the producers of tariffed goods. Thus, for example, if Chinese enterprises own or can acquire (direct or indirectly) steel and aluminum production facilities in the US, the net effect of the tariff will be small. Over the long term, and in the absence of waivers from tariff, there may be a gradual shift of production—but not necessarily to the US. Instead the shift may move production to other states which have successfully negotiated tariff waivers.

You’ve mentioned some of the beneficiaries behind his decision are their other internal or external beneficiaries in addition to the companies in America, or is it just wholly these American companies who are going to benefit from this decision?

What is an American company today? The notion of national companies is now essentially obsolete in a context in which most economic activity is connected to global flows of production. Companies of a variety of nationalities are organized to manage and participate in global production (in steel and aluminum and other products). The economic enterprise that tends to manage or control the process of production and the role of other enterprises within that production process tends to be characterized as the representative or incarnation of a multinational enterprise, and to lend its nationality to that system of global production. But realistically, that represents an oversimplification of the realities of production. Thus, American apex companies may benefit from the tariffs. On the other hand, US apex companies who have invested heavily in steel and aluminum production enterprises outside the US may suffer. Conversely, a Russian or Chinese enterprise that owned steel or aluminum production facilities in the US might profit significantly from the tariffs. Because of this quite large divide between the nationality of the place of production and the nationality of the ownership of production (up the production chain) it is difficult in many cases to point to a generalizable nationality for winners and losers. And that is the great insight of this effort—states can control generally the production of things within their territory and use their borders to exact a cost of entry (or exit). But that control of the consequences of production within or outside a state has absolutely nothing to say about the nationality for the beneficiaries of these policies. If all steel production abroad is owned by US companies, then steel import tariffs would affect US companies negatively because it adds costs to their global allocation of the elements of their production chains.

How much will this decision to increase tariffs affect countries like China, Japan →

and South Korea then?

There are two questions here. The first deals with reciprocal tariffs. This is a simple one—if the US raises tariffs on aluminum and steel, then other countries would seek to do the same on US steel and aluminum. Yet the impact on the US may be negligible if it is a net importer of these products. And thus, more effective may be what I might call retaliatory tariffs. Thus, if the US imposes tariffs on steel and aluminum that affects national industries elsewhere, those states might impose duties on US agricultural products or some other product in a sector where US exports are large. But in a global economy that might only produce short term pain, as those in control of production chains can, at some cost, realign their trade routes in ways that might soften the blows of tariffs. And again, where one thinks only of short term effect, one misses the essential element of a more benign long-term effect within a global context in which capital and investment still moves fairly freely. And, indeed, rather than approach the imposition of tariffs with retaliatory tariffs, China, Japan and Korea would be better off buying US: steel manufacturers, increasing production of un-tariffed steel and then exporting that commodity for finishing in their own home states.

How likely is the European Union to retaliate by imposing tariffs on US products?

This is an excellent question. While the initial emotional response, one fanned by the global media, might have tilted toward retaliatory tariffs on vulnerable US products, that course may not be followed once tempers are calmed. The principle reason for this is that the Trump Administration has made it clear that it would entertain bilateral negotiations on waivers of tariffs. This is not a small matter. Indeed, one can see in this Tariff imposition-negotiated waiver approach an essential feature of the Trump Administration’s movement away from its old approach of globalized system building multilateralism to the new America First Initiative. Thus, consider the dynamics of the tariff imposition in context. The United States has commenced building its own

trade network in a manner that links up with the US enterprise’s management or control of certain production chains. That requires a reorienting of trade relations from a multilateral form without a center to an aggregated bilateral form with the US at the center. To effect this reorientation of the foundations of trade the US must first re-center its position in global trade networks (not all of them but those of vital interest or with respect to which there is an ambition). To that end, certain shocks are necessary. These include withdrawal from multilateral agreements (including Paris and TPP) and the disruption of old free

No trade war is likely. The deep structures of economic integration cannot be undone by a series of shocks with offers of renegotiation. And trade war does not seem to be the intent (though one must disregard certain of the President’s tweets to acquire assurance on that point). And America First Initiative is not the same as the isolationist policies adopted from near the end of the 1920s—it is rather the reverse, the effort to encourage muscular expansion but now oriented from key home states, rather than by building a community of similarly situated actors all competing in the global markets for engagement



trade alignments. But mere withdrawal does not produce re-centering—the offer to renegotiate the terms of bilateral relations (and in the process restore relations or waive action) is the driving element of realignment. At the end of the process, if carried out systematically and with a clear long term vision, the US might well produce a trading system that looks substantially the same as the Chinese One Belt One Road Initiative. If that is the case, then the future of global trade is not manifested in tariffs, but through these tariff and other shocks, a new global trade system, built around control of production chains, will emerge in which most roads lead either to Washington, or to Beijing.

Will Mr. Trump’s acts result in a trade war between the US and world’s other economic powers? What can be the consequences of such possible war for world?

with portions of emerging production chains. And indeed, while the ineptitude of national leaders might, through comedies of errors and personal vanity, move key states toward trade wars, the result would not further state power. Trade wars are particularly dangerous in contemporary politics precisely because they would produce two types of instability. First, trade wars would produce instability among the lower reaches of production chains. Those states would suffer substantial impacts in employment that would lead to political unrest, and more likely substantial migration that would then destabilize neighbors and eventually the apex states to which migration will flow, particularly in the West. Second, trade wars would destabilize apex nations as well. The stability of the political orders in the United States and China depend in large part on the fulfillment of a promise of a baseline economic prosperity. Where that

disappears then both states might well be subject to the vagaries of populism which, though it might not overthrow either's system in a formal sense, would substantially corrupt them.

The US and the Europeans cooperation after world war was based on trade, security and military regimes like NATO. Don't you think possible trade war between the US and Europe can spill over other security and military fields, too?

I agree, of course, that a trade war would spill over to other vectors of state to state relations. But only suicidal states and mad leaders without substantial popular or institutional checks, could possibly move the US-EU relationship dangerously in that direction. The US and its European allies have had tiffs and have made grand gestures of disapproval against each other with some regularity since the 1960s. One need only remember the antics of Charles De Gaulle (quite effective both within Europe and in the effect on NATO relations). And in any case, the bad behavior of states on the periphery of the US-EU "entente" may ensure the strength of the core alliance militarily and work against economic policy foolishness.

Rising of rightist in Europe is a threat to the future of the EU and from the other side this can result in more independent trade relation without the EU considerations. Considering this fact how do you see the future of EU?

Many people fear the ghosts of the past, and even more people believe that it is important to fight past battles over and over. But like the analogy with the trade wars of the 1920s, analogies with the rise of fascist movements in Europe in the 1930s may be misapplied in this case. Yes, indeed, the ultra-right movements have risen again after several generations of muscular suppression in Europe, and ridicule (effective) in the US. But that suppression, in part, might well have contributed to the re-emergence of the virus of right wing extremism in the face of a largely unchecked left wing extremism that has tended to be the darling of the political and intellectual sets in the US and Europe since the great

social rebellions of 1968. That cultural moment plays differently in Eastern Europe, of course, and produces a return to the comforts of authoritarian nationalism that can easily be characterized as either left or right to suit the agenda of the commentator. At some point balance must be restored, of course, or the EU will flounder. And that may be likely in the medium term. For the moment, however, the rise of rightists as against an unchecked culture of leftism may produce the sort of instability that marked the early Weimar Republic. But at its base, the EU is suffering a version of 2nd generation malaise. The rising elite never experienced the trauma that produced European solidarity in the face of a half century during which Europe virtually committed suicide. They do not know hunger, and fear, nor do they worry about the penetration of larger powers to undermine their own autonomy and independence (those are worries left for the detritus of empire). And thus, they can indulge the privilege of dismissing the institutional structures on which their own prosperity and security are based. To that end, indeed, it is not the rise of the right, but the effects of ennui, that may have a substantial deleterious effect on the solidity of the EU.

The US also recently imposed tariffs and other measures against the People's Republic of China. Do you see the possibility of a trade war or more adversarial relations between the US and China with respect to trade issues?

I would suggest that the recent and very quick tariff exchange between the United States and the People's Republic of China illustrates the character of these tariff moves by the Trump Administration and the way that they have been received once governments finish producing the appropriate responses required for public consumption by their internal and external audiences. Consider what happened when in mid-March 2018 President Trump moved to levy tariffs on up to \$60 billion of Chinese imports, in addition to those imposed on solar panels, steel and aluminum. Initially, the Chinese reacted aggressively and publicly in the expected way, utilizing all of

their networks to aid in that effort. The Chinese indicated an intention to levy tariffs on about \$3 billion of US imports, including soybeans or aircraft, major trade goods. The effect was immediate—global financial markets fell dramatically over the course of a week. Yet, after the necessary public drama, one discovered that the tariffs imposed on both sides appeared to serve as an invitation for both the US and China to begin to renegotiate their trade relations.

The Americans sent a letter indicating the changes that they sought in the wake of the tariff impositions, with an emphasis on trade and intellectual property issues, including what for the US amounted to coercive technology and know-how transfer rules. Premier Li Ke-qiang spoke publicly about the need for China and the United States to continue negotiations and reiterated pledges to better open their internal markets and perhaps to target purchases of specified US goods. Negotiations continue. When news leaked of those steps, global markets responded appropriately. And thus one can begin to see the contours of the way in which tariffs have become an instrument rather than the objective of trade policy. The US may now use tariffs as a critically important tool in the reframing of US trade policy in the form of the "America First" Initiative.

The object is not to destroy trade—the US President and his advisors have been very clear about that (it is only that people have chosen not to listen)—but to reframe the basis of the global trading system from the forms that emerged after the 2nd World War to a new form whose characteristics will be shaped both by the Chinese One Belt One Road Initiative and its American counterpart, the "America First" Initiative. It was the Iranian leadership itself which almost a decade ago pointed to the end of the post-World War II era and its structures. Few paid attention at the time.

That was a pity. For it seems that in retrospect they were correct and that the global community will continue to see manifestations of the new system emerge as the first order powers realign their visions, reach accommodations with each other and reorder the hierarchies of power and production for the first part of this century.

Living on the edge: Asiatic cheetah in Iran

Interview by: Lachin Rezaian

Mohammad Farhadinia, a wildlife biologist, has said thanks to conservation agencies' attempts, the Asiatic cheetah has received a high level of social support. It gives hope and dedication, both to government and civil society in their battle to save the rarest cat in the world.

He stressed that the cheetah project established an innovative insurance program to compensate people's occasional livestock loss to the cheetahs. "Iran must be proud of its cheetah project which against all odds, has been a platform to benchmark the modern nature conservation in Iran and perhaps beyond across the volatile Middle East," he noted in an interview with Mehr News correspondent Lachin Rezaian:

What is the current situation of Asiatic cheetahs in Iran?

Until recently, Asiatic cheetahs used to occur in three regions, or if we consider them as sub-populations. The first one is near Tehran. Sadly, we do not have any evidence of cheetah presence there since 2013. The second one, which is called the Southern, covers several of promising cheetah reserves. But to our surprise, no cheetah female, and consequently no evidence of breeding has been detected since 2011 there. Currently, we are aware of 4 adult males, some aged 10 years, wandering the Southern region. Finally, there is a "Northern" region. This is the only region where we have evidence of cheetah breeding, for example three different families were spotted during 2017. We are optimistic that there may be more cheetahs in these areas as well as other landscapes where have not been explored.

How do you evaluate conservation actions for cheetahs in Iran?

Iran coordinates its governmental conservation work through a cheetah project. Recently, one of the cheetah project's advisors evaluated it to have achieved to 63% of committed activities. The way cheetah conservation evolved



in Iran was astonishing, from an animal quite unknown for public to the only animal present on a national soccer's jersey in the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, facilitated by the cheetah project. The cheetah inspired many young conservationists to build their career in saving animals, making Iran as the most productive country across the Middle East in terms of published papers in biodiversity conservation peer-reviewed journals. Iranian government remained highly committed to save the cheetahs, for example launching many development plans were stopped within cheetah areas and 125 rangers are hired to protect the cheetahs and their prey. The cheetah project established an innovative insurance program, to compensate people's occasional livestock loss to the cheetahs. Iran must be proud of its cheetah project which against all odds, has been a platform to benchmark the modern nature conservation in Iran and perhaps beyond across the volatile Middle East.

Although we must be proud of achievements in terms of activities, we should not forget our goal which is securing a viable population of Asiatic cheetahs in Iran. As long as the cheetahs are still away from the viability, there is no question on extending or discontinuing the cheetah project based on its failure and success. The cheetah is, and will be, a conservation-dependent animal.

I recently learned that a news translated and summarized by Mehr News Agency from one of my detailed articles about cheetah conservation in Iran created disappointment among some conservationists, after titling "Cheetah

project failed". That was neither the title nor the conclusion I meant from the original article which was originally titled as "Low genetic diversity a big threat to Asiatic cheetahs", aiming to encourage revising our protection activities. Engaged experts may find that article useful in order to revise nearly two decades of cheetah conservation for concluding a better strategic plan for future.

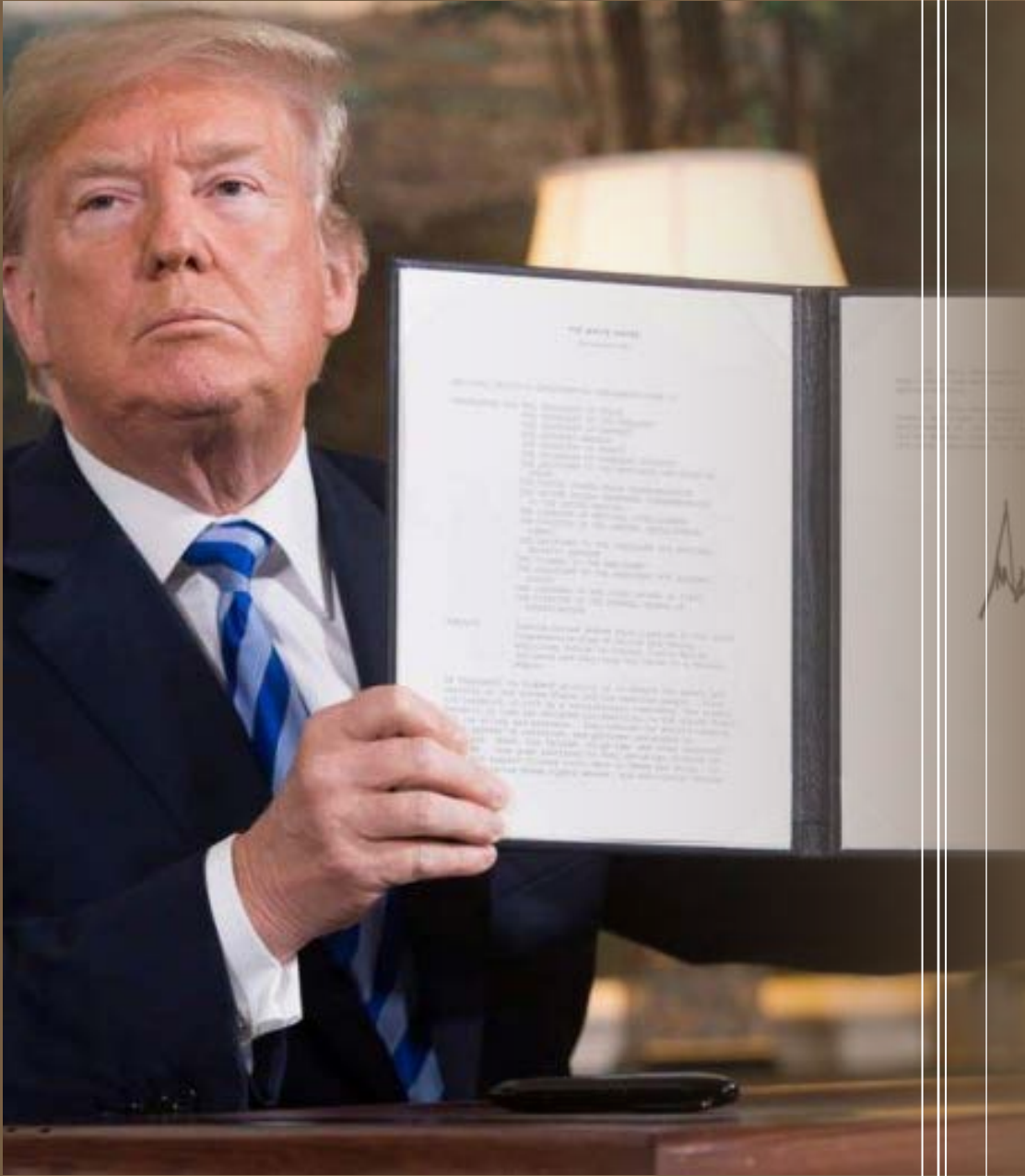
What is the solution if we want the Asiatic cheetahs to survive?

There seems to be a dichotomy in the current cheetah conservation in Iran. In one hand, some scholars believe that "threat mitigation" is still the major solution for cheetahs, implying that mitigating the threats and improving habitat and prey would allow stabilizing and increasing the local cheetah abundance.

In contrast, some biologists believe that in addition to the ongoing threat mitigation efforts which must be enhanced, a new level of interventions is needed as part of the solution, notably through captive breeding. Recently, Iranian Department of Environment declared that Iran will pursue the second approach, launching a captive breeding program along with ongoing protection efforts and threat mitigation. I am not aware of the stage of planning or implementation.

Do you consider any chance for cheetahs to survive?

Speaking realistically, there is still some chance, but it is tiny and fragile. When a population is limited to several individuals, particularly in the case of Asiatic cheetahs which each individual might be hundreds of kilometers away from the nearest cheetah, it is difficult to predict the future and to control complex factors affecting each of them. A road collision with a female from an area can ruin breeding of cheetahs in a big reserve, or curious herd dogs chasing after a cheetah cub can destroy the breeding outcome of a female in a matter of minutes. This is why we need to be open to wide range of solutions, but certainly not to give up, as long as the last cheetah is wandering parts of the Iran's vast barren deserts.



Opinion



US-EU possible soft tactic to contain Iran

By Payman Yazdani

The US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has created a new rounds of speculations about the three European major players' (the UK, France and Germany) capabilities and abilities to keep the deal alive without the US.

Following the US President's unilateral move to withdraw from the Iran's Nuclear Deal, lots of diplomatic and political efforts have been made both by the European and Iranian officials to keep the internationally achieved deal alive.

Islamic Republic of Iran has announced that it will remain in the JCPOA just if the EU can guarantee Iran's benefits and interests under the JCPOA in the absence of the US, otherwise Tehran will leave the deal, too.

Despite all measures taken and political promises made by the European sides to keep the JCPOA alive, over the past ten

days many big EU firms and international companies have announced their decisions to stop their activities and operations in Iran including Total, Eni, Siemens, Airbus and Maersk.

Just couple of days after the US withdraw from the JCPOA, French gas and oil giant Total has announced that due to return of the US sanctions against Iran it has to pull out of Iranian Southern Pars oil field.

Italian oil giant Eni has also decided to abrogate its agreement with Iran to study oil and gas in Iran.

Maersk as the biggest shipping company in the world has announced that due to its vast activities in the US and to avoid possible US punishments, it will stop its activities in Iran.

Considering the limited capabilities and potentialities of the EU to challenge the US hegemony and also the fact that EU governments cannot force private sectors to work with Iran, it is not realistic to expect the EU to save the JCPOA.

As I mentioned in my previous writing, the possibility of job division between the US and EU to contain Iran should not be ignored.

All facts on the ground imply that all EU measures and promises to keep the JCPOA alive will only result in remaining of some small European companies in Iran. Big companies that can invest and transfer technology to Iran will leave Iran to avoid the US possible punishments. This possible soft and indirect US-EU tactic can help the joint goal of the US and EU to contain Iran.

By this tactic, firstly the EU can buy time and contain Iran so that not to leave the JCPOA. Secondly, the EU will pave the way for selling of its products and services in Iran's market without investment and transferring technology. Thirdly, Iran's incomes and revenues will be limited which Americans and the Europeans consider it as a good soft and indirect way to increase pressure on Iran to limit Iran's regional influence and missile capability.

US withdrawal from N-deal; unsettling implications

By: Mahmood Monshipouri

After US President Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA, the European signatory states of the deal as well as Russia and China announced that they will continue abiding by the agreement without US, and here Monshipouri is discussing the consequences.

The US withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal between Iran and the

leading world powers, which has lifted sanctions in exchange for verifiable limits on Iran's nuclear program, has created a whole host of problems, not just for Iran but for the European Union (EU) member states.

It is generally believed that without a core participant and guarantor—that is, the United States—the nuclear deal may not be upheld much longer.

Perhaps the broader question is: Will this division between the United States and its European allies, who intend to

preserve the deal, weaken or strengthen US leadership position on the global scene? A growing, if not widespread, perception in Europe is that the so-called "indispensable" United States has increasingly become the "unpredictable" United States. This element of unpredictability is likely to cause further friction rather than unity between the United States and its longstanding Western allies.

What is still to come is not clear. It appears, however, that the Europeans are caught in the moment of utter confusion regarding the cost of sticking to the deal, as the prospect of reaching a consensus with the United States seems highly unlikely for now at least. The enforcement mechanisms is likely to create a tremen- →

dous burden on the US European allies.

Jean Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission (The New York Times, May 18, 2018:A10), has said that the Commission has a “duty to protect European companies” from US sanctions, invoking the so-called 1996 statute to block such sanctions in an attempt to salvage the nuclear deal. Nevertheless, larger firms and multinational companies have begun to retract their commercial and military agreements with Iran. Bijan Zangeneh, Iran’s oil minister, has an-

an awkward position, hoping to keep its foreign investment in Iran steady while at the same time not jeopardizing its economic ties with the United States. Volkswagen, the German automaker, has continued exporting cars to Iran. Richard Grenell, the US ambassador to Berlin, according to the European newspapers, has warned Berlin against the continuing normal trade ties with Iran: “German companies doing business in Iran should wind down operations immediately.”

The Trump administration has re-

US sanctions on Iran not only block American firms from doing business in the former, but also prohibit foreign firms that do business there from accessing the larger US banking and financial system. Renewing sanctions would make it immensely difficult for Iran to sell its oil abroad or use the international banking system.

Iran produces roughly 4 million barrels per day of crude oil, accounting for about 4 percent of global supply, much of which is exported to Asia, including China, India, Japan and South Korea. Tehran will look further to the east, where China and Russia will become its major trading partners as a result. Most notably, China’s trade ties with Iran could come into conflict with—if not countervail—US sanctions. While it is true the volume of trade between China and the United States far outweighs that of Iran and China, Iran nevertheless continues to occupy a pivotal place in China’s reinvigoration of the historical Silk Road. With the threat of sanctions looming large, Iran will most likely seek new opportunities under China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative in the coming years and decades. The regional and international implications of this policy cannot be underestimated.

On balance, the occurrence of a US policy that pushes states to choose between banking in US dollars and with US firms operating under a different financial system could not come at a worse time. The US has engaged in an increasingly fruitless trade war with the Chinese, has come under heavy criticism from Europeans allies for its trade policies, and has created tension with enemies and allies alike in the international system. Whether this pushes states to reconsider the already diminished stature of the United States in the world system remains to be seen, but clearly the writing is on the wall: international relations are now operating in a potential post-American world and the rebalancing as well as recalibrating of financial interests may be forthcoming.

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nounced that Chinese state-owned oil company CNPC was ready to replace Total if the latter decided to withdraw (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/eu-moves-block-sanctions-iran-180517134848253.html>).

For the Europeans, the lingering question is: Should EU countries push back against the Trump administration over the Iran nuclear deal? French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire has reportedly noted that Europe should maintain its economic sovereignty by challenging the US role as the “world’s economic policeman.” This is understandable, given that the French energy giant Total has a \$5billion deal to extract Iranian natural gas. The deepening French economic ties with Iran have also included Airbus, which has already begun delivering jets to Iran Air under a multibillion-dollar contract.

Germany has similarly found itself in

turned to the decades-old familiar strategy toward Iran, one which was based on sanctions and coercive diplomacy rather than negotiation and reliance on agreements. Today, Trump’s aids believe that the same strategy could force Iran to change its foreign policy behavior. John Bolton, Trump’s national security adviser, has sent an utterly ominous signal to those European countries doing business with Iran, appearing convinced that the Europeans will find it in their interests to follow the US lead rather than resuming with the nuclear deal. Europeans are torn between having lucrative contracts with Iran on the one hand and maintaining normal trade ties with the United States on the other.

The extra-territorial impact of sanctions has raised serious concerns about penalizing foreign businesses that trade with or invest in Iran. The

How information, mass media play major role in social life?

By Sajad Abedi

The media and their influential role in governments have been and will be considered by all the governments, parties and political currents.

In recent decades, the role of the media has been enhanced in the field of information dissemination in the field of influence on the governments and macro policies of the countries.

In the colorful or velvet revolutions in the last decade, this role has become quite distinct and has led observers to examine the dimensions of media power in recent political developments.

Following the end of the Cold War and the formation of a monopolistic world, the United States changed its strategy from the Cold War to the cultural battle and the Soft War to dominate the values of liberalism, and by implementing colored or velvet revolutions in some countries, including Ukraine, Georgia, and Lebanon," consolidated its foothold in these countries.

"Soft War", "Velvet Revolution" or "Orange Revolution" are the theories put forward by the theoretician Gene Sharp, and has been successfully implemented in the countries.

The most important tool is the "Soft War" of the media. In this research, the role of the media (especially the written media) has been attempted in the field of the development and implementation of soft overthrow in Iran.

In this research, with the opinion of communication experts, the role of the media in the ineffectiveness of states, the creation of a climate of chaos, inflammation and civil disobedience, the and intensification of social dilemmas and abnormalities in society, and the use of deceptive strategies has taken the lead to undesirable decisions and policies.

In this study, media techniques and tactics, including exaggeration, incitement and persuasion of the audience, highlighting issues such as democracy, citizenship rights, creating stress and weakening the morale of the people,



and the duplication of society by the media, provide a platform for soft suppression.

This is the important point here; the important and strategic demand of the enemies of the Islamic Revolution is to realize this kind of overthrow in our dear homeland; soft subversion acts like a suspicious termite; it does not rush in and out of the inside.

It is very important to first know such a phenomenon and then to deal with it. Also, dimensions and concepts include public diplomacy, current risk committee, Delta project, Rika Dubai project, effective tools in the software project, a new concept in international literature, the strategy of pressure from the outside and change from within, the main actors of soft suppression, the opposition outside of Governance, soft threats and media warfare - a Soft War, a bloodless war and a calm war - the use of the media to undermine the country's target, utilize the power and capacity of the media (including the press, news agencies, radio, television, the Internet and advertising principles) to defend national interests.

The most prominent media war are the Soft War and the new international wars, which the parties of the battle use solely to advance their political ends

from the media a war on newspapers, microphone radios, TV screens and camera lenses.

However, while introducing a glimpse of colored or velvet revolutions, the main characteristic of which is non-violent resistance to authoritarian rule and the struggle through civil disobedience, we examine the role of the media and their impact on the emergence of revolutions in the new era; revolutions that, unlike the great revolutions in the world over the past decade, the power has been taken away from authoritarian systems with no serious damage to the entire country.

In contemporary world history, there have been various examples of soft overthrow. Among these examples is the attempt by Britain and its related factors to create a diversion in the Constitutional Movement of Iran.

In the course of this movement, efforts were made to help with such activities as penetrating the high levels of the movement, creating pessimism and fidelity, and moving from the true path which created justice for the people, to go away in a way that is driven by the intensity of extremes, famine and Mark of Chaos, a ground for a coup dictatorship called Reza Khan.

In the nationalization of the oil indus- →

try, we also saw that some Western intelligence agencies, directly or indirectly, contacted with some of the newspapers and led them along their anti-government Mossadegh's overthrowing goals and eventually overthrew it with a similar coup d'état.

Recently, the CIA released its documents on its role in the Iranian press before the coup d'état of August 28th, which suggests that some newspapers with the money, guidance and nutrition of the CIA were the basis for the coup of August 28th.

It is recalled that the coup was not the kind of universal coup d'état that was being carried out by some soldiers, but rather an example of a soft overthrow that was carried out with the demonstration of individuals, some of whom were considered as mobs.

Following the cessation of relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States in the early years after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, several tactics have been used by the United States to weaken, isolate, challenge, and waste the resources of the Islamic Republic of Iran and cause despair in the nation.

Although there have been limited military conflicts between two countries in a number of cases, but at a glance, soft approach can be considered as the main US policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran in the current situation.

In the context of the Greater Middle East and World Development Program, the United States has made it clear that social movements have led to a change in the political systems of these countries, and even will intervene in the launch of such a movement.

In this regard, in particular, the attitude of the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran has been based on various events and scenes of soft subversion during a time of about 30 years; According to the famous remark made by Founder of Islamic Revolution Imam Khamenei, "negotiation with America is forbidden as it bears innumerable disadvantages and no benefit."

They want to open the door to the influence; in the same nuclear negotiations, wherever they may have influenced on, we must now pay attention to the outstanding feature of the new media and new information technologies in shaping these revolutions and influence.

It can be argued that the media have played a part in the above characteristics (the media facilitate communication between parties, student movements, foundations and NGOs, and in particular the masses of people).

The fact that the disappearance of events in Venezuela and Belarus prevented the collapse of the color revolution and the influence of these countries has been fetched up.

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EU's poor record in JCPOA

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

The European troika are still insisting on having negotiations over a second or complementary agreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

After the withdrawal of the United States of America from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) despite the official support of the European troika and those like "Federica Mogherini", High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs, the unreasonable demands of European authorities over the conditions set by Trump, including "limiting Iran's missile power", "controlling Iran's Regional Activities", "Inspection of Iranian Military sites and permanent nuclear restrictions after 2025" remain strong.

Thus "preserving the JCPOA", doesn't necessarily mean the European authorities support for the nuclear deal as it is.

And this point should be seriously taken into consideration in our country's foreign policy equations. On the other hand, the Western media maneuvers in this regard should be smartly pursued, and there's no place for a mistake in this regard.

Some Western media believe that the JCPOA without the cooperation of the United States is no longer valid. Because with the introduction of secondary sanctions, practically other European countries won't be able to have an effective economic engagement with Iran. However, some other media speak about the possibility of preserving the JCPOA without the United States. In any case, the European troika, along with the two countries of China and Russia, should officially guarantee this position, and declare their commitments to Iran in this regard.

Decoding the recent positions of Western officials can play an effective

role in understanding the European troika's demands on the "new JCPOA". During his visit to the United States, the British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson, once again proved London's direct play on Washington's ground. Johnson first wrote at the beginning of a note in The New York Times:

"I believe that keeping the deal's constraints on Iran's nuclear program will also help counter Tehran's aggressive regional behavior. I am sure of one thing: every available alternative is worse. The wisest course would be to improve the handcuffs rather than break them."

The British Foreign Secretary then uncovered his true face, and instead of "restraining Trump's nuclear ambitions", he stressed:

What has been gained from the nuclear deal? Imagine all the mutually contaminating civil wars and inter-necine conflicts that rage across the Middle East today. Then turn the dial and →



add the possibility of a regional nuclear arms race triggered by Iran dashing for a bomb. That is the scenario which the agreement has helped to prevent.... It has weaknesses, certainly, but I am convinced they can be remedied. Indeed at this moment Britain is working alongside the Trump administration and our French and German allies to ensure that they are.

As we can see, European officials are trying to make public opinion ready for accepting new limitations on the nuclear deal. Meanwhile, limiting Iran's missile power is considered to be the main demand of the West.

Last summer and during the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York, senior British officials were committed to American and Zionist authorities to do their best to "change the nuclear accord", or "cancelling it". In other words, British officials have promised Trump and Netanyahu to accept their final decision, even if it didn't agree with the JCPOA. In this period, the European troika is attempting to implement the "JCPOA without US" formula, based on "Iran's greater commitment" compared with "less commitment" of the West.

The fact is that US Congress and government authorities didn't really consider the JCPOA as an "independent phenomenon," but defined it as one of the pieces of the puzzle of "controlling and restraining the powerful Iran". On this basis, the JCPOA was supposed to be

merely an "introduction", or a "symbol" for controlling Iran's immense power. In the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 members in November 2014, John Kerry tried to attach a "nuclear-missile" dimension to this "introduction", so that it would not be limited to Iran's nuclear capability. Even it has reached a point that the United States has made the resolution of Iran's nuclear case subject to the inclusion of the country's missile power in the agreement.

However, the wise and determined positions of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution eventually led to the withdrawal of Obama administration from this demand. However, at the same time, Democrats in the United States emphasized that the project would be incomplete without imposing a limitation on Iran's missile power. This is a formula that is already followed by Europe.

Even during the time when nuclear negotiations were held, the European troika (Britain, Germany and France) agreed that Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities complement each other, and limiting of one of these two without the other will not decrease the regional power of Iran to the extent they had in mind. In 2015, however, the European troika and the White House Democrats concluded that Iran's missile power could become the second priority of Iran's negotiations with the members of the P5+1, and then in the near future the issue of limiting our country's missile power could be discussed. The

British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel all emphasized that according to the European troika, believes the issue of "limiting Iran's missile power" should be included in the text of the nuclear accord in any way possible.

The French, German and British authorities has repeatedly expressed their concerns about the missile power of our country. That well indicates their common agreement on limiting our country's defensive power, and the European troika seeks to enter into negotiations with our country in this regard. Hence we should carefully and smartly watch the positions of the European Union, and especially the three countries of Germany, France and Britain on Iran's nuclear and missile programs to be able to take the proper decision and measures.

Now that Trump has walked out of the JCPOA, there is no longer any place for issues such as "complementary" and "secondary" agreements. In the meantime, the European troika should be committed to the strict implementation of the content of the nuclear deal as it stands, and it should provide Iran with the necessary economic guarantees. It's obvious that our nation will never allow the Europeans to impose the "JCPOAII" through the smile tactic, and our country's foreign policy system should make sure that the European authorities well understood this issue.

Le Pen slams Macron over JCPOA

By: Hanif Ghaffari

Although the President of the French National Front, Marine Le Pen has seriously slammed French President Emmanuel Macron for his approach towards the nuclear deal, the criticism has been censored in French media.

Although the President of the French National Front, Marine Le Pen has seriously slammed French President Emmanuel Macron for his approach towards the nuclear deal, the criticism has been censored in French media! In other words, only a few French news sources has reflected Le Pen's words, while others simply ignored them.

Criticizing Trump's decision to walk out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), France's Far-right leader stressed that this decision is "putting French citizens at risk and is depriving the French economy of very lucrative markets." She then described Trump's decision in this regard as dangerous.

"Similar to the harsh sanctions in 2012 against Iran, the US has an entire arsenal of means to prevent [foreign companies] from maintaining any trade relations with Tehran. Such diktat is impermissible and can't be tolerated," Le Pen noted.

The fact is that a number of French companies, including Total, Renault, and Sanofi, are based in Iran and could, according to the new sanctions, be affected by the US measures.

"By withdrawing from the 5+1 agreement, the United States, once again, broke their promise... for a second time in less than a month," Le Pen said.

She also mentioned that Emmanuel Macron bears his share of responsibility for the "illusions" he had about his ability to talk Trump out of withdrawing from the nuclear deal with Tehran.

"I resolutely condemn the position of Donald Trump and also that of the French diplomacy which, in its attempts to be even more neo-conservative than [US national security adviser] John Bolton, has found itself without US patronage and no alternative way to go, ... He [Macron] finally refused to go to Tehran to defend the national interests



[of France] and to listen to the position of the regime. He was only interested in the American-Israeli-Saudi axis," Le Pen said in a statement released on Friday.

Marine Le Pen's remarks in criticizing the misguided policies of the French President on the JCPOA are totally in line with current realities in French foreign policy equations. Last summer, Emanuel Macron has been committed to Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu to include Iran's missile capabilities and permanent nuclear restrictions against our country in the nuclear deal context. Beyond that, he promised to do his best in order to limit Iran's regional activities through a second agreement!

Such hideous promises indicate that Macron doesn't have the slightest and minimum intelligence in foreign diplomacy. Accepting Trump's demands on the JCPOA, Macron had practically humiliated the French diplomacy system, and reduced it to an "impotent broker" of US policies.

It should be noted that the same trend existed in France foreign policy before, during the presidency of Sarkozy and Hollande. France has faced countless illusions in its foreign policy after the departure of Jacques Chirac of the Elysee Palace and the presence of new leaders; something we can well see the results in Paris's decisions on the JCPOA and the country's policies in Syria.

In her criticism of Macron, Le Pen has pointed out a very important subject that shouldn't be easily overtaken: That the French president (over last year) hasn't basically listened to the positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran,

and has only become a desperate player on Trump's ground. Under such circumstances, Macron's words on saving the JCPOA is more like a joke.

"France needs real world politics and rid itself of the neo-Conservative ideology, which has led to such destructive consequences [in the Middle and Near East] and finally to start defending the interests of France," Le Pen emphasized.

According to Le Pen, cooperation with Iran, Russia and Syria against terrorism is of crucial importance in preventing new terrorist attacks on French soil. She said, "secondly, we should establish the post of a defense commissioner [in relations with Iran] and thirdly, we need to work out and implement a mechanism of bank payments that would help us resist the US diktat and protect bilateral exchanges [with Iran]."

With no doubt, the French President is to blame in this equation, and he is way behind being a "defender" of the JCPOA! Currently the leaders of Britain, France and Germany have urged all the signatories to the JCPOA to stick to its provisions. This is while the role of people like Emmanuel Macron, "Theresa May" and "Angela Merkel" in breaking the nuclear deal with Iran is no less than the US and Trump! "Standing against Trump's illusions" was the least responsibility of the European troika, but France, Britain and Germany refused to fulfil it. On the contrary, those like Emmanuel Macron did their best in feeding the illusions of the incapable and controversial President of the United States, the illusions that today have stuck European countries, including Britain, Germany and France.

Lies of mass destruction

By: Jack Perry

Netanyahu's shows about imaginary nuclear weapon programs in Iran has been subject to many comments, caricatures and remarks as it is discussed in this commentary by Jack Perry.

Seeing Benjamin Netanyahu stand up there and lie about Iran's "nuclear weapons program" was one of the worst performances ever given. A grade school drama production could have done better. And would have been more convincing because children are better able to believe in fantasy, especially the fantasies they tell others.

Even worse, Netanyahu expects the world to believe this, all the while IDF snipers are killing kids in Gaza. Is this not surreal? Netanyahu reminds me of Colonel Kurtz from the movie *Apocalypse Now*. All the while going upriver, Captain Willard thinks Kurtz is on to something. But then he sees Kurtz and is astonished by the level of madness Kurtz has descended into. The world is an unwilling Willard to Netanyahu's Kurtz.

Even that is too simple an explanation. The fact is, Netanyahu is gambling with his own country's fate but doesn't see it. He thinks that if he can just convince the United States to attack Iran, there will be no consequences to Israel. It is perfectly clear he is wrong. No one is going to forget that it was him who needled an unstable Trump into attacking Iran. But should Israel join a US coalition, it certainly will not escape.

Be that as it may, Netanyahu thinks the US can launch its famed Tomahawk cruise missiles at Iran and run, as it did in Syria. Not so fast! Syria air defense shot down most of the Tomahawks in the last attack on Syria, which the US government has been worked feverishly to deny. There is no solid evidence Tomahawks launched into Iran will reach their targets. Therefore, it would take aircraft to attack Iran. But the truth is, the US military has not taken on an air attack where it will face vast surface-to-air missile batteries and fighter/interceptor aircraft since the Vietnam War. Where, by the way, it lost quite a few aircraft which is how Senator John McCain was cap-

tured in his days as a navy aviator.

Let's not forget that Russian air defense radar operating in Syria could track incoming US warplanes and pass the information on to Iran. The US could do nothing about it without provoking the Russians and possibly losing the host aircraft carriers that launched the warplanes to begin with. Of course, the United States could send out strategic bombers such as the B-1 and B-52s. But, again, the US lost B-52s to enemy fire in the Vietnam War so even that option is not without serious risk. Again, these planes are not invisible to radar. Yes, the US has stealth aircraft. But after they drop bombs, they're no longer hidden. They might get in, but will they get out?

Netanyahu also assumes Russia will continue to sit this out. At some point, Russia and probably China are going to have had enough of the US and Israel sowing discord and conflict in a region they are hoping for closer trade relationships with. Russia and China want peace and harmony in the Middle East because that is necessary for the trade relationships they desire. The United States and Israel want discord and conflict because it keeps the region from uniting together in their own interests which do not include the United States and Israel. Of all the nations in the region, Iran holds the most promise of becoming a regional superpower that could challenge American hegemony. And that is what frightens the United States.

Netanyahu might be saying this from his own Kurtz-like personality. Or he could be saying this at the behest of US interests. Maybe it was the price for the release of the jailed spy Jonathan Pollard, who funneled US nuclear secrets to Israel for years. Either is possible. Or, perhaps, both are. The madness of Netanyahu is clear, given the actions of the Israeli military in Gaza who are certainly acting upon his orders. The world watches IDF snipers shoot children and giggle about it. The world sees this, fidgets in its chair, and does what? Worries about whether Trump paid off Stormie Daniels to keep quiet a rather distasteful peccadillo. An affair that, honestly, didn't kill anyone so why get so focused on it?

The movie *Apocalypse Now* didn't intend to portray the madness, hypocrisy,



and insanity of war. But it did. It came at a time that the United States still hadn't recovered from the way the Vietnam War tore the social fabric here. It literally ripped the scab off and forced the United States to confront what it had done. But it didn't stay that way. Because it was only a couple years later Reagan told us, no, the Vietnam War was a "noble cause" and movies appeared to cast a heroic light on the war not a few years after that. And now even *Apocalypse Now* has flipped from unintended anti-war movie to being watched by pro-war people who actually think Kurtz is the hero and not a tragic character who lost the battle for his own mind and took all his followers along with him.

History is a tragedy but when it repeats itself it's a farce. And no one knows that better than Israel and the United States who accuse every nation of having nuclear weapons programs when the only country to use them against people was the United States. And the only nation in the Middle East who has nuclear weapons is Israel. So it goes that Iraq went down and no one was really surprised when it was revealed they didn't have a nuclear weapons program. Well, Israel knew it already before 2003. Because it was them who destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981. But no one has learned that the United States and Israeli "lies of mass destruction" programs are alive and well.

Jack Perry is a writer who lives with his wife in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. When talking about the ambitions and goals of the United States government, Jack warns: "Always Assume It's A Scam." Jack writes, bakes bread, and is a Path pilgrim and wayfarer of this world.

Reasons for snap elections in Turkey, Erdogan's easy way to win

By: Seyed Mahdi Nabavi

Here the contributing commentator from the IIWFS touches upon the reasons behind Erdogan's call for snap elections in Turkey which seems to cloud over democracy in Turkey,

Over the past two years, Turkey's political sphere has been accompanied by major and controversial developments. The unsuccessful coup and massive arrest of government opponents, challenges with the United States over the extradition of Fethullah Gülen and YPG, the referendum on the reform of the constitution and the change in the system of government, the military intervention in Syria and the occupation of Afrin were only part of these developments. Now Erdogan has started a new challenge and is looking for a snap election. He, who had repeatedly called the snap election supporters a traitor several times before, announced on April 18 that he will hold the presidential and parliamentary elections, approximately 17 months earlier than scheduled, on June 24, 2018. This issue was raised by Bahçeli, the National Movement Party's leader, one day before its announcement by Erdogan's government. The snap elections, scheduled by the Justice and Development and National Movement parties, was immediately passed to parliament and approved by the Turkish Parliamentary Election Commission.

When announcing this, Erdogan said that the decision was made to hold early presidential and parliamentary elections, taking into account the specific circumstances of the region, especially the crisis of Syria and the developments in Iraq. The spokesman for The Prime Minister of Turkey announced the move to thwart anti-Turkey initiatives. But it seems that there are more important reasons behind this decision. Here are some reasons:

1. One of the most important reasons for this decision is the probable negative impact of the economy on the



upcoming elections in Turkey. Turkey's economic growth has been the most important strength of the Justice and Development Party over more than 16 years of rule over Turkey. Though Turkey's economic growth was about 7.4 percent in 2017, the general trend of Turkey's economy and its outlook for next year is not clear, and it is likely to face serious problems. Turkey's 2018 budget faces a potential deficit of \$ 17 billion; The Turkish Lira against the dollar reached its lowest level of 4.13 last month. The foreign investment rate in Turkey in 2017 fell by 17% due to geopolitical tensions and domestic policy problems in Turkey. The IMF warned in February 2018 about the emergence of economic risk areas in Turkey, and such cases as foreign major financial needs, limited foreign exchange reserves, increased dependence on short-term capital flows, including Turkey's economic turmoil. Therefore, fears of a downturn in the year leading up to the election and its negative impact on the Justice and Development Party's vote can be considered as one of the reasons for the snap elections.

2. Another point is the use of the nationalist atmosphere resulting from the operation of the olive branch and

the occupation of Afrin. Turkey faced a security problem affecting the crisis of Syria and the Kurdish forces' growing power and managed to create an atmosphere of intense nationalism inside Turkey, with the occupation of Afrin and the defeat of the Kurdish forces in the absence of the interference of other actors, while enhancing the strength of the Syrian crisis and inducing the fight against terrorism inside Turkey and now it's the best chance to wave on nationalist feelings and win votes.

3. The municipal elections next year and preventing its possible negative impact on the first Turkish presidential election with the new system is one of the things that can be part of the reasons for this decision.

But how will the presidential race be? Can Erdogan retain the power in Turkey's politics, or can rivals stop him?

It seems that Erdogan will not have a hard path to win the presidential election and to gain more power in light of the President's increased authority. The following can be attributed to this issue:

1. Opposition's short time for preparation

By announcing snap election, Erdogan has made his opponents face a done

deal and put them under pressure of the shortage of time and they have less than 66 days to plan and campaign. This will affect the opposition's strategies for having a strong electoral campaign against the government.

2. The disintegration of the opposition

In recent polls in Turkey, the popularity of AK Party varies from 46% to 52%, with the highest percentage of CHP being about 30% and IYI Party, about 38%. The point is that Erdogan's opposition parties do not have integrity, while he is a candidate for the three parties of Justice and Development, Nationalist Movement and Patriotic. His most important rivals are Meral Akşener of IYI Party and Muharram İnce of CHP. Opposition could not reach a single candidate and their votes goes for several candidates who cannot gain majority.

3. Erdogan's media power

Despite the development of social networks, audio and visual media still have a significant impact in Turkey. The results of a study by the "Demokrasi için Birlik Association", which consists of more than 100 organizations and institutions, according to records from the

Radio and Television Council of Turkey (RTUK) indicate that out of a total of 17 major Turkish TV channels, from 1st to 20th March 2017, before the April referendum, 470 hours of live program were allocated to Erdogan and the AKP, while this amount was only 45 hours for the Republican People's Party (CHP), and 15 hours for National Movement Party (MHP) [1]. On the other hand, recently Turkey's largest media group, the Doğan Media Group, a pro-government cluster company, has been sold to Demirören's holding company; So practically, most of the Turkish media are in the hands of the Justice and Development Party, which will be the party's propaganda machine ahead of the election.

4. Widespread arrests of political opponents

Turkey has been in a state of emergency since the coup, and recently its duration has been extended. The excuse of the coup and the establishment of a state of emergency allowed Erdogan to eliminate and imprison a large part of the opposition, get even with military and intelligence agencies as well as the government of Turkey, and pave the way for repression and singularity. This massive massacre of arrests of opponents

and journalists has caused the freedom of expression in Turkey to be distorted; and the cost of opposing Erdogan's policies would be higher and the possibility of maneuvering the opposition parties would be reduced.

5. New Electoral Rules

Another point is some of the electoral laws that were communicated and applied at the same time as the referendum. According to these rules, local election committees can take ballot boxes wherever they think it is necessary to take a vote and even votes that do not have the specific seal of the election are counted. This is a risk that challenges the credibility of the election. The point that opposition parties objected during the referendum.

Finally, according to the points mentioned, if there is no particular incident that would impose a political earthquake on Turkey, it seems that Erdogan's re-victory is not unexpected.

[1]. <http://www.dw.com/tr/referandum-yar%C4%B1%C5%9F%C4%B1nda-ekran-adaletisi-zli%C4%9Fi/a-38378613>

Seyed Mahdi Nabavi is a senior research fellow at IIWFS

Washington's biggest mistake in Syria

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

US, UK and French air strikes in Syria has attracted the attention of many media outlets and analysts. The US, despite Trump's claims, has carried out a limited attack on the Middle Eastern country, but its consequences will certainly affect Trump and his allies in the near future. The issue can be analyzed from various angles.

First, the Trump's administration's objective in Syria was to salvage terrorist groups and takfiris. The fact is that the US has opened a special account for extremists such as ISIL, Jabhat al-Nusra and Jaish al-Islam, in line with the rise of the security crises in Syria and West Asia. With the defeat of terrorist groups, a significant part of the US capital and its partners in the region would have been

lost, and thus the US has spared no effort to revitalize the assets.

Second, during the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump promised US citizens that his administration would cut US foreign policy costs in Western Asia and focus more on America's internal affairs. However, Trump has proved otherwise and has taken the same path that former US president Barak Obama took (supporting the war and insecurity in Syria), and perhaps Trump has even put Obama to shame with his international expenditures. As mentioned "creation of insecurity in Syria and the West Asia region" is a major objective in US foreign policy, supported by both Democratic and Republican Parties.

In addition to America's, Britain's and France's participation in the recent attacks on Syria, it also reflects the lack of rationality and reveals the dangerous game of

the European partners and their American ally in Syria. Over the past five years, France and Britain, along with the US, have made every effort to overthrow the ruling system in Syria, but to no avail. Francois Hollande and Emmanuel Macron, as the former and current French presidents respectively, have done their utmost to support the terrorist groups in Syria. Paris is considered to be the main sponsor of Saudi Arabia, an Arab country that is also known as the main supporter of terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq.

Ultimately, the United States, Britain, France, the Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia will pay a very high price for the air strikes. The Oval Office and its allies have seriously miscalculated the consequences of the attacks and made security mistakes. It's as if Washington and its partners have not learned their lesson in Syria and the West Asia region for the last five years.

A dead-end for Trump

By: Hanif Ghaffari

Last August, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed for the eighth time that Iran has been committed to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

According to the agreement, which was negotiated among the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Germany (P5+1) and Iran, we accepted significant constraints on our country's nuclear ability in exchange of lifting sanctions.

The fact is that many experts overwhelmingly support the JCPOA and have urged all sides to continue implementing it. But the deal isn't safe. Not by a long shot.

On Sept. 19, the US President raged against the nuclear deal at the United Nations General Assembly:

"... (Iran has) destabilizing activities while building dangerous missiles, and we cannot abide by an agreement if it provides cover for the eventual construction of a nuclear program. The Iran deal was one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United States has ever entered into. Frankly, that deal is an embarrassment to the United States, and I don't think you've heard the last of it. Believe me."

Trump then announced that he's going to walk out of the nuclear deal by May 12. Trump has claimed that Iran didn't comply with the JCPOA, which is in full contradiction with what the IAEA stated. According to the American law, the president should confirm that suspension of sanctions in accordance with the deal remains vital to the national security interests of the United States. But Trump doesn't seem to have such an intention!

Some hawks, including former US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, has encouraged Trump to decertify Iranian compliance and abandon the JCPOA. For these hard-liners, that would pave the way for Congress and the administration to impose a "de facto global economic embargo" on Iran. This is in spite the fact that at a recent Senate

hearing, Mike Pompeo has emphasized that he didn't find any evidences that Iran has violated the nuclear deal.

But Trump is undoubtedly interested in tearing down yet another pillar of former President Barack Obama's legacy. As US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told Fox News on the day of Trump's U.N. speech, "the president really wants to redo that deal."

Since the beginning of his presidency, Trump tried his best to stand against the nuclear accord. He also tried the strategy of "decertification and renegotiation" over the JCPOA. In this way, he could turn the nuclear deal into an accord which was completely to the benefits of the United States and of course, Israel. His approach, was self-contradictory anyway. Although he had to certify that Iran was complying with the JCPOA under INARA, he has made no secret of his frustration with this outcome.

During an interview with the Wall Street Journal in July, Trump said he'd be "very surprised" if Iran were found in compliance next time, noting, "If it was up to me, I would have had them non-compliant 180 days ago." Afterwards, US Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley presented the case for decertification in a speech to the American Enterprise Institute on Sept. 5, 2017. Shortly after, Trump told reporters: "You'll see what I'm going to be doing very shortly ... They've violated so many different elements and they've also violated the spirit of that deal."

By going forward with decertification of the nuclear deal, Trump's goal is to refashion the JCPOA to address its supposed "flaws", most notably by making permanent constraints on Iran's uranium enrichment capacity, elements of which loosen at the 10-year and 15-year marks of the deal. Under this scheme, the administration would also seek to expand the contours of the deal beyond the nuclear domain to place limits on Iran's conventional ballistic-missile arsenal.

But Iranian authorities would never accept and yield into the US-Israel tricks. If Washington doesn't comply with its obligations under the nuclear deal, it gives us an excuse to do the same. Iran



could withdraw from the JCPOA and resume its previous activities and peaceful nuclear program.

In the meanwhile, European authorities tried to play a dual role regarding the JCPOA. In other words, The US breach of the nuclear deal and the dual approach of Europeans towards the JCPOA are considered the two main pieces of the same puzzle set by Washington and the European Troika. The United States and the EU are using a leverage called "the JCPOA" to lead regional negotiations with Iran, and press our country to address US regional demands.

In other words, the JCPOA, instead of remaining as an independent legal document, has become a political tool to exert pressure on Iran. Here, the diplomacy apparatus and foreign policy of our country should be very smart. Meanwhile, we should be extremely careful not to cross the red line of our foreign policy which is "preserving the regional authority of Iran" rather than "preserving the JCPOA." Obviously, no one can bargain on our strategic principles in the region and this should be exactly understood as a definite proposition by the opposite side (Washington and the European Troika).

European leaders have suggested that they are open to considering "supplemental" arrangements to address issues not covered by the nuclear accord, that is, changing the JCPOA. As noted, Iran isn't going to accept this "plan". Iran will never re-negotiate over the JCPOA. For us, change of the nuclear deal means nothing other than its breach. Beside Iran, China and Russia had also confirmed that the outcome of Europeans and American negotiations on the nuclear deal isn't considered legal and authentic. Consequently, a US threat to exit or dismantle the deal will leave the Trump administration, not Tehran, diplomatically isolated.

By: Jack Anderson

The suspicious AIPAC's \$ 4.5 million support for appointing the young Arkansas senator, Tom Cotton, as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), or the US National Security Advisor has been discussed here by Jack Anderson.

In recent months, news sources in the United States have reported the possibility of the appointment of the young Arkansas senator, Tom Cotton, as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), or the US National Security Advisor. 40-year-old Cotton is considered the youngest American senator, and, of course, many of the active Israeli lobbies in the United States count on his role-making in American political-security equations. In April 2015, the New York Times admitted that the Zionist lobbies' financial support for Tom Cotton was much higher than that for other Republican senators. The New York Times has announced that the amount of this financial assistance was around \$ 2 million. This is while some informed sources in the US say the AIPAC lobby has spent \$ 4.5 million for Tom Cotton to insure his winning against "Mark Pryor" in the 2014 Senate elections.

In August 2013, Tom Cotton, with AIPAC's green light and support, entered the political scene against former Arkansas Senator Mark Pryor. In the meanwhile, some prominent personalities and politicians in the Republican Party of America, such as "Marco Rubio" and "Mitt Romney", by the order of AIPAC leaders, had also fully supported Tom Cotton.

Eventually, Cotton won 56.5% of the vote (against 40 percent of Pryor vote), and thus defeating his rival, entered the Senate. However, the main question is, what's the reason for this huge, unnatural support of Zionist lobbies, AIPAC in particular, for Tom Cotton? In other words, what capacity did these organizations and lobbies see in Tom Cotton, that they have been willing to use their full power to help him enter the US Senate? Is AIPAC's goal of such widespread support merely Cotton's gaining the Arkansas seat in the Senate? The answer to this question is negative.

AIPAC's \$ 4.5 million support for young Tom Cotton



A security analyst in the United States who didn't want his name to be revealed told our reporter:

"Given the young age of Cotton compared with other American politicians, and his commitment to Tel Aviv, the Israeli authorities have tried to use him as an influential factor in US domestic security and foreign policy. AIPAC has always named Cotton as a trend-making agent in its calculations. This Zionist lobby's recent attempts for Cotton's presence as the CIA Director can also be analyzed in the same vein."

This analyst added:

"It is likely that the AIPAC lobby would ask Cotton not to run for the Senate in the congressional elections in 2018, so that he can be employed by the US government as the National Security Advisor, or CIA Director in Trump's government."

In January 2015, Tom Cotton played an important role in leading and managing the anti-JCPOA movement in the US Senate in the midst of nuclear talks between Iran and the members of the P15+ 1. On March 8, 2015, Senator Cotton wrote and sent a letter to Iranian leaders. In this letter, it was insisted that any nuclear deal without the approval of the US Congress would only be valid until the end of Obama's presidency in 2017, and the next president may easily

cancel it. Another 46 Republican senators also signed the letter.

The existing evidences suggests that such a letter was ordered by the direct order of the AIPAC lobby, and was designed to negatively influence the negotiation process. However, Tom Cotton's commitment to the AIPAC lobby, and beyond that to Israel, is much more than that.

Accordingly, Cotton is consulting AIPAC before making any decision in the field of US domestic and foreign policy, and asks for the views of the lobby's leaders. Even in cases which AIPAC doesn't express its views on critical issues to American senators, Cotton has the duty to indirectly impose AIPAC's stances on senators and even on key members of the House of Representatives. It is not without a reason that Tom Cotton is named as the main AIPAC piece in the Senate. For the thorough financial and political support of AIPAC leaders and Israeli authorities, Cotton has turned into Tel Aviv's agent in the Senate (in the current period), and generally in the political scene of the United States.

Retrieved on April 26, 2018, from <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2018/04/25/tom-cotton-whats-the-reason-for-aipacs-4-5-million-support-for-the-young-senator/>

Trump lacks proper strategy towards Middle East, Syria

By: **Mohammad Ghaderi**

About five years ago, when former US President Barack Obama spoke of a military strike in Syria, Zbigniew Brzezinski, former US National Security Adviser, who is also a prominent foreign policy strategist, objected to the call of the White House.

He noted that the United States lacks a proper strategy towards the Middle East and Syria. Military action should, if it is inevitable, take place within a more developed strategy.

Otherwise, the results will not be positive. But the main question is whether military action solves the problem and if there is basically any strategy to solve this problem. Who is part of this strategy and who is not? These are questions that people should think very seriously about before they take military action, which will have undesirable consequences.

We are now in 2018. Donald Trump is at the head of US political and executive equations. Unlike his promises in 2016, he has begun a costly dispute in the West Asian region. In his speeches, Brzezinski has unveiled the US "lack of appropriate strategy" in Syria. This inappropriate strategy has left both Obama and Trump's governments as defeated states in Syria. Indeed, what exactly has this strategy been? And why has it become the basis and framework for the US measures in the region?

We can come to an understanding of the US strategy in Syria through the words of "Henry Kissinger", former Secretary of State, which was published in New Yorker weekly. In this interview made in January 2011, Kissinger Stressed that Syria should be ignited "from inside", and this is what "is currently happening in this country."

The destruction of Syria in a civil war, is a strategy and goal pursued by US officials over the past six years. The continuing support of Obama and Trump governments from terrorist

and Takfiri groups such as ISIL, Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham and others in Syria can be analyzed in relation to this strategy. The recent limited military intervention performed by Trump has been based on this same strategy. The move was aimed at helping the Takfiri terrorists and "preserving the security crisis in Syria."

The fact is that the destruction of the ISIL caliphate in Syria has made the worst possible impact on the United States and its allies. This important development has had a "strategic" nature. Because it eliminated a significant part of Washington's tools to achieve its strategy in "destroying Syria" and making this country "insecure". Since then, the United States has faced some kind of strategic confusion in Syria.

On the one hand, the American authorities can well see that their tools for realizing their primary strategy in Syria are destroyed, and on the other hand, they don't have the power to plan and define a new strategy in Syria. Many regional analysts believe that Washington is not essentially after adopting a "new strategy" in Syria. Furthermore, the resistance front has been really successful in Syria, and this largely affected US strategic maneuverability in this scene.

The recent US military strike against Syria has been a reflection of the US' strategic weakness toward the country. This military attack, on the one hand, challenged the missile and military capabilities of the United States before the eyes of the most experienced missile experts in the world. On the other hand, it was identified as an "aimless" attack by analysts of military issues in the world.

The fact is that with this attack, the United States even sparked the anger of its Takfiri mercenaries in Syria. In recent days, many western media have sought to answer one question: "What exactly was Trump's purpose by the recent attack on Syria?" This is while even the president of the United States and his companions in the



White House and the Pentagon don't exactly know how to answer this question!

It's obvious that the United States has suffered from a "false strategy" in Syria between the years of 2011 and 2017 (when the ISIL caliphate was destroyed), and from "lack of strategy" since 2017 so far. The White House has lost most of its power in Syria following its failure to realize its initial strategy. On the one hand, Washington is now faced with serious security, military and financial consequences of backing and supporting Takfiri and terrorist groups in Syria, and on the other hand, it's impossible for the US authorities to define a new strategy in the region. We can see the result of this confusion in the behavior of US officials towards Syria and the West Asian region.

The gap between the primary goals of Washington in the region and the existing situation today is indicative of the strategic defeat of the administrations of the 3 US presidents, namely Bush, Obama and Trump in West Asia. Undoubtedly, when the defeat is resulted from tactical mistakes, it may be possible to make up for it. But when it has a strategic nature, it's very difficult and even in some cases impossible to make up for it.

This fact is true of the strategic defeat of the United States in Syria. Under such circumstances, the only way left for the United States is to "confess to defeat" in Syria. Any other choice will have extensive costs for Trump and his government, and even the next Democratic or Republican governments of the United States. Undoubtedly, US allies and mercenaries in the region and the world are also going to be forced to pay these heavy costs as well.

Decoding Pompeo's words at US senate

By: *Mohammad Ghaderi*

Political commentator Mohammad Ghaderi tries to decode the recent remarks of the CIA Director Mike Pompeo in his hearing at the Senate that Iran has never been after nuclear weapons.

The CIA Director "Mike Pompeo", who is nominee for Secretary of State, has recently mentioned meaningful words in his hearing at the Senate on Iran and the nuclear deal. In his words, he acknowledged that Iran was not after nuclear weapons even before the nuclear deal, nor will be in the future.

On the other hand, he has announced that he is seeking to fix and correct the nuclear deal with Iran! This is while the US President Donald Trump is scheduled to announce his final decision on Iran's nuclear deal by May 12. "I want to fix this deal," Pompeo said. "That's the objective. I think that's in the best interest of [the United States]."

At his recent Senate hearing, Pompeo has emphasized that as CIA Director, he didn't find any evidences that Iran has violated the nuclear deal. At the same time, he believes that Tehran can't expand its program shortly after the US withdrawal from the nuclear accord. He emphasized that his goal is to correct the nuclear deal with Iran. Pompeo said:

"If there's no chance that we can fix it, I will recommend to the president (Trump) that we do our level best to work with our allies to achieve a better outcome and a better deal," he said. "Even after May 12, there's still much diplomatic work to be done."

A simple decoding of Pompeo's remarks suggests that, despite the opposition to the nuclear accord, he is trying to deal differently with this issue as the future US Secretary of State. Some analysts also believe that Pompeo has adopted such an approach to face the US Senators' relative opposition to the White House's withdrawal from the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action).

In any case, according to Pompeo,



Donald Trump may not make a final decision on the nuclear deal with Iran on May 12, and he will continue to consult with his European allies on what he calls "fixing the flaws of the JCPOA".

Pompeo's remarks indicate that the White House hasn't come to a determined and clear decision on how to deal with the JCPOA yet. On the other hand, numerous consultations by representatives of the four countries, the United States, France, Britain and Germany, continues in silence.

Western sources have argued that these countries are consulting on the three controversial issue, namely "the Sunset clauses", "limiting Iran's missile power" and "extensive inspections of Iran's military sites". These sources claimed that the only remaining disagreement between the four countries is over deletion of the so-called Sunset clauses from the nuclear deal, and thus putting permanent limitations on Iran's nuclear program.

Pompeo is currently the CIA director, and ironically, he was one of the foremost critics of the Iran nuclear deal when he served as a House Republican from Kansas. Trump fired Secretary of State "Rex Tillerson" over the raised disagreements, and picked Pompeo as his successor in March, just two months before the deadline on May 12 to decide whether to bring back sanctions that former President of the United States waived when the JCPOA was first implemented.

Before this, many Western politicians

and analysts saw the nomination of Mike Pompeo for secretary of state by Trump as a sign of Washington's withdrawal from the nuclear deal. Beyond that, John Bolton's appointment as US national security advisor also sent a clear message to the international system that Trump is about to pull out of the nuclear deal with Iran.

John Bolton is now silent about the fate of the JCPOA! The silence seems very meaningful at the current time. It's obvious that John Bolton is one of the main opponents of the nuclear deal with Iran, and he doesn't even believe in negotiating with the European Troika on maintaining the JCPOA.

The important question, however, is whether Bolton's silence reflects the continuing paradoxical and vague approach of the US towards the JCPOA? Or did Trump ask him to be silent in this regard and wait for the final results of their talks with Europe?

American senators still don't have a clear picture of Trump's final decision about the JCPOA. Meanwhile, some Republican senators like "Rand Paul" and "Jeff Flake" are worried about the costs and consequences of Trump's decision to refuse joining other members of P5+1.

Most US senators tried not to mention the nuclear deal with Iran in their speeches during recent weeks. This is while some senators such as "Tom Cotton" and "Ted Cruz" strongly encourage Donald Trump's government to pull out of the nuclear deal with Iran.

US limited symbolic attack on Syria

By Payman Yazdani

Recent chemical attacks in Douma, Syria provoked international community's anger. The attacks happened when the Syrian army had upper hand and inflicted heavy defeat to the terrorist groups in the region.

Couple of weeks before the attacks, Russian officials had repeatedly announced that some efforts were being made by some terrorist groups in the region to carry out chemical attack intending to create enough pretexts for the US to invade Damascus.

As the Russian officials had predicted, based on a pre-designed plan the chemical attacks in Douma were carried out by the terrorist groups in coordination with some foreign forces present in the area. Minutes after the attacks Washington, Paris and London accused Syrian government forces of the attacks without presenting any documents and began to threaten Damascus with military assault.

The US, France and the UK threats against Syrian government led to strong reaction from Syrian allies, Russia and Iran. Russian ambassador to Beirut warned that any missiles launched against Syria not only would be shot down but also the locations the missile are launched from would be targeted.

In a meeting with Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus also senior adviser to Iranian Leader Ali Akbar Velayati emphasized that Iran would fully support Syria against any encounter with foreign military aggression.

Following Syria's allies serious warnings against any foreign military aggression on Damascus, despite his initial rhetoric threats and 48 hour deadline, the US president Donald Trump began to retreat and softened his tone.

Trump had earlier tweeted "Russia vows to shoot down any and all missiles fired at Syria. Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and "smart!" You shouldn't be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!" but after the Russians



warning just in 40 minutes softened his tone against Russia and suggested Russia working together and ending an arm race.

Also after serious reaction from Syria's allies, France retreated from its previous stance and announced the possible attacks on Syria would be carried out from its main land not from its warships or bases in the region. This could decrease the possibility of the Russia's retaliatory attacks on France since the country is NATO member.

While Russia reacted seriously to US threats against Damascus, reports of secret talks between Moscow and Washington were published that showed Russia's firmness and seriousness against the United States. Russians emphasized that the US missiles must target terrorists not Syrian legal government fighting against terrorism.

Finally 2 days after the end of President Trump's deadline, the US and its allies launched a limited symbolic missile and aerial attacks on Syria. The above and below mentioned points indicate the limited symbolic attacks by the US have been carried out just to keep Trump's face as the US president whose initial tweets were even confusing for his advisers:

- Announcing clearly that Assad government would not be target of attacks before the assault which was later reconfirmed by France after the attacks.

- The US announced the operation lasted just 60 minutes and continued air strikes will not take place.

- US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford after the attack said the de-confliction line with Russia was "active" this week.

- Dunford also said the targets in Syria were decided on with the goal of minimizing impact on Russian forces.

- Pentagon Chief, Mattis opposed any prices on Russia and Iran during the attack in a meeting with Trump and his advisers.

- No key places like Damascus international airport were targeted.

- Blackmailing Saudi Arabia by promising Saudi Prince Bin Salman again to confront Iran in the region during his recent visit to Washington, derailing Astana talks on Syria, diverting public opinion inside America from Trump's moral scandal in respect to his illegal relation with a porn star and trying to keep Iran busy to prevent Iran's retaliatory attack on Israel regime for the regime's attack on a Syrian base where some Iranians were stationed.

Douma, false flag may ignite WW III

By Stephen Lendman

Trump's war cabinet policy toward developments in Douma, Syria may ignite an uncontrollable firestorm - risking WW III.

I followed events in Serbia. Poland was ground zero for WW II. Will East/West conflict in Syria escalate to war to end all others, risking catastrophic nuclear war?

The stakes are potentially monumental. Humanity's fate could ride on events as they unfold.

Washington wants another imperial trophy ahead of a similar campaign against Iran. Its goal is hegemonic regional control partnered with Israel and its key NATO allies.

Its larger objective is unchallenged global dominance, eliminating all sovereign independent governments, replacing them with subservient pro-Western regimes - Russia and China its main targets.

Moscow's intervention in Syria changed the dynamic on the ground, foiling Washington's objective - what it aims to regain.

Tactics include rejecting peace, waging endless war, controlling as much Syrian territory as possible, especially along the Turkish, Iraqi and Jordanian borders, continued use of terrorist foot soldiers aided by terror-bombing, and false flags like Douma last Saturday to demonize Damascus and Moscow.

Security Council debates are theater, accomplishing nothing, rule of law principles irrelevant.

Washington and its rogue allies operate by their own rules, battleground Syria an example of their ruthlessness.

Moscow's good faith Security Council efforts are foiled by US obstructionism, wanting nothing interfering with its imperial agenda.

Dangerously escalating events in Syria risk a potentially defining moment of our time. World peace could be hinging on events as they unfold.

Washington's Harry S. Truman



aircraft carrier, its battle group warships, and guided missile USS Donald Cook destroyer are heading toward Mediterranean Sea positioning off Syria's coast near Russia's Tartus naval facility.

According to lower house State Duma Defense Committee chairman Vladimir Shamanov, Moscow's wasn't informed about the deployment, saying: A group of ships of the US Navy (other than the Harry S. Truman battle group) has appeared at a distance of 150 miles from the Tartus region."

"It is common in international practice potential participants of events in the area should be notified accordingly in advance."

"We have not been notified, although we had legally ratified the agreement on two bases in Tartus and Khmeymim."

"Trump said that he would think about the missile attack on Syria despite any resolutions at the UN Security Council."

"All this smells of something are outside the framework of universally recognized international norms."

EU air traffic control issued a Rapid Alert Notification for the eastern Mediterranean, warning airlines of a possible attack on Syria "with air-to-ground and/or cruise missiles within the next 72 hours, and the possibility of intermittent disruption of radio navigation equipment".

Russia earlier warned of serious consequences if Washington attacks Syrian forces, especially if its personnel in the country are harmed.

During Tuesday's Security Council debate, Russian UN envoy Vasily Nebenzya stressed the warning, saying:

"We have repeatedly warned the American side about highly negative consequences that may follow if they apply weapons against the legitimate Syrian government, and especially if the use of these weapons - God forbid, affects our military men, who legally stay in Syria."

Russian and Syrian forces are on high alert, an attack by Washington and its allies could come at any time.

Moscow's ambassador to Lebanon Alexander Zasyplin said "Russian forces will confront any US aggression on Syria, by intercepting the missiles and striking their (land and/or sea-based) launch pads."

Trump cancelled a Summit of the Americas trip to focus on Syria. A potentially important development could alter his plans.

On Tuesday, UK Prime Minister Theresa May said Britain needs more evidence of the alleged Douma incident before committing to military action against Syria.

She rejected acting before OPCW inspectors visit Douma and report on their findings. French President Macron signaled he's ready to ally with a US attack on Syria if use of CWs in Douma is confirmed, adding only chemical facilities would be struck.

None are involved in CW development and production. No evidence suggests otherwise. US-supported terrorists alone used CWs numerous times, in most cases falsely blamed on Damascus.

A likely US attack on Syrian forces looms, with or without allies. Russia's response will be a defining moment.

Syria is a hugely dangerous tinderbox. Along with his hardened war cabinet, Trump's rage for war making could ignite an uncontrollable firestorm - risking WW III.

Trump expects Turkey to side with US aggressive policy toward Iran



By Osman Faruk Logoglu:

The erratic and unending changes in the administration by President Trump reflect first and foremost his unique conception of the Presidency.

He views the Presidency as being the CEO of USA, Inc. He prefers to work with individuals who will not challenge or disagree with him. The choice of Bolton and Pompeo as National Security Adviser and Secretary of State respectively has also a lot to do with the more aggressive hard-power driven foreign policy Trump wants to pursue. Both men are known not only for their hawkish positions but also for their willingness to implement their radical views and to use American military power. The changes have been dubbed as the “war cabinet”, a fitting description indeed.

How these changes will affect Turkish-American relations remains yet to be seen. Both Bolton and Pompeo had, in their previous lives, made highly disparaging comments about Turkey, criticizing the Turkish government for its policies at home and abroad. Since then, they have not said anything to amend

those most negative views. So the prospects for Turkish-American relations are not necessarily encouraging with these two men in office.

The key question now is how the two sides will handle the question of Menbij in Syria. Turkey threatens military action there to clean the area of Kurdish YPG listed by Turkey as a terrorist organization. The area is currently under the joint control of American forces and SDF, the core of which is the YPG. The initial bilateral talks at the level of high officials in Washington have not produced an agreement. Now it is reported that talks would be resumed after Pompeo is sworn in as the new Secretary of State in May.

Trump has recently signaled early withdrawal from Syria, citing “high financial costs” of American engagement. But Pentagon and other administration sources have downplayed the Trump announcement, indicating that the US is there to stay. I believe Trump will not withdraw from Syria. First, his number one mission of defeating ISIL is not yet accomplished.

Second, he will not abandon Syria to the Russians. Third, he will want to maintain American presence in Syria

for Israel’s sake. Fourth, Trump’s ultimate agenda is confronting Iran in the region and for this reason he may feel he would need logistical facilities in Syria. And finally, for all the inter-connected reasons above, he will continue to support and feed PYD/YPG. In a fundamental sense, what Trump does in Syria would be best understood in terms of what he intends to do regarding Iran.

This is a critical question. Trump will by 12 May have made his decision on the nuclear agreement with Iran. He said he will leave the agreement if his demands for changes in it have not been met by that time and recommend to the Congress the imposition of new sanctions. With the likes of Bolton and Pompeo in the line-up, Trump is likely to pursue an increasingly more aggressive approach to Iran. And he will want to see Turkey on his side as a NATO ally and expect access to Turkish facilities in case of a military operation. So Turkey has to make a choice to side or not to side with America in Trump’s Iranian offensive.

The choice for Turkey should be clear. Let’s remember that Ankara pursued a policy of proactive neutrality during the 1980-1988 Iranian-Iraqi war. Turkey not only did not take sides in the conflict, but worked actively with both sides to end it. US is a friend and an ally, but Iran is a friend and a neighbor. Furthermore, Turkey supports the Iranian nuclear agreement. Hence, Turkey must work other signatory countries that still support the agreement to dissuade the US unilaterally from abandoning it. However, at the end of the day Turkey must make clear that it will not be a part of or accessory to any hostile action by the US against Iran. The US will one day leave, but Iran will continue to be our valued neighbor.”

Osman Faruk Logoglu is Turkish veteran politician and member of Turkey’s Republican People’s Party.



Report

'One Belt-One Road' may be Iran, China gateway to becoming soft-power giants

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

'One Belt- One Road' is generally known as a mega infrastructure project aimed at promoting trade among countries along the new Silk Road routes; but the project also includes initiatives for boosting cultural exchanges – a chance that Iran and China could use to exercise their soft power.

China is well on its path to dominate global trade, but when it comes to soft power, the country is sadly lagging behind its other rivals in the East Asian cultural sphere in exporting its commercial pop culture to other countries. Ask any Iranian on the street about their knowledge of Japan, for example. They would tell you about Haruki Murakami or Kazuo Ishiguro if they are the reading type; or Hayao Miyazaki if they like Japanese animations (or 'Death Note' if they watch too many anime); there is even a chance – small as it may be – that they will tell you about Konami, Hideo Kojima or Final Fantasy if they are the gaming type. With South Korea, we had a golden era of Korean TV series; I don't think you can find many people in Iran who would look in confusion if you tell them about Jang-Geum – the lead actress in 'A Jewel in the Palace'; I have even met a few Iranian people who were K-pop fans.

But when it comes to the Chinese pop culture, that's where many – if not all – draw a blank; one reason may be that China isn't trying too hard to create the kind of content in the music, cinema or book industry, that could be internationally competitive. The large population of China may have played a part in turning the focus of cultural products inward, on domestic consumers. Another reason may be the struggle to move past the negative Chinese stereotypes, as promoted throughout the US history. The government's strong sway over China's cultural sphere may also be another reason for the lack of Chinese cultural products in the world's mainstream.

I would say Iran has fared just a little



bit better than China in exporting its cultural products. Looming politics overshadow cultural activities; still, the Iranian cinema has been worming its way, slowly but surely, into the hearts of cinema goers across the world through the painstaking efforts of Abbas Kiarostami and Asghar Farhadi. Our contemporary literature is still obscured by the overwhelming greatness of our ancient literature. Our classic music is an acquired taste, and the pop music is favored mostly by the Iranians themselves.

"Cultural exchange is the real exchange," says Ms. Gulinaer Wulfuli, Professor of the Kashgar University, who is visiting Iran as part of a cultural delegation from China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. And I might be biased, but I have to agree with her on that.

The Chinese delegation, which held a press conference at the Chinese Embassy in Tehran on Monday, was headed by Xu Guixiang, vice secretary-general of the Chinese Overseas Friendship Association, who says the visit to Iran aims at introducing Xinjiang and enhancing cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

Mr. Guixiang describes Xinjiang as the largest Chinese administrative division, spanning over 1.6 million km² – a staggering area when you realize this

northwest city is just as big as the whole country of Iran.

I ask him about the progress of Iran-China's cooperation in the 'One Belt- One Road' project.

The 'One Belt- One Road', or OBOR, or the Silk Road project as mostly known in Iran, is for the most part, a mega infrastructure project dedicated to promoting transport and energy development plans in the countries along the new Silk Road routes. The project is valued at about \$5 trillion, spanning over 60 countries across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. Iran is one of those countries that have signed up for the project.

"Iran and China's cooperation in OBOR is highly significant in terms of humanistic values and people-to-people exchanges," he says. "I feel that there is more potential for cooperation in this field. The two countries have such rich resources for cultural and people-to-people interactions. The OBOR is one of the many advantages presented by this cooperation between Iran and China."

"We, as part of this cultural delegation, have drawn up a number of projects within the OBOR framework, such as 'The Scent of Books'. The project invites countries along the new Silk Road routes to translate their books into the →

language of one another.”

He maintains that the US pullout from the JCPOA and the subsequent possibility of imposing old and new sanctions will not affect Iran-China’s cooperation in OBOR. “It’s because the relations between Iran and China go back to thousands of years. The friendship between the people of the two countries are very deep.”

“China welcomes the efforts made by regional countries towards the promotion of national unity. China plays a significant role in maintaining the peace and stability in the region. The development of ties between Iran and China amid a peaceful and stable region will serve the interests of both countries,” he says.”

What he says about ‘The Scent of Books’ project intrigues me. The idea of organizing a group of translators to engage in promoting the literature of the countries which have signed up for OBOR definitely holds a lot of merit. Especially considering that China will be the Guest of Honor at the 2019 Tehran International Book Fair; an occasion that will give China a good opportunity to introduce its cultural and literary products to the Iranian public.

“This will be a good opportunity to display the history and culture of China,” says Mr. Xu Guixiang. “China is very keen on participating at this cultural event, to present top Chinese books to the Iranian book lovers. I will talk to relevant organizations back at home about my proposals and suggestions regarding this matter.”

I shift the discussion to China’s influence, or lack thereof, in today’s cinematic trends across the globe. Mr. Xu Guixiang, however, believes that Chinese TV series have their own influence in foreign countries. “When I turned on the TV back at my hotel, I saw an Iranian channel was broadcasting a Chinese show. But of course, China has a long way to reach the level its vast potentials demand. More cultural exchange is needed to help China spread its pop culture and appeal among the Iranian people. When I go back, I will call on relevant organizations at home to have more interactions with Iran in the cultural sphere.”

Still, the China image that the world gets to see comes, not from Chinese drama series, but from the American ones. I ask him if he has watched ‘Mr. Robot.’

“No, I haven’t. What is it about?”

So I launch into an enthusiastic description of one of my most favorite TV shows: It’s an American drama series in which a Chinese cyber-terrorist also serving as China’s Minister of State Security leads a series of cyberattacks as the head of the Dark Army against the US largest conglomerate, Evil Corp, with an intention to sway the UN vote in favor of China’s annexation of The Congo, and hurting the US economy in the process. I also mention how the series made it look like China was behind Trump’s election victory, as contrary to the mainstream opinion in Western media that puts the blame on Russia.

“That’s some absurd imagination,” he sounds shocked by my description of ‘Mr. Robot’, and I wonder if I should have also told him about how this Chinese character ends up blaming the cyberattacks on Iran because it’s a believable story in Western media. “We Chinese never intervene in the domestic affairs of other countries. About Russia’s dealings with the US, I don’t know anything about that either.”

I catch up with Ms. Gulinaer Wulfuli later, who has more to say about Iran and China’s exchanges in the literary sphere.

“A lot of Persian titles have been translated into Chinese, such as Rumi’s ‘Masnavi’, Ganjavi’s ‘Layla and Majnun’, and Ferdowsi’s ‘Shahnameh,’” she says. “Persian language is also being taught at some universities in China, most notably Peking University and Shanghai International Studies University.”

“China has a comprehensive program for introducing the culture and literature of Iran to Chinese people.” But the focus is still on academics, and I want to know how much a random Chinese person on the street can tell you about Persian literature if they haven’t studied the course at university.

Rumi, for example, is particularly popular with the West. His somber quotes on Tumblr get a lot of notes (most notably: ‘The wound is the place where the Light enters you.’ Or, ‘Don’t grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form.’). Ms. Wulfuli says, however, that Rumi has not yet become integrated in China’s pop culture, and his full sway is still focused on academic circles and over literary figures and researchers.

“The ‘One-Belt One-Road’ project is

expected to introduce the Persian literature and culture more and more to the Chinese nation,” she adds.

I ask if the OBOR vision is to take the love for Persian literature out of the academic monopoly and bring it among the ordinary people.

She is hopeful about that prospect and says OBOR has an aim to “build a human community with shared destiny”; a concept which embodies a hope for an open, inclusive, and beautiful life for everyone in the world.

“One of the exchanges among countries along the Silk Road routes is a cultural one, beside the economic and trade cooperation,” She says. “This exchange includes sharing books and poetry of each nation. Xinjiang acts as a bridge through which China exports its culture and in turn, receives other countries’ cultures. This route introduced so much of the Iranian culture to us. I believe that in future, Iran and China will have so much more cultural cooperation under the OBOR project.”

Two factors that are likely to bring a foreign book into focus of Iranian book readers is that if the book has won a major literary award, and if it has already been translated into English.

She says a Chinese writer has actually won a Nobel Prize, but does not name him. It is actually Mo Yan, the writer of 11 novels, several novellas and short story collections, who received the prestigious literary award in 2012. His case proves my point about literary prizes being one of the deciding factors for prompting Iranian translators into giving a book some consideration: none of Mo Yan’s books had been translated into Persian before he won the Nobel Prize. I have only seen the Persian translations of his ‘Red Sorghum’ and two short story collections titled something like ‘Stop This Nonsense, Avesta’, and ‘The Calf and the Endurance Runner’ [I might be completely off the marks with these titles, seeing how the collections are actually a selection of the translator’s personal favorites and not enlisted as such in the writer’s bibliography.]

At any rate, Ms. Wulfuli says that the ‘Scent of Books’ project will be an effort to get the Iranian people more familiar with Chinese contemporary literature.

I can’t wait for the project to get underway.

China strongly supports JCPOA, says 'a deal better than no deal at all'



By: Lachin Rezaian

China's special envoy for Middle East issues, Gong Xiaosheng, while announcing his country's support for the nuclear deal, said having a deal on Iran's nuclear program is better than no deal at all.

Speaking to the reporters during a press conference in Tehran on Tuesday, Gong Xiaosheng said his visit to the Islamic Republic addresses two important issues, i.e. JCPOA and Syrian crisis, about which he has held some meetings with Iranian officials.

Expressing that he is visiting Iran for the second time, Chinese envoy praised Iran's development since his first visit to the country two years earlier; "I am proud of being in Iran," he noted.

Pointing to JCPOA, Gong Xiaosheng underlined the need for all parties involved in the Iran nuclear pact to stick to the deal and use dialogue and negotiation to resolve the disputes. He said China was willing to strengthen cooperation with all parties involved in the Iran nuclear pact.

"JCPOA is a multilateral pact and needs to be protected by all the parties

involved; this is not only for establishing peace and security in the region, but also for preventing any encroachment on the Non-Proliferation Treaty," he stressed.

Regarding China's position on the nuclear deal, he said China's stance is clear on JCPOA; we will continue it, and I hope that Trump will consider the international community's reaction while making any decision.

"China will abide by its commitment to the Iran nuclear deal since the IAEA had verified Iran's compliance with the accord several times," he added.

China-Iran relations are not merely based on what JCPOA dictates; there are many bilateral agreements signed between the two countries, and China respects its commitments; China is very concerned about its traditional friendship with Iran and will respect that in the future, too.

Syrian crisis was the second issue Chinese envoy addressed during his talk with Iranian officials; Gong Xiaosheng said tensions in Syria are likely to escalate and China is further focussing on the issue and hopes the war-stricken country may reach permanent ceasefire in the near future.

China's position on Syria is clear, he noted, "we believe that the crisis in Syria needs only a political, but not military, solution."

China has kept contacts with various parties, i.e. Syrian government and opposition, to advance peace process and will play a constructive role in the reconstruction of the country in the future, he added.

Chinese envoy also said about the design of a belt road: Some people think the plan is just about China, while the Silk Road had existed thousands of years ago, and even named it a German scientist.

Xiaosheng added that the design of a China-owned beltway, all the countries that are on the path to this plan, and other countries in the world, which in the past went to the Chinese traders to West Asia and Europe, and European, Iranian and Arab merchants also on this route. They traveled to China.

Chinese envoy also pointed to the One Belt, One Road initiative, saying some people think the plan is just about China, while the Silk Road has existed for thousands of years, and even the term Silk Road (Seidenstrassen, in German) was first coined by German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877.

Gong Xiaosheng added that the initiative belongs to all the countries alongside the Silk Road routes, passing through many different empires, kingdoms, reigns and societies throughout history.

Regarding Iran-China ties after US withdrawal from JCPOA, he described that the position is threefold; first, we are trying to maintain this agreement. Second, the differences will be resolved through dialogue, and third, China-Iran economic and financial relations will continue, and the Chinese government will fulfill its obligations entirely.

What is digital marketing and why is it important?



By: Yashar Zhaleh Doust

‘Digital Marketing’ or electronic marketing dubbed ‘e-marketing’ is an approach that reaches users via the use of digital technologies and turn them into customers.

Digital Marketing is active in the following areas:

1. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
2. Content marketing
3. Marketing through impact
4. Content automation
5. Campaign marketing
6. Electronic commerce dubbed ‘e-commerce’
7. Marketing through social networks
8. Demo advertising (banner)
9. Electronic books dubbed ‘e-books’
10. Optical disks and game diskettes
11. Other forms of digital media

In addition, digital marketing can be expanded to other non-internet channels of digital media including cell phones (SMS, MMS), voice answering services and/or text message on hold.

What are the advantages of Digital Marketing?

In this day and age, undoubtedly, digital marketing is the most reliable and the safest way of communicating between the marketer and customer. In this type of marketing, you can design messages in such a way that fully responds to the certain needs and requirements of the customer.

In the digital advertising, it is easy and time-efficient to design a very attractive message, which position can be promot-

ed in cyberspace quickly and accurately.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization is the process that makes a website or web page more visible while using a cost-free search engine, usually referred to as natural or acquired results.

Digital Marketing Principles

The quality of visitors is more important than the number. Remember that not everyone out there is your customer!

In digital marketing campaign, just do not look for numbers, because, digital marketing is not a goal! Rather, it is a helping tool to achieve the goal.

The number of interactions, i.e. the number of likes, comments, and shares, is important and this issue will ultimately help you promote your brand and sell more.

It is important to note that increasing the interactions of users in the website and social networks is the main goal of digital marketing and ultimately, it should lead to obtaining revenues and returning the digital marketing costs.

Another important point is that such optimization is not just for websites rather, it is for all the digital marketing campaigns including social networks.

Successful digital marketing in less than a year

A successful website can be launched in less than a year through taking the following measures into consideration:

Preparatory work and preparation of the text: First, provide the content and notes that are required to prepare a site

with at least 20 pages.

Domain name: name of domain should be simple and able to become a brand. For this purpose, proper names are superior to the key names.

Web design: the more simple, the better. Avoid using flash, file and voluminous copies. Remember Google’s special lesson that, “users want simplicity.”

Webpage dimensions: make webpages as small as possible. Although it is a difficult task, it is worth trying. (try making each page between 5k to 10k). This will be both useful for the user and the search engine.

‘Speed’ is almost the most important factor. With bigger webpages, you will lose 10 percent of your customers. This 10 percent can be the difference between success and failure.

Timing of Producing Content:

The timing of the publication of the content is important.

The social networking channel as well as the website itself have different traffic at different times of the day.

For example, statistics show that the sharing of photos and videos, hours and days of using Facebook networks are quite different with Instagram. As a result, planning should be made to update various channels of digital marketing in order to find the traffic peak and share points.

Locating and Density of Words: Use the ‘keyword’ once in the heading, once in the explanation and once in the headline, once in URL and once in bold and once diagonally. This density should be between 5% and 20%.

Inbound and outbound links: Google attaches great importance to links.

Inbound links are the links of other sites to your site.

Output links are the links of your site to the other sites.

Google uses both of its algorithms:

From the Google’s perspective, inbound links are the links that other websites tell you who you are and outbound links are the links that you use to introduce yourself. As a result, be sure to link to valid and relevant websites on your webpages.

Links between webpages: The structure of linking to your webpages is of paramount importance. All webpages should be easily accessible with 2 to 3 clicks.

36th International Film Festival (FIFF)



By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Dossier

I trust my heart, says Ludovico Einaudi about his successful musical career

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Award-winning Italian composer Ludovico Einaudi, who is scheduled for three shows in Tehran starting Tue., says he follows his heart in creating music, citing 'luck' as the factor that his passion aligned itself with something that a lot of people like.

The first thing that you should know about Ludovico Einaudi's music is that it is the kind of music that reflects the man himself. "I love new experiences," he says with sincerity, and he does not need more proof to back up that claim other than his mere presence in Tehran. A place which, although a mere 2,120 miles away from his homeland, accounting for a 4-hour flight and a 2:30 hour of time difference, is always considered as an adventurous tourist spot, because of lack of representation, an abundance of misrepresentation and the usual case of 'I put off visiting Iran until I am old enough to fully appreciate its ancient history'.

But he is here now, for the very first time, scheduled for three sold-out shows at a venue large enough to house over 2,000 people, and he is excited to tour the city and meet his Iranian fans; "I know that I have a large fan base here in Iran, waiting for my performances. This is actually the main reason why I'm here today, because I know it is very difficult for many people to travel around to watch the live performances of their favorite musicians, so here I am bringing my music to them," he says during a Q&A panel on Monday at the Interior Ministry Hall, where he and his five-man band will go on stage on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday night.

"Music is a fantastic way to communicate with other people around the world, because it's one of the few languages that doesn't need translation. Music speaks from heart to heart."

Born in Turin, Italy on 23 November 1955, Ludovico Einaudi started his musical journey by composing for folk guitar



Einaudi and his band at a Q&A panel with the press, Tehran

as a teenager. Later, he studied at the Conservatory in Milan, spending several years composing in traditional forms, including several chamber and orchestral compositions. There, he met Luciano Berio, the Italian avant garde composer known for his experimental and pioneering work in electronic music. Berio taught him 'a very open way of thinking about music', and he has carried that philosophy into his music up until now.

"I've always been told that there's a bit of difficulty in defining and labeling my music. The quality of the music I

compose, and also the kind of music I like, cannot be crammed inside a box. I like a kind of music that connects different worlds, doesn't stay in a closed place, but has windows open to different airs."

I ask him if he was worried about the reaction from the classical circle now that his piano music has ventured into the realm of electronics, synthesizers and popular film scores.

"Well, I started to feel that the classical environment didn't like what I was doing, but I keep saying that the great →

composers of the past, like Mozart, didn't confine themselves in a box. Mozart's opera, *The Magic Flute*, constantly interacts with different styles and languages and this is why I think his music was great, because it encompasses many of his interests."

"It is important to keep your mind open, eyes open, ears open while composing music and sharing it with the people," he says. "It is a risk [to mix different genres of music] in the sense that there are people who won't like it, but I have been following my vision, I trust my heart."

Einaudi was once invited to be the director of *La Notte della Taranta* festival, in Salento in southern Italy, and the set he created expanded to include music from North Africa and Turkey.

"I like the fact that I can travel somewhere, hear something that I really like, and then incorporate it into my own music. Maybe I even do a project with Iranian musicians in the future," he says.

"I think what makes music interesting is the moment all these different genres and sounds meet with one another and start a dialogue," he says. "The moment

you meet something different from yours is the moment you discover; it's a new experience."

For Einaudi, creating music is like visiting new places, having new experiences, and opening yourself up to adventure and risk.

But did he know the risk he was taking would actually end up in his favor? "I didn't do any calculations about where the future of my career would take me. I have always just followed where my passion leads. It was a matter of luck that my passion aligned itself with something that a lot of people like."

Speaking about the upcoming shows in Tehran, he said that his set list includes tracks from his latest album *Elements*, as well as film scores from *The Intouchables*, such as *Una mattina* and *Fly*. "I will play a repertoire of the music I have been composing in the last 20 years. So it's like a portrait of my music. It is a good set list to present myself in a new place."

Einaudi said that he would also perform 'The Elegy for the Arctic', the track he played in the Arctic Ocean in Svalbard, Norway for Greenpeace. Sitting at a grand piano with the Wahlenberg-

reen Glacier slowly melting in the background, 'The Elegy for the Arctic' was composed to draw attention to climate change.

"I like that this track is connected with the theme of environment, which is important to everybody. We all should realize that the planet is warming up. That by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans. The video has million viewers on YouTube. The commission did not react positively, but the important thing is that more and more people are becoming aware of the issue."

"Every time I play the solo parts during a performance, I play something different based on the vibes I get from the place, and I give back the vibes to the audience as a gift," Einaudi says, noting that the improvisation is connected to the feeling that he gets from the atmosphere.

The award-winning composer will go on stage at the Interior Ministry Hall on April 25, 26 and 27. His band includes Redi Hasa on cello, Federico Mecozzi on violin, Francesco Arcuri on guitar, Riccardo Laganà on percussions, and Alberto Fabris on bass.



Ludovico Einaudi playing 'Elegy for the Arctic', June 16, 2016

Franco Nero: The Golden Age is over

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

The legendary Italian actor Franco Nero says the golden age of the Italian cinema "will never return" and blames it on television and the damage it has done to people's film-watching habits.

For many Iranians, he is better known as the title character in *Django* (1966), an Italian Spaghetti Western film directed and co-written by Sergio Corbucci, in which Franco Nero plays his breakthrough role as a drifter riding into the middle of a border fray between Mexican bandits and the Ku Klux Klan.

"I belong to Sean Connery's James Bond era. He went on to act in many other films, but for many, he was still known as James Bond. The same thing happened to me. I've played in many movies but it is *Django*, made on almost no budget, that still holds a special place over the others," he tells an enthusiastic gathering of the press and fans at a Q&A panel as part of the FIFF36 programs on Friday.

He talks of Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012) in which African Americans replace the Mexicans as the downtrodden and Nero had a cameo appearance, and goes on to promise with 90% certainty that a new movie in the franchise, named '*Django Lives!*', will be soon made in the future, with a screenplay by John Sayles and Nero himself reprising the role.

"I am an actor, director, producer, and a lucky man," this is how Nero introduces himself. He puts great emphasis on 'luck' as a key factor in his international exposure which, to this day, has landed him as many as 220 roles all across the world. "If I ever win an Oscar, I will dedicate it to all the great actors and actresses in the world who were not just as lucky," he says. "I believe in destiny. There's an African proverb that says, you can wake up early in the morning, but your destiny has woken up 30 minutes before you."

"I've never been to Tehran," he says. "I've travelled to over 100 countries across the world, including Sweden, Germany, Russia, Czech Republic, Hun-



gary, Britain, Canada and the US, but Iran was absent on the list. So the Fajr festival was a good opportunity to finally come here."

He admits he isn't much familiar with the Iranian cinema. But he mentions that he is friends with Vittorio Storaro, the Italian cinematographer and three-time Oscar-winner for masterpieces such as Bernardo Bertolucci's '*Last Tango in Paris*' and Francis Ford Coppola's '*Apocalypse Now*', who worked as a cinematographer on Majid Majidi's biopic '*Muhammad, Messenger of God*' in 2015. "It was a great film, and Storaro was very pleased with the project." He says he has also seen works by Abbas Kiarostami and Asghar Farhadi, the two major Iranian filmmakers that have made a noticeable impact on the world's cinema scene.

Asked to comment on his experiences in filming in different cinema industries he said, "The spaghetti that we make in Italy is totally different from the ones made around the world," he says. "The same is true about the cinema in each country."

Here, he shows off his acting skills and charismatic power of storytelling as he keeps the audience, who don't even know Italian and have to wait for the Persian translations, captivated by anecdotes. "A few years back, I was on Johnny Carson's show, and he asked me

about the difference between working in Italy and working in the US. I said that in the US, there are six big film studios, such as Warner Bros., Paramount Pictures, Walt Disney Studios, 20th Century Fox; and they decide to make a movie. The first thing they look for is the most popular star in Hollywood at the time. Then they look for a best-seller to adapt into a screenplay or sometimes they go for an original script. In 90% of cases, the director is chosen by the studio, and if the director comes into conflict with the cast, it is the director who gets kicked off the production. And the whole team sticks to a strict, meticulous schedule that even includes the weather forecast. It is a real industry.

"But in Italy, it's a different story. First, there is a director who wants to make a film. He goes to a producer and the producer says let's hear what you've got. The director then turns into an actor as he plays out the script in order to move the producer so he would fund his film. Then they look for an actor. They think of Franco Nero but dismiss him as being too expensive. The director has to round up his own team and they work on their own sweet, leisure time.

"I told Johnny Carson that in Italy, all directors have low blood pressure. It's very difficult for them to start work early in the morning, so they get to the location rather late," he finishes his tale with →



Nero's Q&A panel at Charsou Cineplex, 20 April 2018

a friendly jibe at the notorious Italian tardiness. Well, that part of the story we could totally relate. Iranians are guilty of the same crime, after all.

He says Spencer Tracy was his role model in acting when he was younger. "But a couple of years later, I had the chance to work with one of the greatest stars in the world, Laurence Olivier. One day he told me that I reminded him of his younger self. You have the physique for always playing the hero, he told me, the way Americans do. Americans always want to be the hero of a story where the Europeans are the losers. But you have to play in one film in a year and make sure that the movie is really going to sell. But that's monotonous, Franco. So be an actor. Take risks. This way, your path will go through ups and downs, but in the long-run, you will reap the benefits of your hard work. And I took his advice."

"I think I am the only actor in the world, and I say this with much pride, to have taken on personages from 30 different nations. Obviously, it has been a great risk, but a pleasant one nonetheless," he adds.

The Italian cinema is best known for its 'Golden Age' of the 1940s, the post-war neorealism characterized by stories about the poor and the working class, usually casting non-professional actors to deal with themes of everyday life and difficult economic conditions, in clear opposition to the Hollywood-influenced productions of the Fascist years. Rossellini, Luchino Visconti, Giuseppe De Santis, Vittorio De Sica and Carlo Lizzani are

notable figures of this era who filmed on location to reflect the 'real Italy' on the screen. The movement died out in Italy by mid-1950s, but it went on to influence cinematic trends around the world. You can perhaps even see the impacts of that Italian brand of neorealism in Asghar Farhadi's works, where you barely register that you are watching a film and not, in fact, looking through a window at someone's actual life.

I ask Franco Nero if he believes that the golden era of Italian cinema is well over and done with, or if another revival is on the horizon, which can leave as great an impact on the global cinematic trends as the Italian neorealism once did.

He answers with a resonating, 'No.'

"The 50s, 60s and 70s were the shining periods of Italian cinema. Many great American filmmakers said that they have been influenced by that era. That age will never return."

Why, though? "Because now there is television."

He seems to hold a particular dis-

taste for television and the change it has made on people's film-watching habits.

"You can no longer make a film without first obtaining broadcasting rights from the television. In the past, there was a producer, but now there are a handful of employees on various TV networks who read the script and have the final say on it. They'd say, 'ahh this scene can't be shown on TV at 8:30 PM, so we have it to cut it out.' So the filmmaker is castrated and can't create the content he wants."

"Unfortunately, television ruined cinema. And I'm going to tell you why: When you go to the cinema, you have made a conscious choice to watch a movie. You pay for the ticket, watch the movie in silence and in the dark, and decide at the end if you liked it or not. On TV, during the primetime between 8:30 to 10 PM, this is how a movie is watched: while on the phone, eating dinner, burping and farting, and all the while the movie is rolling. They pay no respect for the efforts put into the film. One of my dearest friends Fernando Rey, who was a great Spanish actor, told me once that his Don Quixote had 15 million viewers. I told him, no way. Perhaps 200,000 at most, who had really watched the series with full attention. The rest just watched bits and pieces. I ran the same test in Italy. Someone said, 'hey Franco, I saw you on TV last night.' I said, oh really? What was the story about? He said he just watched a part of it when he was having dinner."

"The only benefit that the TV can have is that if you missed the chance to watch a film in the cinema, you can watch it a few months later on television. Unfortunately, the good movies are only shown on TV very late at night," he laments.



For many Iranians, Nero is still known as Django.

Ludovico Einaudi promises surprises in upcoming Tehran shows

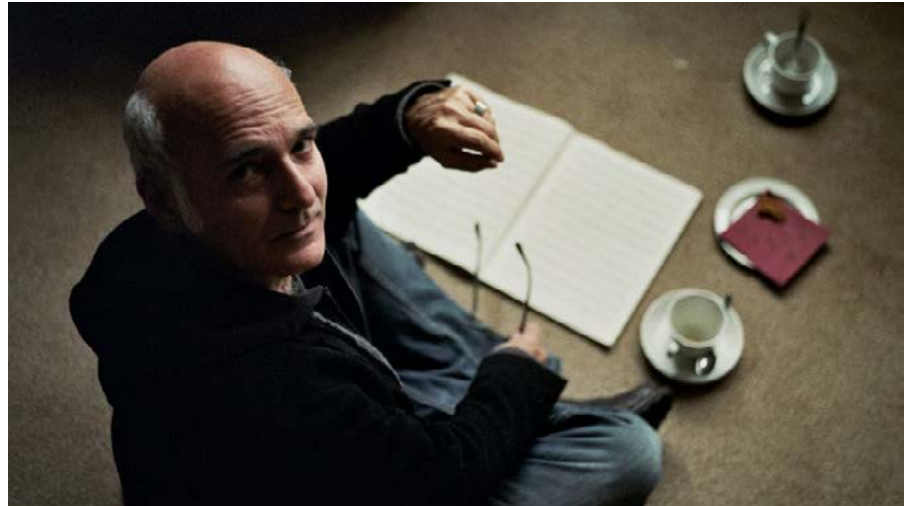
Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Critically-acclaimed composer and pianist Ludovico Einaudi told Mehr News that he will perform a few 'surprising' tracks for the Iranian audience during his shows on 25-27 April in Tehran.

The experimental Italian composer Ludovico Einaudi told Mehr News correspondent on Saturday that he is "very excited" and "curious" about his upcoming performance in Tehran, which comes in the wake of years of studies he has done on the country; "finally, I can make my first trip to Iran and I am hoping that the trip would present me with a special opportunity to get a better and closer understanding of the life style and culture of the Iranian people," he said.

"The setlist that I am going to perform together with my ensemble in Tehran includes pieces that I have composed in the last 20 years," he said. "Some of the tracks will be performed as piano solos and the rest will be performed with my ensemble."

"I believe that the tracks selected for my Tehran performance will be a good indicator of my personality and my mu-



sic and I hope that they will be able to appeal to the senses of the Iranian audience," he added.

The Bafta-nominated Italian pianist, who is better known for his film scores for 'This is England', 'I'm Still Here', and 'Doctor Zhivago', was pleased to learn about his rather large fanbase in Iran; "In the past few days getting ready for my trip to Iran, I have heard from friends that I have a lot of fans in that country, and I know that they are looking forward to the concert, so I am really excited and happy to have

a chance to perform for my Iranian fans."

"I believe that music is an amazing way for connecting with various people and cultures across the world, and it does not need any more explanation," he said.

Einaudi is scheduled for three shows at the Ministry of Interior Hall in Tehran on April 25, 26 and 27. His upcoming concert follows the unprecedented performances of Icelandic composer Ólafur Arnalds and German electronic band Schiller on the Iranian stage.

Freedom of expression is key, says filmmaker Jörn Donner in Tehran

Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Jörn Donner, the producer of Ingmar Bergman's 'Fanny and Alexander', says in a presser in Tehran that the basis for all artistic mediums is the freedom of expression, hoping that the up-and-coming Iranian filmmakers will be able to enjoy freedom of expression in their productions.

At 85 years of age, Swedish-speaking Finnish writer, film director, actor, pro-

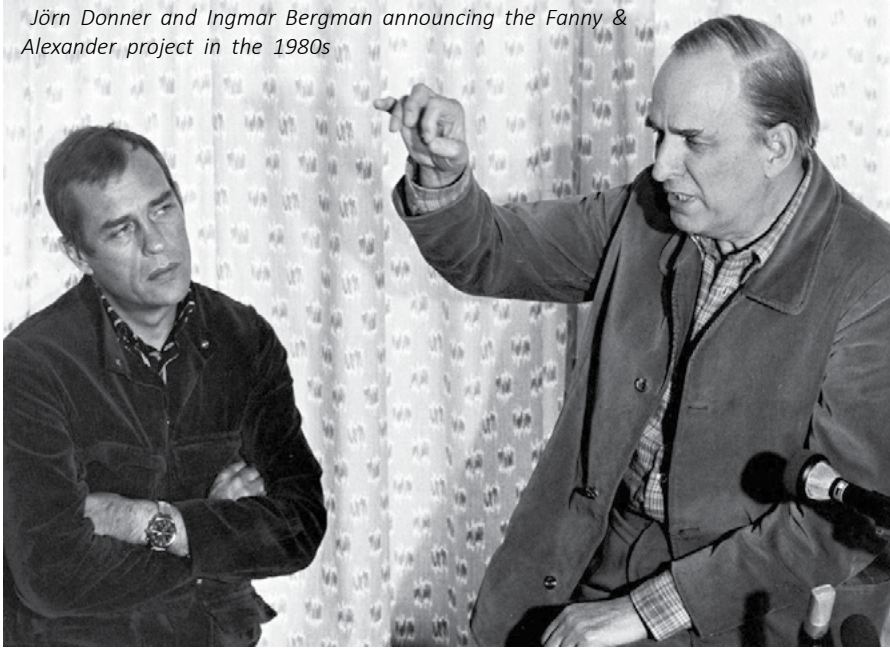
ducer, politician, and founder of Finnish Film Archive, Jörn Johan Donner, has given up filmmaking because he got tired of "influencing the money people" to sponsor his films. "If there's money coming, I can make a film next year," he jokes with his trademark deadpan expression; but until then, as the author of 55 books to date, he will mostly focus on his writing.

43 years have passed since the last time Donner was in Tehran. What brought him back after all these years,

he says, was his chance meeting with the Fajr International Film Festival Director Reza Mirkarimi in Moscow. The both of them were part of a jury panel at the 39th Moscow International Film Festival in 2017. Naturally, Mirkarimi invited him to be a special guest at this year's Fajr festival. Donner, ever so graciously, accepted.

He is best known for his collaboration as a producer in Ingmar Bergman's films such as "Fanny and Alexander". During a workshop on Thursday, Donner →

Jörn Donner and Ingmar Bergman announcing the *Fanny & Alexander* project in the 1980s



ipation in the future.”

As a filmmaker dabbling in politics, Donner calls himself a ‘dissident’. “I have shown in my documentaries that I am very critical of the present politics in Finland,” he says. “I have a completely different opinion than of our present government, and I will continue to be a critic and no one can ever stop me from creating the content I want.”

He admits that he knows too little of the Iranian cinema (he is later gifted a complete collection of works by notable Iranian filmmakers Asghar Farhadi and Abbas Kiarostami, as a crash course), but he is aware of the rather wide cultural gap between Iran and Scandinavia. He is quick to add that despite the differences in culture, which sometimes makes it difficult to find a common language between nations, the films continue to deal with the eternal questions of life and death and love.

While he is on the subject of universal themes shared across different cultures, I ask him if he believes that the film industry in Scandinavia, in an attempt to appeal to a wider audience by detouring around cultural differences, is shifting away from artistic values toward Hollywood commercialism.

“I personally think that films made by a particular nation tend to encompass the experiences of that nation. So, the Scandinavian and Northern cinema will continue to be based on those experiences, but still, good filmmakers, like Ingmar Bergman, are able to eliminate the borders between people by doing films that are considered just as important outside the national borders. The best films are the ones which can close the borders and be shown and understood all across the world. Of course, that’s not an easy thing to do.”

Donner is very particular about the importance of “freedom of expression” in filmmaking; “You have to remember that the basis for all artistic mediums is the freedom of expression,” he says. “It is just as important to make a film about the Iranians as it is to make films that concern Scandinavian people. I hope that the up-and-coming filmmakers of Iran will be able to continue the tradition of open-minded filmmaking and enjoy the required freedom of expression in their creation.”



screened his documentary movie about Bergman’s life in celebration of Ingmar’s centenary of his birth in 1918. “Bergman was a film maker with a Swedish mind. That does not mean he didn’t care about life and death, but his mind always circled around social inequalities and questions about life,” he said about the legendary Swedish auteur during the workshop that introduced the participating young Iranian filmmakers to the roles, tasks and obstacles faced by film makers and producers.

“While working with Bergman as a producer, I never messed up with the content of what he was directing. The only thing that concerned me was the schedule and the money,” Donner says at the presser held on Friday morning

at Charsou Cineplex in downtown Tehran. “And I knew I could trust Bergman in keeping within the timetable and the budget as he was very particular about these things.”

Donner makes a point to talk about the share of women filmmakers in the cinema industry. “As a reflection on Harvey Weinstein’s scandal in the United States, there has been a very aggressive movement in Scandinavia to have more equal opportunities for women directing films or working as cinematographers. I have produced quite a number of films directed by women in Sweden and Finland, but what I hope for is for the share to rise. Currently, 90 percent of movies are directed by men, which necessitates much more female partic-

2018 Fajr Intl. Film Festival roundup: Stronger than ever

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Iran's largest annual film event and the longest running in the Middle East wrapped up on Fri. after running for 9 days. This year's festival was abuzz with more energy and activity in the presence of Italian actor Franco Nero and American director Oliver Stone.

Running for 36 consecutive years, Fajr International Film Festival is Iran's largest annual film event and the longest running of its kind in the Middle East. For three years now, Fajr festival has been holding its national and international sections separately. The international event this year screened over 100 films from all across the world during 9 days of intensive, back-to-back programs which also included workshops, press conferences, exhibitions, a talent campus and a film market.

The 36th edition, running from 19-27 April in Charsou Cineplex as the main venue and Felestin Cinema both in downtown Tehran with easy access to the subway and other means of

public transportation but heavy traffic if you chose to drive your car, was perhaps more vibrant than ever, not only in terms of movies high in quality and number, but also in terms of the special guests attending the event, such as legendary Italian actor Franco Nero and distinguished American filmmaker Oliver Stone.

The awards ceremony held Thursday night at Vahdat Hall of Tehran saw 'Aga' directed by Milko Lazarov snatching the festival's top prize in the main competition section.

A joint production of Bulgaria, Germany and France, 'Aga' paints a melancholic picture of the isolated and self-sufficient life of an old Inuit couple living in the Russian republic of Sakha, desperately trying to hang onto the dying culture of hunting in the vast, snow-covered ground against the ticking time of global warming and the destruction caused by modern lifestyle.

Remembering the grand prix winner in 2015, Icelandic feature 'Rams' by Grimur Hakonarson, and its particular focus on bringing to life the breathtaking

Nordic landscapes and a deeply-rooted rural culture, one could say there is a certain love among the FIFF juries for films about the distant lands that do not usually get a chance to be presented to a wider audience. The conflicts in 'Aga' are subtle, sneaking upon the characters as unobtrusively as they do upon the audience; the dialogues are scarce and at times disjointed; but the cinematography is gorgeous, and message is clear: the environment is in dire danger.

Dovlatov (2018), a co-production of Russia, Poland and Serbia and directed by Alexey German Jr., was the winner of the festival's Critics' Choice Awards. It is a Russian biographical film about a few days in the life of writer Sergei Dovlatov (Serb actor Milan Marić) in 1971 Leningrad, on the eve of the emigration of his friend, the future Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky (Artur Beschastny). It may be long-winded and the references lost on an audience uninformed about the Russian literary circles at the time, and especially with Dovlatov himself, whose popularity may not have extended well beyond the national borders, but the →



film offers a clear, at times satirical outlook of struggling writers and artists who refuse to conform.

The Mohammad Al Ameen Award went to acclaimed Iranian filmmaker Majid Majidi whose 'Beyond the Clouds' opened the FIFF36. An India-set melodrama, Majidi's flick paints a texture-rich picture of humanity at its best and its worst.

While presenting the award, Culture Minister Salehi noted that Iran is recognized in the world by its culture, poetry and art; "True, there are many who are trying to show a distorted image from Iran, but there are also many others like Iranian poets, artists and filmmakers who are making every effort to show the real image of Iran to the world; the way it was, is and must be," he said.

The Peace Award, the first of its kind at FIFF, went to Cambodian writer-director Rithy Panh whose co-production of documentary film 'First They Killed My Father' (2017) by Angelina Jolie was selected as the Cambodian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film for the 90th Academy Awards. The film focuses on the aftermath of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia.

"I suffered a lot because of the bitter events of my past," Rithy Panh explained his reason for becoming a filmmaker in a country where art had no place. "I could have done music and painting to alleviate my psychological sufferings, but went for filmmaking instead, because there were no pictures showing the crimes committed against humanity by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. I had all the images recorded in my head but not on reels. I had to picture those things either as a drama or documentary, and I had to make it. It was a tough time for me to once again rerun those terrible scenes and I had no intention to make my viewers suffer with me either."

The Fajr Peace Award aims to raise awareness for the social relevance of films, and to make use of the influence of movies and documentaries on the perception and resolution of social, political and humanitarian challenges on the international scale.

"We usually end up with numbers in massacre. We do not talk about humans and their stories. While it was natural for me to tell the story of these people as a survivor of this genocide. Each of us

has a story, and when we are dead that story is lost too," Rithy Panh added.

Member of Jury Mohammad Ali Bashe Ahangar described the judging process as consisting of viewing, discussing, voting, and awarding; "FIFF is no lesser than its counterparts in the West. In fact, in some cases it is even better," Ahangar said, while noting the Talent Campus workshops, feature-length, short and documentary movies of all genres, and several other sections like the Film Market and Digital Content Market, each adding a different color to the vibrancy of this year's festival.

Personal tastes sometimes get in the

in Django (1966), an Italian Spaghetti Western film directed and co-written by Sergio Corbucci, in which Franco Nero plays his breakthrough role as a drifter riding into the middle of a border fray between Mexican bandits and the Ku Klux Klan.

Attending a Q&A panel on April 20, Nero introduced himself as a 'lucky' man who has taken on personages from 30 different nations; "Obviously, it has been a great risk, but a pleasant one nonetheless," he said.

"Unfortunately, television ruined cinema," Nero lamented about the long passed golden era of the Italian cinema.



way of judging, but for Ahangar, the deciding factor to choose a particular film as the winner is the attention given to the techniques used in a film's structure, directing, cinematography, and the overall production design.

French director Olivier Megaton, best known in Iran by his action movies 'Taken 2', 'Taken 3', and 'Transporter 3', was a special guest at the festival; "I love the tone," he said of his experience at Fajr. "Because it's like International Istanbul Film Festival or Mexico International Film Festival, where everything is organic. In fact, I don't like the tones in so many festivals. When you arrive in Tehran, it is super organic even if it is a little too polluted for me, but everything in the streets is all human. Even the old building from several decades ago, they have souls and have their own stories."

Other notable guest was Italian legend Franco Nero, who is, for many Iranians, better known as the title character

"Cinema is like a big city, where different citizens live. Cinema means freedom, and there will be cinema as long as there is freedom," he added.

On April 24, Fajr hosted a workshop on acting with French actor Jean-Pierre Leaud, a significant figure of the French New Wave, best known for playing Antoine Doinel in François Truffaut's series of films about that character, beginning with 'The 400 Blows' (1959). He expressed joy for seeing his film 'The Rise and Fall of a Small Film Company' screened at Fajr and urged his students not to lose their enthusiasm for world cinema.

"The cinema of Iran enjoys international recognition, especially this year with good films in the Cannes Film Festival, and this is all thanks to young filmmakers of Iranian cinema; some like Asghar Farhadi whose films I like very much and are among the best films I have ever seen," he said. →

On April 25, 2018 FIFF hosted a music composing master class with A. R. Rahman in Charsou Cineplex. Rahman is a two-time winner of the Academy Awards and five-time nominee of the Academy Awards. He also scored for Majid Majidi's Muhammad, The Messenger of God (2015), and Beyond the Clouds as his second collaboration with the Iranian filmmaker.

On 'Mohammad, The Messenger of God', Rahman said, "Majidi wanted his music to be a character, otherwise silence would have prevailed. His view was that music is the angle of God's sight towards His servants."

Later that day, Italian composer Nicola Piovani performed a classical music concert at Vahdat Hall following a master class entitled 'Italian Music' attended by Fajr Club members who met with the instructor to get a feel for his teaching style and skills.

Iranian government officials, 200 guests from Italian embassy in Tehran, university scholars and a number of filmmakers whose movies were competing attended the one-off musical concert.

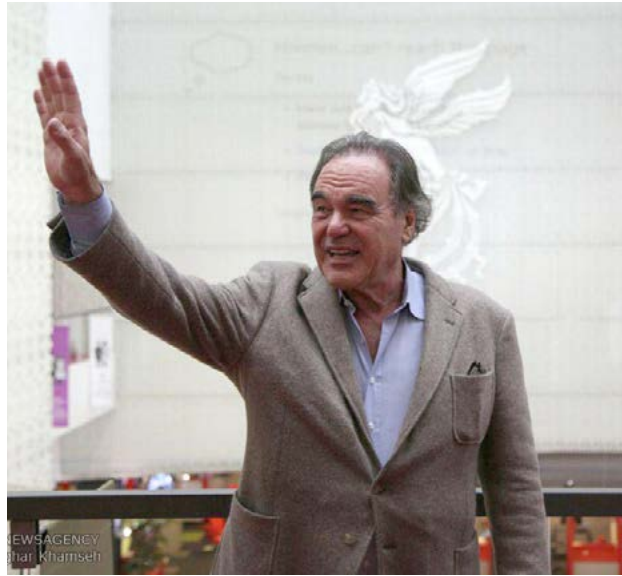
"Music is dangerous, that's what Fellini would say. He was afraid of music because it made him excited," the Academy Award winner Nicola Piovani said before performing a piece in the memory of the great Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini.

But perhaps the most exciting attendance at this year's Fajr belonged to distinguished American director, screenwriter and producer Oliver Stone, whose press conference on April 25 drew a lot of attention from Iranian and foreign media and press.

Being as much of an artistic filmmaker as a political commentator, it was no surprise that the press conference geared toward Oliver Stone's remarks on Trump, French President Macron, US wars in the Middle East, and Iran nuclear deal.

"We make a mess and call it peace," he said, while describing the United States is a global "outlaw".

The Iranian Film Market (IFM) is one of the main sections of FIFF, which provides exclusive meetings and exchange



opportunities for attending producers, distributors, exhibitors and sales agents of films and TV programs with Iranian filmmakers. According to the IFM manager, animated films were a great hit with international distributors this year; the reason for which he attributed to the fact that animated movies play well overseas and have a much wider appeal than the sequels and niche movies; "But maybe more importantly, this year's crop of animation production companies did well because they are using more advanced techniques and practices," he added.

Short animated piece 'Mr. Deer' by Mojtaba Mousavi received a Special Mention at FIFF36. 'Mr. Deer' utilizes the puppet technique to narrate a story set in an unknown time, in a ruined subway station which is similar to those in modern European societies. People in this society have animal faces and have forgotten humanity.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Yadegari talked about co-productions, noting a deal between Iranian and French companies for production of documentary series, as well as animated movies. Iranian companies also inked 5 MoUs with Germany's international news channel Deutsche Welle to produce five animated movies. Similarly, the IRIB sealed a deal to produce a documentary film with Deutsche Welle, according to the IFM manager.

Fajr also hosted Cinema of Georgia Panel, with A-list actors, actresses, and filmmakers from the country in attendance. Georgian actress Salome Demu-

ria and director Irakli Bagaturia were the main panelists, who discussed the cinema of Georgia notable for its cinematography and simple storytelling. They also talked about the industry and how the fall of the USSR, civil war and unrest threatened Georgia's proud cinematic tradition.

According to FIFF director Reza Mirkarimi, this year, there were 1690 film submissions and 120 were selected from 54 countries and regions to compete in various categories. 29 films, including 20 foreign and 9 Iranian ones, were enjoying their premieres at Fajr festival.

25,000 students attended The 7th Hour program, designed for younger audience; 47 international distributing companies took part at the Film Market in 42 pavilions; 300 A-list guests from 78 countries were present; and a new category was added under the name of First Film Award. The award in this category went to Dressage by Iranian filmmaker Pooya Badkoobeh (Iran).

Missing from this year's festival was the "Shadows of Horror" category, dedicated to the screening of horror films at midnight throughout the event. Last year saw the screening of 'Train to Busan' from South Korea, 'The Darkness' from France, 'The Bride' from Russia, and 'Zar' from Iran, which was a successful production in a genre that has been long neglected in the Iranian cinema.

According to Mirkarimi, since its inception, the festival has been and still is dedicated to promoting Iranian cinema and culture, discovering and cultivating new talent, and has contributed to the careers of countless Iranian and international filmmakers.

Mirkarimi stressed that FIFF is strengthening its collaboration with the Film Market and aims to contribute to the development and expansion of Iranian cinema not just as a culture but as an industry and identity.

"The Fajr Film Festival exists to provide a time and place to share in the allure and delights of Iranian cinema, aims to program a rich and diverse lineup each and every year, and aspires to create a festive event with regional and international appeal," he added.

'There is no exit', Oliver Stone slams US foreign policy in ME



By: **Marjohn Sheikhi**

Distinguished American director Oliver Stone, while visiting Iran, drew attention to the 'creative destructive' foreign policy of the US in the Middle East, aimed at bringing US more profits.

The 36th Fajr International Film Festival posed a good opportunity to have distinguished American director, screenwriter and producer, three-times Oscar winner, Oliver Stone, right here in Tehran.

Stone is best known for the hit films 'Platoon', 'Scarface', 'Born on the Fourth of July' and 'Natural Born Killers'. He is also known for his films on political figures, such as 'JFK' (1991), a polarizing investigation of the circumstances surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, 'W.' (2008), based on the life and presidency of George W. Bush, 'Comandante' (2003), about Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, and 'South of the Border' (2009), which focused on several other left-wing leaders, notably Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.

He is as much of an artistic filmmaker (as proved by his 'Any Given Sunday' – a 1999 sports drama film about a fictional professional American football team) as he is a political commentator – "It helps

me being in touch with the real world", he says about his passion for making documentaries on political figures. So, it was no wonder that the press conference on Wednesday held among a large gathering of Iranian and foreign press at Charsou Cineplex in Tehran, geared toward Oliver Stone's remarks on Trump, French President Macron, US wars in the Middle East, and Iran nuclear deal.

"In 2003, George W. Bush invaded Iraq, which we know was a disaster," Stone said while talking about 'W.' and how he tried to deal with America's foreign policy regarding the Middle East in his 'satirical' production. "There is a very important scene in that movie where the national security and the goals of the United States are discussed. Dick Cheney (played by Richard Dreyfuss) points at a map in the situation room, and it shows the Middle East. Cheney is a ruthless authoritarian and a believer in the American empire. He talks about our goals around the world, the prize – oil, money, resources – is in Eurasia, and he points right at [Iraq] and says, 'we're going to Baghdad. Real men go to Baghdad'. Then someone says, 'and what is your exit strategy, sir?' and Cheney says, 'there is no exit.'"

He mentioned that he has no plans at

this time to do a film on an Iranian politician, and dismissed rumors about his asking Ahmadinejad, the then Iranian president, for an interview in 2007. "Believe me, I'm much less ambitious than that," he said.

He called Saudi Arabia out on being one of the major destabilizer in the Middle East, describing the Saudi regime measures in the region as 'creative destruction' – a term he also uses for the US' foreign policy in the region; "We make a mess and call it peace," he says, while describing the United States is a global "outlaw".

"We are outlaws, we're doing something that is outlawed internationally, we had no permission to invade Iraq from the UN, we did it, and we continue to do this."

"We made a mess out of Iraq, Syria, Libya, but it doesn't matter to the American public. It's OK to wreck the Middle East," Stone said. "It doesn't matter who is president – Bush, Obama or Trump, the US will break any treaty."

Stone later likened Donald Trump to Beelzebub, the biblical devil, and highlighted the US involvement in various proxy wars in the Middle East.

Stone also criticized French President Emmanuel Macron for joining Trump on his stance against the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. He called Macron a "young man who doesn't have much of a sense of history or memory of the great traditions of France", saying that by standing alongside Trump, Macron is trying to show a sign of 'French power', the same way as former French President Nicolas Sarkozy did.

"This is a return to the colonialism and imperialism of the old France," Stone stressed that Macron needs to learn not to become an imperialist.

The 36th Fajr Film Festival will wrap up on Friday after running for 9 days and screening over 100 films from across the world. Other notable guests at this year's edition included actors Franco Nero and Jean-Pierre Leaud and Italian composer Nicola Piovani.

Oliver Stone raps Macron for joining Trump in calling for N-deal revision

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Influential American director Oliver Stone at a presser Wed. in Tehran said he could not believe that French President Macron had joined voices with US President Trump on calling for a revision on Iran nuclear deal.

During a press conference at 36th Fajr International Film Festival on Wed. in Tehran, distinguished American director, screenwriter and producer, who has been invited to the FIFF as a special guest, made a request to address the AFP correspondent present at the conference to talk about his impression of French President Emanuel Macron's position on Iran nuclear deal.

"Back at my hotel room, I saw on television your President Macron standing alongside President Trump, calling for a revision on Iran nuclear deal. I couldn't believe it," Oliver Stone said among a large gathering of Iranian and foreign press at the FIFF's main venue, Charsou Cineplex, in downtown Tehran.

The three-times Oscar winner was referring to remarks made by Macron and Trump at a joint press conference at the White House on Tuesday. The two presidents hinted at a new agreement on Iran's nuclear program.

Macron's visit comes ahead of a May 12 deadline for Trump to decide whether to extend waivers of economic sanctions on Iran, a US commitment under the agreement. Trump has been aggressively railing against the Iran nuclear deal, calling it "worst deal ever". "They will have bigger problems than they ever had before," Trump threatened Tehran at the presser should it resume its nuclear program if Washington decided



to withdraw from the deal.

Oliver Stone went on to praise the foreign policy of former French President Jacques Chirac, which marks a great contrast with the position of the current French president.

"I remember very well, with great pride, when President Chirac said no to President Bush when he wanted to invade Iraq. And now to see this young man who doesn't have much of a sense of history or memory of the great traditions of France...we have to remember that Mr. Macron, much the same way as Mr. Sarkozy, seems to want to stand alongside America as a sign of 'French power'."

"This is a return to the colonialism and imperialism of the old France," Stone warned. "France has to learn it can't be an imperialist anymore. Mr. Macron has to learn not to be an imperialist."

"For me, to see him join Mr. Trump in his declaration is very depressing," he said, adding that he will always remember "the better side of France" with Mr. Chirac.



MEHR NEWSAGENCY
Photo: Behnam Tofighi

'Beyond the Clouds': A picture of humanity at its best and at its worst

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

'Beyond the Clouds' by Iranian filmmaker Majid Majidi raised the curtain at 36th Fajr International Film Festival on April 18. An India-set melodrama, Majidi's flick paints a texture-rich picture of humanity at its best and its worst.

The 36th edition of Fajr International Film Festival opened Wed. night with the festival director Reza Mirkarimi cutting into a cake in celebration of the 120th anniversary of the Iranian Cinema, followed by the national premiere of Iranian filmmaker Majid Majidi's drama 'Beyond the Clouds'.

Although the screening was set at 9 PM on the last working day, the number of people who showed up at Felestin Cinema in downtown Tehran was staggeringly high. The ticket line outside was at least 30-people long with only five

minutes left to the screening, with some having already booked their tickets online, and some hoping to be let in without a ticket; which they did, as long as there were still free seats left for them, and this is one of the main reasons why I love the Fajr festival time – in the case of international film festival and theater festival at least – when the focus shifts away from making money to getting as many people as possible to watch the festival's carefully-handpicked programs.

While FIFF's priority is for films enjoying their world or at least international premiere, 'Beyond the Clouds' raised the curtain at the prestigious festival after its screening at the 48th International Film Festival of India in Goa in Nov. 2017, followed by its participation at Istanbul's Fifth International Bosphorus Film Festival, where it won the Best Fiction award, the Best Actor award for Ishaan Khattar (enjoying his debut role

as Amir), and the Best Editing Award for Hassan Hassandoost. Majidi's latest flick was also screened at the 29th Palm Springs International Film Festival in California in January, before it finally arrived at the gates of the Iranian movie theaters.

An ambitious project to be sure, but perhaps not as much as his previous production – a religious biopic on the Prophet of Islam, "Muhammad: The Messenger of God," also premiering at and opening the 2015 FIFF – Majidi's Indian-set melodrama feature is set to premiere on April 20 in 34 territories across the world, including the Persian Gulf region, the United States, Canada, Pakistan, Singapore, among others.

'Beyond the Clouds' follows the story of a brother and sister – Amir and Tara (played by Malavika Mohanan) – who were estranged after one calamity only to be reunited years later after another. As a drug-dealer, Amir is leading a dan-



gerous life constantly dodging trouble in the underbelly of Mumbai. After a drug bust and evading the cops, Amir finds himself at the doorstep of Tara's house, seeking shelter and redemption at the same time as venting years of pent-up frustration at his sister for remaining married to a man who would constantly beat them.

The reunion is short-lived, however, as Tara's altercation with her boss (Akshi), to whom she owes money for the place she is living in as well as being indebted to him for his earlier cover for Amir, ends up with the man attempting to rape her and her striking him in the head with a brick in self-defense – a scene that employs Majidi's favorite shadow-play technique for this film, amid the billowing bedsheets on the rooftop, and the splatter of blood red on the creamy-white cotton.

The crisis is set early in the two-hour narrative, allowing Majidi enough time to delve freely in some cinematographic delights carried out with much splendor by Anil Mehta: The Thane creek with its flocks of flamingos, the Mumbai coasts and jam-packed ferries sailing across calm waters, the scene with Amir and Akshi's two children drawing with pastels on the wall, but perhaps the most memorable and symbolic of which, the scene wrapping up Amir's arc following him out of the hospital after he's informed that Akshi has died after all, and he steps into the sun and people are on the streets celebrating the Holi festival, by throwing colored powders at each other, which fits nicely into Majidi's celebratory story of love, life and the triumph of good versus evil.

'Beyond the Clouds' deals with the cliché, and in its earnest, naïve faith in the ultimate triumph of good versus evil, it does not shy away from predictability, the way Asghar Farhadi's 'The Salesman' does with its convoluted narrative of the same theme of women's plights in a man-ruled society steeped in aggression, injustice, and destitution. Where Farhadi leaves the fate of his female protagonist in 'The Salesman' up in the air as the camera shifts its focus to the fate of her aggressor, Majidi is more resolute to give his own female lead the kind of happy ending that she deserves.

Majidi's latest drama is about humanity at its best and at its worst, put-



ting the characters through tests after tests to see how well they will fare on that spectrum. It is also an attempt to celebrate life in all the smallest details that we take for granted in the face of bigger troubles. "Moon? What is Moon?" becomes a harrowing realization when the words are uttered by some five-year-old boy who has lived all his life inside a prison and has never set foot outside. And when the boy, together with Tara who has made a close bond with after his mother's death, reach out their hands through the creak in the door to feel the wetness of the rain and wait for the sky to clear up and the clouds to move away so they could see the moon and consequently leave the prison life behind, it leaves the audience with an urge to look up at the sky as they step out of the movie theater and relish in the smallest beauties that the world has to offer beside all the hardships that

keep sidetracking us.

For those interested in seeing Majidi's latest film, 'Beyond the Clouds' will have three more screenings on April 20, 21, and 23 at Charsou Cineplex.

Presided over by Iranian film writer and director Reza Mirkarimi, the 36th edition of Fajr International Film Festival will be held in Tehran on April 19-27.

Production: (India) A Zee Studios International, Namah Pictures production. (International sales: Zee Studios International, Sydney.)

Producers: Shareen Mantri Kedia, Kishor Arora.

Director: Majid Majidi. Screenplay: Majidi, Mehran Kashani. Camera (color): Anil Mehta. Editor: Hassan Hassandoost. Music: A.R. Rahman.

Cast: Ishaan Khattar, Malavika Mohanan, Goutam Ghose, Dhvani Rajesh, G.V. Sharada, Amruta Santosh Thakur, Shivam Pujar.

IMDB rating: 7.4/10

6th International Conference Of independent Thinkers and Artists (NewHorizon)



By: Lachin Rezaian

Dossier

6th Intl. New Horizon Conf. kicks off in Mashhad, focuses on JCPOA, al-Quds



2nd day of the 6th International Conference of Independent Thinkers and Artists (New Horizon) kicked off in the capital city of Khorasan Razavi province, Mashhad, today on Sunday.

The conference will host academics, politicians, authors, journalists, activists, filmmakers, and media commentators from around the world to discuss different viewpoints and show worldwide solidarity with palestinian oppressed people.

The participants flocked to the three-day event from the UK, the United States, and several countries of Europe.

The conference chairman is Nader Talebzadeh who is an Iranian iconic cultural figure, documentary filmmaker and director of controversial movie *The Messiah* (2007), and prestigious TV host.

The theme of this year's conference is "JERUSALEM/AL-QUDS, THE ETERNAL CAPITAL OF PALESTINE" which is organized by New Horizon Secretariat, as well as Secretariat of 6th International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Intifada, and is taking place on May 12th through the 18th – 2018.

The event's press conference was held on Sunday, 6 of May, during which

its chairman Nader Talebzadeh elaborated that the conference hosts special guests this year, including well-known senior officials who have already been in the Pentagon, as well as those we have invited to attend the conference for many years.

What we do in this event, he underlined, is like being a helping hand to the Foreign Ministry, to help public diplomacy, launch a kind of soft war and provide an opportunity for the guests to see each other in Tehran.

Touching upon the time of this event, Talebzadeh said, "the time for this conference was very important to us, because Americans are coming to Tehran following the time President of the United

States Donald Trump makes a statement about JCPOA and al-Quds. In fact, it is planned that these people will gather here at this time. This is to say that some of the guests are veterans and prominent people who wrote important books about the 9/11 and are experts in this field.

The first edition of the International New Horizon Independent Conference was presented in 2012 along with a film festival centered on the related issues.

New Horizon conference and festival is aimed at providing a platform where independent thinkers can gather together, feature their films and engage in debate and deliberation on various aspects of world and the reality of Hollywood.



US embassy move 'Netanyahu's plot to destroy all Palestinian lands as his legacy'

Interview by: **Lachin Rezaian**

David Lawley Walkelin, British documentary film maker and a peace activist, said US embassy relocation to Jerusalem al-Quds was an idea totally based on Zionist desire to clear and destroy all of the Palestinians and have the whole land for themselves.

US transferred its embassy to al-Quds because the Zionist lobby in the US is enormous, Walkelin said, adding that there are lots of banks and money they are bringing to the United States; Jewish lobby in America is very powerful indeed and they are always doing business inside the country; nobody cares about morals or family values, people's lives, love and peace and these things; they only care about how much money are in their pockets and how much pleasure they can have with that money.

David Lawley Walkelin visited Iran in mid-May to attend the 6th International Conference of Independent Thinkers and Artists (New Horizon), where he sat with Mehr News correspondent Lachin Rezaian to discuss JCPOA and US embassy move.

Regarding the trust in European countries to continue the implementation of JCPOA, he said "yes, Iran can trust in EU."

He said the issue now is the re-imposition of sanctions; US did not actually destroyed the deal, however, it just left the door a little bit open; Trump said he wouldn't certify the deal, which means that somebody can take it back to the Congress in 60 days. And also due to the pressure that Europe will give to Trump, maybe the US might change the decision.

Netanyahu wants European countries to withdraw from Iran deal like the US, too. In his eyes the deal is not good, because after some years, Iran can start its nuclear program again and they don't want that because they believe, which is rubbish, Iran would use nuclear weapons against them.

It is necessary for Iran to have the nuclear program, so JCPOA is a good idea to stay in it.



Expressing that President Rouhani made a good decision on protecting the deal, he said "nuclear deal is a good deal; the involved parties have worked a lot on it and it has many advantages; for Iran it is a good deal because Iran can still develop its ballistic missiles and other weapons."

Walkelin underlined that "it is necessary for Iran to have the nuclear program, so JCPOA is a good idea to stay in it, especially which it is the only deal we have; having a deal is better than no deal."

On the possibility of implementation and survival of JCPOA without US, he said "it is a question for the future, you cannot tell it right now. We have to wait what is going to happen to the deal in the Congress and if they would vote for the sanctions."

He stressed that Netanyahu is trying to push Iran to take the first move; he wants Iran to try to hit Israel so that he can hit it back ten times bigger. He keeps trying that.

Touching upon the relocation of US embassy to Jerusalem al-Quds, he called Trump's move again a dangerous one. "It is up to the Palestinians and President Rouhani and other nations who are supporting Palestine to step in proving that al-Quds has been in the entire history a holy city, it doesn't belong to Jews. You don't make a holy city the capital of one religion, so the decision was nonsense and the most provocative move Trump could have done which has been faced with the protests in the rest of the world. "

He said Mr. Rouhani must pay visit to other countries who do not support

Trump on the issue and honestly and openly talk about what else they can do to deconstruct the idea.

Regarding the motivation behind the move, he said the relocation of embassy was an idea totally based on Zionist desire to clear and destroy all of the Palestinians and have the whole land for themselves; that is exactly how Netanyahu sees it. He is pragmatic, he wants to leave the legacy of destroying all Palestinian lands for the Zionism. "They are not interested in anything less than the entire place belonging to Israel," he added.

Al-Quds has been in the entire history a holy city, it doesn't belong to Jews. You don't make a holy city the capital of one religion, so the decision was nonsense and the most provocative move Trump could have done.

US transferred its embassy to al-Quds because the Zionist lobby in the US is enormous; there are lots of banks and the amount of money they are bringing to the United States; Jewish lobby in America is very powerful indeed and they are always doing business inside the country; nobody cares about morals or family values, people's lives, love and peace and these things; they only care about how much money are in their pockets and how much pleasure they can have with that money.

David Lawley Walkelin is a documentary film maker. His work includes "The Alternative Iraq Enquiry", a documentary alleging that Tony Blair is a war criminal. In May 2012, he interrupted the Leveson inquiry during Tony Blair's statement, alleging that Blair had been paid off by the American bank JP Morgan Chase for agreeing to take the United Kingdom into the Iraq war. Blair denied the charge. Lawley Walkelin was later fined £100 plus costs. Speaking on the steps outside the court afterwards, Mr Lawley-Walkelin revealed he had received messages of support from the Nobel Laureate Mairead Maguire and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Trump wants JCPOA ‘in a different colored folder, with different name’

Interview by Lachin Rezaian

A former US army psychological operation officer and counter-terrorism analyst Scott Bennett said Trump wants to put the JCPOA in a different colored folder and a color of his and not Obama’s.

Scott Bennett stressed Iran cannot put trust in E3 over JCPOA due to the close ties between US and Europe and their common interests.

Rejecting the possibility of war between US and Iran, Bennett said American people would not allow war and probably impeach Donald Trump on it.

On the role of Muslim countries in confronting against Trump’s decision on relocation of US embassy to Jerusalem, he noted that they should be unified to say if you are going to declare Eastern Jerusalem being Jewish then you have to declare the other part of Jerusalem being Islamic.

Following is the full text of Bennett’s interview with Mehr News correspondent Lachin Rezaian:

Regarding the close ties between US and Europe and their common interests, can Iran put trust in E3 over JCPOA (as Iranian Leader has announced clearly on Wednesday that he does not trust them either)?

No, obviously not. Iran would be fooled to lower its weapons or put itself in a position that would be harmed, like Libya or Iraq. The JCPOA and Iranian-American relationship has not been destroyed yet and it does have 60 days to re-evaluate everything, the Iranian position now should be to engage with Donald Trump in dialogue, they need to communicate with him. Because if they don’t communicate, that is exactly what the Zionists want, they want silence so they can cultivate false flag attacks, more chemical attacks, blaming on Iranians, plotting destructive protests and engage in psychological warfare to get prepared for military activity like they did against Iraq and accusing Iran of chemical weapons and hyper-activating a weapon system because of their JCPOA



pullout; but Iran can disengage that by direct talks with US.

Iranians are better say “Mr. Trump we know your concerns about JCPOA, and we are happy to talk about what you propose, but nothing is going to change that we have already signed. We are not going to give any concession. You want to put the JCPOA in a different colored folder and a color of yours and not Obama’s? That’s fine but nothing can change that is going to damage our country, our culture, and security of our people.

And I think Donald Trump may surprise everyone by saying I agree, I just didn’t want Obama’s name on it but my name on it. OK, it doesn’t matter who gets the name, what matters is that Iran is left alone, the sanctions must be lifted; Iran is allowed to be paid back the money that is frozen and not be attacked or undermined by Israel or the US. So I think Russia needs to step in and play a part of the diplomatic conversation and I think Europe also needs to pay attention that the people of US and Europe do not want another war, there is no reason for war, other than to help the Zionists to destabilize the region. But people in US, Russia, Europe, they do not want war. Only Israel wants war.

So I don’t think there is going to be war, because American people would not allow it and probably impeach Donald Trump.

And the same is true in Europe and Russia, so there is always a chance but I think with the internet and alternative media and international media like you, you are doing wonderful service by allowing truth in people that hear and respect them; they can arm them with knowledge, and the conviction to stand up and influence the political parties.

How will Iran-Europe economic ties suffer if the US resumes Iran sanctions?

It would be wise if Iran, Russia and China make deals with Europeans that gave Europeans a sense of being treated better and having a better deal than they would with the US. US is essentially saying if you don’t do, we are doing, we are going to hurt you with sanctions. So a combined economies of Russia, China, Iran and whatever is needed to present alternative economic deal to make the Europeans not want to side with US and of course paying attention that the European people do not want war.

How do you evaluate Trump’s decision to move embassy to Jerusalem?

Trump’s decision to relocate US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was a great mistake because it insults all of the other Muslims around the world that see Jerusalem as a portion of their own part. →

The Christians own part of it, Jews own part of it and Muslims own part of it too. Because they all have a historical lineage to Jerusalem which is true. So for Trump to declare a place as the property of only one group is very foolish and no American will want it like that. America is a Jewish-Zionist country. There are Jewish Zionists who have influences on media and lobbying groups that give them a lot of money. Trump is not politically sophisticated enough to know the full detrimental effects it would have.

Does embassy's move to Jerusalem, is based on "give and take" policy between US and Israel or based on US national interests?

I think it is based on personal relationship that Trump has with Netanyahu because his son-in-law Jared Kushner is Jewish so there is a sense of Jewishness there. He is been in New York and he was surrounded by Jews. Trump is not Jewish but he has affiliations and he ignorantly and naively has a sympathy that leads them to make these choices that have very negative effect and he is given back with money, hundreds of millions of dollars, and made the choice to move the embassy for them.

What Muslim countries can do to confront Trump's move to relocate US embassy?

First of all, the Islamic countries should be unified to say if you are going to declare Eastern Jerusalem being Jewish then you have to declare the other part of Jerusalem being Islamic, you have to give us equal right and then if they don't do that, they have to protest internationally against Israel, boycott all Israeli services until there is equal division for the Jerusalem.

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.

Rouhani at OIC meeting: **New US administration, Israeli occupation biggest threat to world peace**

Iran's president has said that the Israeli occupation is the biggest threat against the Islamic world, adding the new US administration is also the biggest threat for the world order, peace, and stability.

Hassan Rouhani made the remarks at the extraordinary summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul on Friday.

At the start of his address to the OIC meeting, the Iranian president said "holding Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation immediately after the Extraordinary Meeting of the Palestine Committee of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC) in Tehran on May 14th this year contains the important message that the Islamic Ummah, like a single hand, is standing strongly against the greatest threat to the World of Islam, which is the occupation of the Palestinian land by the Zionists."

Rouhani then expressed hope "this (OIC) meeting, with cooperation and capability of Islamic countries, will lead to the adoption of practical solutions to end this dangerous crisis and to immediately assist the oppressed Palestinian people, especially the oppressed residents of Gaza."

He underscored that criminal Zionists have challenged the global community before the tearful eyes of the world by trampling human dignity and belittling all values, adding "if the Zionist Regime is surrounded by developed, democrat countries, facing with a united Ummah, it will never be able to continue its crimes in such a relief."

The Iranian president said that today, we are mourning the last act of the 70-year-old genocide against the innocent in Palestine. The criminal Zionists have challenged the global community before the tearful eyes of the world by trampling human dignity and belittling all values. While hundreds of thousands of innocent people are deprived of the most basic human rights, the Zionist regime is falsely introducing its own apartheid and ethnocentric system as democracy, calling its religious extremism secularism; what is more unfortunate is that some Western countries are justifying the invasions of the occupiers.

Rouhani then lashed at the US move in relocating of his embassy to al-Quds, saying, "in these conditions, the government of the United States moved its embassy to Bayt al-Maqdis. This arbitrary action which is contrary to international regulations gave the Zionist regime the go-ahead to commit another brutal killing. The White House has shown that it does not hesitate to destroy foundations and rules of international order, and goes to war against the right with forced. Just days before the US embassy was transferred to Bayt al-Maqdis, the President of the United States delivered another blow to international security and credibility of the international community and withdrew from a multilateral nuclear agreement that had been approved by the UN Security Council. The move, in pursuit of a unilateral withdrawal from some of the other important international agreements, has shown that the new US government is a dangerous threat to the global legal system and world peace and security."

"But on the other hand, the popular resistance in Black Monday showed that the new and young Palestinian generation is aware of its rights; that it does not intend to stop it or make a trade it in; that it is possible to reveal the violent face of the usurper and show the moments of perseverance of believers at the early Islam to the world. Palestine has shown that it deserves peace and full respect for its legitimate rights," Iran's president continued.

Former CIA officer:

Trump's Quds (Jerusalem) move to fulfill campaign promise to Jewish donors

Interview by Lachin Rezaian

Former counter-terrorism specialist and military intelligence officer of the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Philip Giraldi said Donald Trump fulfills a promise to very wealthy Jewish contributors to his campaign, adding Benjamin Netanyahu wanted it and Trump is seen as someone who listens to Netanyahu.

Giraldi stressed that Israelis would like a war in the region, noting that Israelis may attack Iranian sites in Syria hoping to draw reactions and response of Iran because they are sure if this happens the United States will get involved and will take Israel's side.

Following is the full text of Philip Giraldi's interview with Mehr News correspondent Lachin Rezaian, on the sidelines of the last day of the 6th International Conference of Independent Thinkers and Artists (New Horizon):

How do you evaluate the possibility of war in the region after US JCPOA pullout?

Well, that's a complicated question. I think the Israelis would like a war in the region. I think what they will do is that they will make attacks on Iranians in Syria. And they are hoping that Iran would then respond. And possibly the United States will get involved and will take Israel's side. But I think they would be a little bit cautious because I don't think that United States is ready to go to war with anyone and I believe that the politics of JCPOA is still continuing. The Europeans are very upset and angry about what the US did. And I think they might make it difficult for Donald Trump and the make efforts to improve the situation.

You said that Europeans are angry with Trump. Do you think Iran can trust them in continuing commitment to JCPOA?

I think yes they can. They can continue with it. They will get the support of Russia



and china too. So they have the possibility of doing this and they at least can break the US politically and very sharply. And I am not sure they are prepared to do that. Again as I said this is a developing situation I think you will know that in a week or at most in a month.

So you think JCPOA can survive without US?

In a form I think JCPOA can continue. It depends on what the US decides to do if the Germans, or the British, or the French decide to trade with Iran and if so maybe the US would take steps to punish them and that is a cripple question; well it can continue but it depends on the US not going after the people that are trying to trade with Iran and we don't know right now what is going to happen.

What do you think about the relocation of US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem? Do you think this move is because of "give and take" policy between the two countries or US does that based on its national interests?

Well, the move of the embassy to Jerusalem is not for US national interests. That is not the issue. The issue is Donald Trump fulfilling a promise to very wealthy Jewish contributors to his campaign. Their names are Sheldon Gary Adelson, Bernard Marcus, Paul Singer, and these people are big

contributors and they are expected to be big contributors in the elections coming so Donald Trump to respond to them he also he did it because Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel wanted it and Trump is seen as someone who listens to Netanyahu.

What do you think about the role of Saudi Arabia in provoking US to make the decision?

Saudi Arabia certainly was in the decision but I think they played major role. I think even for Saudis Jerusalem is a holy spot so I think they said yes but in private and secretly.

How do you evaluate the role that Muslim countries can play in confronting this decision?

Well, Muslim countries through the organizations have already condemned this and I think they should keep condemning it and they should put pressure on the Saudis, in particular, to join the group and make serious their complaint and also the Muslim countries that are friendly with Israel should put pressure on Israel, like Jordanians and Egyptians.

Philip Giraldi is a former counter-terrorism specialist and military intelligence officer of the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and a columnist and television commentator who is the Executive Director of the Council for the National Interest.



Embassy move 'US plot to change region's major issue from Palestine to Iran'

Seyed Ebrahim Raeisi, custodian and chairman of Astan Quds Razavi said Trump's move to relocate embassy to al-Quds aims at normalizing the relations between Arab governments with Israel and the to change the most important issue of the region from Palestine to the Islamic Republic.

The closing ceremony of the 6th International Conference of Independent Thinkers and Artists (New Horizon) was held Monday afternoon, in the presence of Seyed Ebrahim Raeisi, custodian and chairman of Astan Quds Razavi in Mashhad.

6th International New Horizons Conference, entitled "JERUSALEM/AL-QUDS, THE ETERNAL CAPITAL OF PALESTINE", wrapped up in Mashhad on Monday, attended by Seyed Ebrahim Raeisi, custodian and chairman of Astan Quds Razavi, academics, politicians, authors, journalists, activists, filmmakers, and media commentators from around the world, among them were former and current members of the European Union and the current member of the parliament of one of the European countries), former US army psychological operation officer, former CIA officer and a number of anti-war activists.

During the ceremony held on the day US officially recognized al-Quds as the capital of Israel by moving its Embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds, Seyed Ebrahim

Raeisi delivered a speech condemning US and Israeli acts as a move to ignite fears of violence in the region.

"The Zionists and those who support them are destroying the rights of all human beings and those who believe in God, such as Christians, Muslims, Jews and all those who are righteous; they regard the issue of Palestine and the freedom of the al-Quds as their most important concern; today we have to see who and which movement is supporting Palestine and al-Quds, to know who is seeking justice in the world.

Raeisi underlined that "the criterion for justice in today world is what position a person, a group, a government or a country takes on the issue of Palestine; 70 years ago, the Zionist occupying regime began to violate the rights of the oppressed Palestinian people, and today, 5 million Palestinians are displaced and 71% of their land is seized; today Gaza, contrary to all UN resolutions, is occupied by the Zionist regime, too."

Referring to the recent decision of the President of the United States to transfer US embassy to Jerusalem, custodian and chairman of Astan Quds Razavi stated "Trump's move is a dangerous conspiracy and he wants to normalize the relations of the Arab governments with Israel. He added, "today Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammad bin Salman is pursuing policies of Arrogant in the region, and on this basis, the United States

is trying to change the most important issue of the region from Palestine to the Islamic Republic."

US failure in embassy mover to Holy al-Quds is definite and inevitable, he noted, adding Muslim nation will not let this great oppression happen; the noble Palestinian nation will continue resistance and fight against Zionism more determined than before; for years, Arrogance has tried many times to marginalize al-Quds issue, however, they have not succeeded and will never succeed do.

On the last day of the conference, foreign guests also visited Imam Reza's holy shrine to pay tribute to the 8th Shia Imam.

The three-day event kicked off on Saturday, hosting academics, politicians, authors, journalists, activists, filmmakers, and media commentators from around the world to discuss different viewpoints and show worldwide solidarity with Palestinian oppressed people.

The conference chairman is Nader Talebzadeh who is an Iranian iconic cultural figure, documentary filmmaker and director of controversial movie *The Messiah* (2007), and prestigious TV host.

New Horizon conference and festival is aimed at providing a platform where independent thinkers can gather together, feature their films and engage in debate and deliberation on various aspects of world and the reality of Hollywood.