



**Time for Europe to pace
development of SPV**



Mehr Vision

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Islamic Unity



By: Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Dossier

Muslims need to talk more with each other: Bajrami

Interview by Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Muiadin Bajrami, Manager of Foundation Gnosa in Macedonia, is of the opinion that Shia and Sunni scholars need to talk more with each other to achieve Islamic unity.

Touching upon the importance of unity among Ummah, he said, "Those who think that Sunni is more important than Shia or vice versa would not help."

Bajrami made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency on Monday on the sideline of the 32nd Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran.

Here is the full text of the interview:

What do you think of this conference in general and how do you evaluate it?

I believe that this conference is very good for the future. Maybe this is the first step to gather important people to

talk about the unity of Ummah [Muslim community]. The other point is about the problems of Muslims in the world. I believe that the conference should question some wider issues as well, not only for the Middle East. We are always talking about Palestine, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. This is ok, I'm sure, but it's important to talk about the problems of Muslims living in Balkans and other parts of the world. It's crucial to hear the people who have come here from different areas that are never heard, to see what their problems are and what are the solutions.

But I think the organizer here is putting his best effort to gather all these people and I'm so pleased with all he is doing here and I pray to Allah to give him much more power to improve the event more and more.

What are the main barriers in route to



uniting Muslims?

We need to talk more. Important people of each country, either Shia or Sunni, should talk with each other. Those who think that Sunni is more important than Shia or vice versa would not help. We should see our main aim as an Islamic Ummah. But I think this step taken here will improve significantly in the future to unite Muslim countries.

So you are hopeful about the unity.

No, I'm 100 percent sure. I'm Shia and I believe in the coming of Imam Mahdi. I wish that this would happen as soon as possible and we would live in that time, inshallah.

Politics, main reason behind division among Muslim states: Brazilian activist

Interview by Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

The division which is now seen among some Islamic states is mainly because of politics, said Muslim Brazilian activist Garcia Gomez.

Gomez, who is a pro-Palestinian activist in South America, made the remarks in an interview with Mehr News Agency on Saturday on the sideline of the 32nd Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran.

Here is the full text of the interview:

What is your opinion about this conference and what are the barriers in route to achieve unity among Islamic countries?

It is important for Muslims and the world of Islam to understand the importance of unity because if you do not be united, it would be easy for enemies to defeat Islamic countries. In my opinion, the Muslim community needs to be gathered together to acknowledge the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) because I see now in the Islamic communities too much difference in opinions; 'I'm Sunni', 'I'm Shia', mainly because politics have



divided people. It is very important for the Muslims to understand that unity is key to continuing existence.

And how do you see measures adopted by the Islamic Republic of Iran in creating unity among Islamic countries?

Sure, it's so excellent. The media have programs to lie about Iran and Shia community. The conference here is very a very compelling measure to bring about unity among Islamic states.



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Photo: Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Iran is a role model for uniting Muslim states: Indonesian scholar

Interview by Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Akmal Kamil, Deputy Head of Research and Education at Islamic Cultural Center Jakarta, believes that Iran is a role model for uniting Muslim countries around the world.

Touching upon the importance of the annual Islamic Unity Conference, he said that it is a great opportunity for finding solutions to problems of Islamic countries like Palestine and Yemen.

Kamil made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency on Monday on the sideline of the 32nd Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran.

Here is the full text of the interview:

I wanted to know your general opinion about the conference and the role of Iran in uniting Muslim states around the world.

First of all, I want to congratulate the birthday anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Imam Ja'far

al-Sadiq to all Muslims and especially to the Supreme Leader of Islamic Republic of Iran.

In my opinion, this conference is very important. The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought and the Islamic Republic of Iran can play important roles to make Muslim people closer to each other and to share their opinion about how to solve problems of the Islamic world. We cannot deny that today we have many problems from Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Iraq and also other places in the world like Rohingya. And in this conference, scholars have gathered and try their best to find the solution for these problems. So this conference is very important because scholars at least meet with each other once a year. Iran plays a role model in this regard.

Regarding the issue of Palestine, what will be the results of the US illegal decision to move its embassy

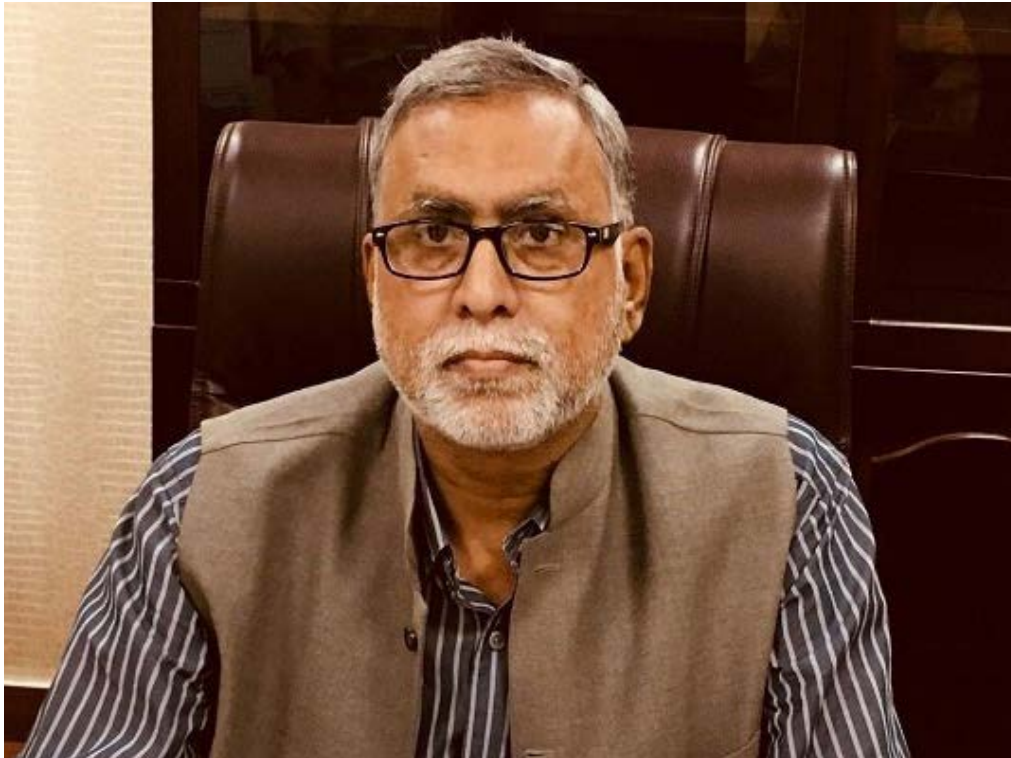
to Jerusalem? And how can Islamic countries counter this kind of measures?

First of all, leaders of Islamic countries have to strongly condemn this decision adopted by the United States President. It's crucial for Islamic countries not to follow this measure. The government of my country, Indonesia, severely criticized Australia when they announced that they want to move their embassy to Jerusalem. This issue was so important that the Indonesian President himself condemned Australia's decision.

So first, leaders of Islamic countries should condemn this kind of hostile measures. And then, the Muslim community all over the world should put their hands together and be united against these actions.

What do you think is the ultimate solution to Palestinian crisis?

As the Leader of the Islamic Republic suggested, holding a referendum will be the solution where Palestinians will de-



Imam Khomeini initiated idea of Islamic Unity: Prof. Mirza

Interview by Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Indian Professor Mahrukh Mirza said that the idea of achieving Islamic unity started with efforts of late Imam Khomeini.

He went on to say that the main factor which threatens the achievement of Islamic unity is lack of education and unless this is not resolved, unity will never be achieved.

Mirza, who is the vice-chancellor of 'Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Urdu, Arabi-Farsi University', made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency on Sunday on the sideline of the 32nd Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran.

Here is the full text of the interview:

What do you think of this gathering in general?

Regarding the 'Vahdat [unity] Week', the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the direction given by Iranian government to unite Muslims, what

I want to tell you through your media is that a day will come that the entire world will embrace the Islam. You know, many Americans are embracing Islam as they reach their peak or high place because Muhammad (PBUH) is our last prophet and no other prophet will come now but only one Imam will come and take 'Zohur' and at that time, the entire world will be praising Islam and say their 'Shahada'. You see the high intellectuals from America are following thoughts of religion. They may not be following Islam now but I'm sure they will do so one day; they have started using Hijab, their westernization circle is coming down and other smaller countries are also following them now. Another point is that unity among Muslims is the message of this conference - but I believe that there is still a long way to go - as far as global unity is concerned. Unity is the reason that caused Imam Hussein to give his Qurbani [sacrifice] with 72 of his companions whilst, his opposers, in the Yazid's troops, didn't know the true path which led to the real tenets of Islam.

Who initiated this unity movement and what threatens the Islamic unity the most?

Undoubtedly, Islamic unity started as a result of Imam Khomeini efforts. And very soon you will see all the countries will have to come and join their hands together, otherwise, we will be scattered.

Lack of education is the main factor which threatens Islamic unity. Unless Muslims are not well educated, absolute unity is impossible. Education is different from literacy; a literate person is only capable of reading newspapers but an educated individual has wisdom and enjoys a far-sighted vision. My message to Muslims is that they must prepare the grounds for educating their children. And you see the Sunni community of Islam has also studied the message and history of Karbala. Mahatma Gandhi told if he had 72 soldiers like those of Imam Hussein he would have won the Indian freedom within 24 hours from Britain.

Only Resistance can solve Palestinian crisis: German analyst



MEHR NEWSAGENCY
Photo: Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Interview by Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Jürgen Graßmann, the independent analyst from Germany, said that the only solution for the Palestinian crisis is resistance.

Grabmann made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency on Monday on the sideline of the 32nd Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran. The three-day conference wrapped up on Monday night.

Here is the full text of the interview:

What do you think of this conference and how do you evaluate the measures adopted by Iran for uniting Muslim states?

It is essentially important to bring all the Muslim countries together to create a resistance against Zionism and against battles in this world. Bringing Islamic countries together needs a special strategy. It is very important to know that Iran is the only country in the world which is seriously interested in the matter. The other governments are not interested at all. Some people come, just get their money and go. But without the help of Iran and Velayat-e Faqih [Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist], you will not

succeed, and even other countries will not succeed. So they have to understand that Iran stands top regarding its foreign policy – no matter you can criticize Iran for its internal policies. So they have to follow this and we have to follow the Velayat. Even if you are not Shia, you need the control and leadership of Velayat to wake up all the people, how we make an active strategy. Just talking about revolutions is not enough, you have to be active. That is good when we come here all together and there is a chance inshallah, I'm sure.

What are the main barriers in this route to achieve unity?

Sorry to say that, it is the brain-washed people. It is what taught years before. I'm a specialist for Islam even if I cannot speak Arabic but you have to understand Islam in its essence. The essence is ahlul-bayt which is a present. Even now you have Velayat, it is a diamond. Even Iran does not know. If you lose this diamond, you lose everything. So the main problem is that they have to understand to follow Islam in the path of ahlul-bayt. If you don't understand this, you can be professors or doctors, but you will not succeed. So that is our work to teach and we need to do some-

thing politically together to change their mind to follow Islam in the right way of ahlul-bayt.

Regarding the issue of Palestine, what is the ultimate solution for this crisis?

We have to find a strategy together because, in Palestine, it is 70 years that they are fighting beside the Arab armies and now you see Palestine is nothing, they only have 10 percent of their own country. They have not the right leader. In German, we say that the problem is the head. That's why its 70 years that they cannot succeed because are not dealing with it right. If you follow ahlul-bayt, you cannot lose.

Do you think that referendum is a solution for Palestine or just resistance can solve this?

Only resistance can solve this. With peace, you cannot get it. They will not allow making a Palestinian country. My theory is that Palestine, Mecca, Medina belong to Muslims, no matter what and where it is. So if you do not fight for it together, you cannot get it. They are losing for 70 years even when Imam Khomeini created this Islamic Revolution. You have to fight for your rights. Otherwise, they will not give it free, never.

Palestine a big umbrella that gathers all Muslims: Hamas rep.

Interview by Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Khaled al-Qaddumi said that the issue of Palestine and Jerusalem is a big umbrella that can gather all Islamic states together.

The representative of Palestinians resistance group Hamas made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Mehr News Agency on Saturday on the sideline of the 32nd Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran.

Here is the full text of the interview:

How do you evaluate the conference in general?

Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim. The conference is the 32nd attempt for the Islamic unity. Surely, it's very positive to gather those different schools of thought, different sects, even different lives and cultures in one place to bridge the gap and very huge and tremendous results will come out of it. I think the only thing that we need to make it more successful is to transcend from rhetoric and speeches to practical implementations and programs. And this is what we required today since we have mentioned that Palestine and Jerusalem is a big umbrella that gathers all of us; so that means we need some practical steps to move forward like how to confront the Israeli hegemony in the region, how to confront the Zio-American hegemony in the region. We are elites and we have big responsibilities that we have to do in front of our nations.



What are the main barriers which hinder the achievement of Islamic unity?

There are many but I believe that they are very fragile and they are not very solid barriers. Let me talk about for example how to feel the empathy; we feel that we do not try to understand the view of others, so we insist on the view of ourselves. We look at different people whose opinion differs from us and when we say that 'the other', then we are dealing with these people with a very big gap. When we think that we are one and we have to decide together, then we have bridged those gaps. 'How to understand each other'; I believe this is the biggest barrier which we have to bridge and I think that it is easy for us to do so.





Interview

Theorizing religion in intl. relations not only feasible but essential: Prof.

By Javad Heirannia

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Professor of Politics and Religious Studies at Northwestern University says that "Religion was never excluded from international affairs, but has assumed different forms and occupied difference spaces in different regimes of governance, some of which are described as secular."

She adds that "religion has never been absent from the practice of international relations, although it is the case that IR theory ignored or refused to deal with the subject for several decades."

Professor Hurd also says that theorizing Religion in International Relations "is not only feasible but essential."

Following is the full text of the interview:

When has the religious issues been a matter of great in Theorizing of International Relations?

My first work was among the first to open up new conceptual and political spaces in which to think and talk about religion in the study of International Relations. Religion was never excluded from international affairs but has assumed different forms and occupied difference spaces in different regimes of governance, some of which are described as secular. This was the subject of my first book on "The Politics of Secularism in International Relations" (Princeton University Press, 2008).

Religion is not an isolatable entity and we cannot treat it as such. Taking this as a point of departure forces us into a different field of play, epistemologically and politically. It becomes clear that any attempt to single out religion as a platform from which to develop law and public policy ends up privileging some religions over others. Looking ahead, we need to embed the study of religion deeply in a series of social, institutional, and interpretive fields. This requires disaggregating and complicating the category. It requires considering what the



world looks like after we move beyond the ideology of separation and secularization, and also beyond the ideology of restoring or accommodating religion to public life. Neither is sufficient. They mirror each other, in fact.

We can see the inevitable interplay of politics and religion in the current refugee crisis, in claims for asylum in Germany. Because asylum claims coming from Pakistani Christians carry more weight in Germany, there has been an uptick in conversions to Christianity among asylum-seekers. Both politics and religion are being transformed in ways that cannot be disentangled. To attempt to separate the fields of religion and politics, or to "bring religion back in" misses the point. In the case of the asylum-seekers, those who cannot or choose not to identify as recognizably religious are simply less likely to be legally protected. These are the kinds of dynamics that we need to pay attention to. This means adjusting our conceptual frames so that we can ask better questions, and provide more sophisticated analyses of contemporary religion and politics.

Some argue that if the theory of International Relations means a constitutive and critical theory, then bringing religion into International Relations is possible, but if the theory of International Relations is an explanatory-empirical theory, the theorizing religion in International Relations is not possible and, in fact, there is not theological positivism

theory in International Relations. What is your opinion?

I do not think it is useful to divide the field up using these categories. My research works on all of these fronts. My recent book "Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion" (Princeton University Press, 2017), for example, disaggregates discourse about religion into three categories: expert religion, official religion, and lived religion. The idea is to break down the monolithic category of religion, and to try to understand religious practices as they intermingle, shape, and are shaped by law, history, and politics. I am working toward a more integrative approach to religion, law, and society, in which religion is seen as always already part of history rather than standing apart from it.

The analytical framework of "Beyond Religious Freedom" illustrates this argument. I distinguish between religion as construed by those who have legal and political power ("official or state religion"); religion as construed by experts who generate knowledge about religion ("expert religion"); and religion as lived and practiced by ordinary people ("lived religion"). Expert religion is religion as defined by those who generate what is known as policy-relevant knowledge about religion. This includes scholars, policy experts, government officials, and religious authorities. When we hear experts (religious or secular) talk about religion today, we often hear it either celebrated as a source of morality and cohesion or feared as a danger to contain. You have probably heard versions of both narratives: good religion versus bad religion. Rather than the privatization of religion, today we hear about the need for governments to support good religion and tame or disrupt bad religion all over the world. The good/bad religion narrative is a powerful form of knowledge about religion; it's a form of expert religion. This is an interesting shift in public discourse that is worth following.

Some scholars such as "Michael Allen Gillespie" in the book "The Theological ➔

Origins of Modernity” believe that modernity was not initially against religion, and in later years, as a result of social, cultural and political conditions, it has led to secularism. So Based on this conception, religion does not conflict with modernity, so can it be said that religion does not conflict with the International Relations theory stemming from modernity?

I do not think there is one thing called “religion” or one thing called “modernity,” and so generalizations like this do not make sense to me. As I mentioned above, religion has never been absent from the practice of international relations, although it is the case that IR theory ignored or refused to deal with the subject for several decades. That has changed now, as discussed in my 2008 book mentioned above.

An example of how religion has always been with us in practice is a program I write about in “Beyond Religious Freedom”. RelHarmony was a US Agency for International Development-supported project to bring interfaith understanding and tolerance to Albania in the 1990s. The aim was to create the social, political and legal conditions in which political and religious ‘extremism,’ as defined by the US and the EU, would wither on the vine. The reality was of course more complex. What does it entail politically and religiously to “engage with top religious leadership?” When officials court those leaders, as they did in this program, the heads of nontraditional religions and unorthodox versions of protected religions are ignored. RelHarmony’s final report acknowledged this, noting that “religious leaders from Albania’s traditional religious groups were supportive of interfaith initiatives, but that their views differed on the question of including members of non-traditional religious groups in RelHarmony activities.”

Religious-outreach programs operate on the questionable assumption that all religions can be treated equally. This masks the power relations involved. The religions of the majority, of the orthodox, of the ruling class, of allies of the United States, the United Nations, corporate interests or some other government or power broker inevitably carry more political weight than others. Less-favored groups are likely to be classified as cults or extremists. The former US Ambassa-

dor for International Religious Freedom, Suzan Johnson Cook spoke about this during workshop attended by US religious leaders and scholars: “There are certain areas where the US government has muscle,” she said. Her chief example: the promotion of foreign religious leaders. How do we square this with our domestic tradition of disestablishment? This is one of the questions I am thinking about now.

Some argue that the current International Relations theory cannot explain some of the current phenomena of international relations and we need a religious theory of International Relations, especially with regard to religious issues. What is your opinion? In general, theorizing Religion in International Relations is feasible?

It is not only feasible but essential. I study how “religion” has a category and set of practices is interpreted to shape projects of law and governance. This has both theoretical and empirical implications—I do not separate the two.

If theorizing Religion in International Relations is possible, can this religious theory in International Relations explain all the unresolved issues and problems?

Certainly not all of them! But we can offer insight into some perduring dilemmas involving the politics of difference in contemporary public life. Let me give two examples.

The first is the legal protection of groups as “religious minorities.” I am interested in the forms of subjectivity, both individual and collective, that are cultivated and reinforced through the law when groups are defined and legally protected as “religious” minorities. The Alevis of Turkey are a fascinating case. They hover at the boundaries of modern distinctions between secular/religious/superstitious as they interact with modern state-building projects. The Alevis as a community and a category were formally constituted as part of the Turkish nation-building project. In taking up their case I sought to understand how ordinary social and religious belonging gets translated, and transformed, through the process of becoming legalized. What happens when we designate groups legally as religious minorities? I argue that adopting religion as a cat-

egory to draw together individuals and communities as corporate bodies that are seen as in need of legal protection to achieve freedom is a risky business. We need to think twice before rushing to create these legal regimes. I develop this argument through a study of two legal constructions of Alevism, by the Turkish state and the European Court of Human Rights. They are premised on differing assumptions about Alevism, but both erase the indeterminacy surrounding Alevism as a lived tradition. They also bolster the role of the state in defining and overseeing Turkish religiosities. My intention in that chapter is to encourage readers to see the inevitability of legal protections for religious minorities in a new light, and to seek out and affirm other possibilities and forms of identity and solidarity.

A second example is the category of “religious violence.” There is a sense that if we talk about religion and politics we are talking either about religious freedom or about religious violence, or both. I am not convinced that these constructs help us understand what is actually going on in the world around us. One problem with talk of religious violence is that when we declare religion or religious difference to be the cause of an act of violence we obscure or submerge a much bigger picture. A lack of religious toleration shoulders the blame for an incident or episode. The explanation for violence becomes: they’re doing this because they are religious and they don’t like other religions. They are religiously intolerant, backward, anti-modern. The minute we adopt this storyline, however, we make ourselves incapable of seeing the broader, often institutionalized, often state-sponsored, often racialized, and always politicized contexts in which violence and discrimination actually occur. Religion is one part of that story. But we need a broader lens to see how religionized, racialized, and nationalist politics become intertwined. An example from my recent book is the current violence against the Rohingya people of Myanmar. I tell a different story about their situation that de-dramatizes the religious element, without ignoring it, while drawing our attention to other factors driving the violence against them. We need to tell more stories like this one.

Interview by Javad Heiranni

PGCC never was effective organization: Shireen Hunter

Shireen Tahmaasb Hunter, a professor of political science at Georgetown University, tells the Tehran Times that "the PGCC was never an effective organization. Certainly, it has been an unequal partnership in the sense that Saudi Arabia has dominated the Organization."

"The PGCC was also created as a response to the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, especially the perceived Iranian threat to the Persian Gulf security," Hunter told Mehr News correspondent.

She added that "now Iraq is practically out of the strategic equation at least for the foreseeable future. Iran no longer poses a viable ideological or security threat for the Gulf Arab states."

Following is the full text of the interview:

The Persian Gulf Cooperation Council's (PGCC) annual summit was held in Riyadh while the Qatari emir and the Sultan of Oman refrained from joining. What are the reasons behind this refusal?

The reluctance of Oman's and Qatar's leaders to attend the PGCC Summit and instead send lower level representation, reflects their differences with Saudi Arabia and their resentment of Riyadh's efforts to dominate the PGCC. Saudi Arabia's current problems following the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi has undermined its position and prestige, thus making it easier for Doha and Muscat to snub the kingdom.

Qatar left OPEC and according to some reports, it might break-up with PGCC. Do you think that Qatar will leave the PGCC?

Qatar's decision to exit OPEC does not necessarily mean that it will leave the PGCC. However, given the divisions within the PGCC and the fact that most PGCC members sided with Saudi Arabia in its dispute with Qatar, it is conceivable that Qatar might leave the organization. However, given continued U.S. support for the PGCC, at least in the short term, such a decision might undermine Qatar's security



as well as its position in confrontation with Saudi Arabia.

The PGCC failed to find a purely internal collective solution to the Qatar crisis. With regard to this failure, how do you see the future of PGCC?

The PGCC was never an effective organization. Certainly, it has been an unequal partnership in the sense that Saudi Arabia has dominated the Organization. The PGCC was also created as a response to the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, especially the perceived Iranian threat to the Persian Gulf security. Now Iraq is practically out of the strategic equation at least for the foreseeable future. Iran no longer poses a viable ideological or security threat for the Gulf Arab states. By contrast, it is the Saudi and Emirati ambitions and behavior that is destabilizing the region. In other words the very raison d'être of the PGCC has disappeared. Therefore, it is no wonder that the PGCC failed to reconcile Qatar's and Saudi Arabia's diverging interests and outlooks.

In case of Qatar's exit from PGCC, is there any possibility of a new alliance between Qatar and Turkey?

In the short term, the PGCC will sur-

vive, although its efficacy will be further undermined. In the long term, much would depend on what happens in Saudi Arabia and in Iran. A change in Saudi attitude in the direction of more cooperation and less bullying of regional actors might revitalize the PGCC. Iran's reintegration into the international community, could even provide an opportunity to transform the PGCC into a more inclusive regional organization, with Iraq and Iran also joining it.

As to a closer Turkish-Qatari alliance, it is not clear what shape such alliance could take. Anything beyond what already exists, especially extensive military cooperation and greater Turkish military presence in the Persian Gulf, would trigger concerns in other regional states, including Iran and Saudi Arabia regarding Turkey's long term goals and ambitions. Greater Turkish military presence in the Persian Gulf could also cause anxieties among European countries. In general bilateral alliances between Persian Gulf states and extra-regional states, including Turkey could be destabilizing. A viable security organization must include all of the Persian Gulf's littoral states. Other states such as Pakistan, Turkey and possibly Egypt could be affiliate members or participate as observers.

Qatar withdrawal from OPEC may increase Iran's production share: Zaccara

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Dr. Luciano Zaccara says Qatar withdraw from OPEC may increase the quota (of power and production) that OPEC may allocate to Iran, which is not in line with the US policy towards Iran.

Qatar will withdraw from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Persian Gulf nation's Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi announced.

The decision to quit the bloc of 15 oil-producing countries that account for a significant percentage of the world's oil production was confirmed by Qatar Petroleum, the state oil company, last Monday.

To know more about the issue we reached out to Dr. Luciano Zaccara, research assistant professor in Qatar University.

Following is the full text of his comments:

What are the reasons behind Qatar's decision to withdraw from OPEC? Is it politically and economically right decision?

Qatar is only producing 600,000 barrels per day, but it is the first exporter of LNG. Economically speaking it will not affect Qatar's income coming from oil export, neither the overall OPEC production, since altogether it is producing 32.5 million barrels daily. At this point it seems logical for Qatar to focus on gas production and marketing, moreover having in mind Doha is hosting the GECF and shares one of the biggest gas fields with Iran, without having any constraints on their oil production from the OPEC cartel.

Is there any relation between Qatar's decision and the Saudi policy in the organization?

The timing of the decision, just few days before the 9th December PGCC Riyadh summit, seems to show the decision is somehow related to the cur-



rent diplomatic rift between the two states and the fact that Qatar's influence in the decision making process of the organization is very limited. Mainly controlled by Saudi Arabia with the required consensus with Iran and Iraq, but also with non-OPEC members such as Russia, remaining within OPEC seems now not very in line with the general foreign policy and economic goals of Qatari government. However, remaining in OPEC did not prove to be harmful for Qatar either.

Any relation between Trump's anti-OPEC policies and Doha decision?

It is clear that Trump is worried about the oil price ramping up, as he tweeted, and that he prefers a united OPEC that can prevent the control of oil prices, but I cannot see that Doha decision has been affected by the US policy on the matter.

How do you see the future of the 60 years old organization?

The OPEC has been very important in some periods of its history, and certainly it will remain as an important production cartel of a very limited energy resource worldwide for the next 30 to 50 years. However, their efficiency in controlling the prices, and making the states members to comply with the established quotas has been very limited in the last 20 years. With

extra-OPEC members being very influential in the short and long term, depending on the success of the shale oil production, the OPEC capacity of having a determining role on oil price will be significantly reduced in the coming decades.

At the present moment which Iran is under US and its regional allies' pressure such as Saudi Arabia and UAE to cut Iran's oil export to zero, will Doha withdrawal from OPEC affect the US goals toward Iran?

Sanctions against Iran so far proved to have a very limited impact neither in the Iranian production nor in the oil price. Qatar withdrawing from OPEC does not mean the country will withdraw from the market either, meaning that probably the oil market will not suffer from neither situations. This is not necessarily harmful for US interest in the region, but it may increase the quota (of power and production) that OPEC may allocate to Iran, which is not in line with the US policy towards Iran.

Will this decision affect China's One road-One belt project?

As far as the price is not going up, China will not suffer economically speaking. Neither from the political point of view, since China has been reluctant of getting dragged in the many regional confrontations that affect the region. The Chinese government has cordial relations with all the governments, including Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and neither the Saudi-Qatari crisis nor the Saudi-Iranian confrontation have forced China to choose sides and to cut ties or reduce imports from any of the three producers. That said, the China project is a long term project that includes many countries and aspects that seems will not be affected by this politically driven decisions that will have very limited economic impact on the oil market nor on the links that China had built with the different state actors along the road-belt.

Political squabbles among OPEC members have weakened its efficacy: Prof. Entessar

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Touching upon the Qatar's reasons to withdraw from OPEC, Prof. Entessar said political squabbles among its members have weakened OPEC's efficacy.

Qatar will withdraw from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Persian Gulf nation's Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi announced.

The decision to quit the bloc of 15 oil-producing countries that account for a significant percentage of the world's oil production was confirmed by Qatar Petroleum, the state oil company, last Monday.

To know more about the issue we reached out to Nader Entessar, Professor Emeritus of Political Science from University of South Alabama.

Here is the full text of his comments:

What are the reasons behind Qatar's decision to withdraw from OPEC? Is it politically and economically right decision?

Qatar's announcement of its intention to withdraw from OPEC took almost everyone, including many seasoned observers of Qatari politics, by surprise. Qatari government stated that it would like to concentrate on its natural gas sector, but this reason alone cannot really explain why the country needed to withdraw from OPEC to do so. Qatar already has a robust natural gas industry and is the leading exporter of liquefied natural gas in the world.

Is there any relation between Qatar's decision and the Saudi policy in the organization?

I think there is an element of truth to this argument. After all, the Saudis have become the single most important dominant voice and player in today's OPEC. Perhaps the Qataris decid-

ed that it did want to remain part of an organization whose policies were driven by their Saudi nemesis. Of course, we have to remember that Qatar is one of the smallest oil producers in OPEC and has never been the organization's driving force.

Any relation between Trump's anti-OPEC policies and Doha decision?

No, I don't think there is any link between Trump's critical comments about OPEC and Doha's decision to withdraw from the organization.

How do you see the future of the 60 years old organization?

Today, one-third of the world's oil production is attributable to three countries: Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United States. Two of these countries are not OPEC members, and Saudi Arabia has been increasingly coordinating its oil policy with these non-OPEC members. So, I don't believe OPEC today has the clout it once had in the global oil markets. OPEC served a useful purpose in its heyday but its glory days are gone now. Of course, it still does have influence but it no longer has the cohesiveness that it once had, and

political squabbles among its members have weakened OPEC's efficacy.

At the present moment which Iran is under the US and its regional allies' pressure such as Saudi Arabia and UAE to cut Iran's oil export to zero, will Doha withdrawal from OPEC affect the US goals toward Iran?

No. Qatar's oil production is not significant compared to other major oil producers, and its withdrawal from OPEC will not affect US policies towards Iran. As I had stated earlier, Qatar's global energy influence is in the natural gas sector and not in OPEC and oil.

What will be the possible reaction of Russia and China to Qatar's withdrawal? Will this decision affect China's One road-One belt project?

Russia is more interested in coordinating its natural gas policies with Qatar than it is in Qatar's oil production. Also, I don't see any changes to China's "Road and Belt" policies as a result of Qatar's announcement to withdraw from OPEC. China's policies in this regard are multifaceted and complex and are not affected Qatar's decision to withdraw from OPEC.



Murder of Khashoggi hardened Congress resistance to nuclear agreement with KSA: Daryl Kimball



Interview by: Javad Heirannia

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington, says "I do not believe the Congress will approve a civil nuclear cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia if it does not meet the "Gold Standard."

He adds that "murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi has hardened resistance in Congress to any nuclear agreement, especially one that would allow for the transfer of sensitive enrichment or reprocessing technology to Saudi Arabia."

Kimball tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview that Saudi Arabia probably will not accept a nuclear agreement with the US like the one US has signed with the UAE.

Following is the full text of the interview:

Saudi Arabia started its research nuclear reactor in Abdulaziz city while it has not reached an agreement with the US on nuclear activities. Some

believe that this is a message from SA to the US that it will advance its nuclear activities even without the US. What do you think of this?

Saudi Arabia has already concluded nuclear cooperation agreements with France, Argentina, South Korea, and Kazakhstan. Some of these states need but do not have authorizations from the United States for the transfer of nuclear services, technology or assistance to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia currently has a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, they have not concluded an Additional Protocol arrangement with the Agency.

The Nov. 6 groundbreaking recently announced by the Saudis does not necessarily mean that this is ground being broken for the two nuclear power reactors which the Kingdom is getting bids on from the US and other countries. To do so, Saudi Arabia needs to conclude its negotiation on a bilateral civil nuclear cooperation agreement with the United States under the terms of the US Atomic Energy Act, which Congress can block if it is not satisfied with the terms of the agreement.

Saudi Arabia insists on having Uranium enrichment and reprocessing while the US wants "Gold Standard" in its agreement with Riyadh which doesn't include enrichment and reprocessing. Based on 123 treaty, will the US finally give up to Riyadh demand?

The US-Saudi negotiations are not going well. US Energy Secretary Rick Perry has been pressured by many members of Congress to ensure that Saudi Arabia agrees not to pursue uranium enrichment technology or plutonium separation technology, also known as the "gold standard." The Saudis are, according to our sources, are steadfastly opposed to any restrictions along these lines and they do not want to give the IAEA inspection authority under the terms of the Additional Protocol.

There have been many statements of concern from Congress this past year, but most recently of interest includes reports of legislation to be introduced by Democratic Rep. Brad Sherman would require a "gold standard," and would also amend the process of approval for civil nuclear cooperation agreements to make it more difficult to pass Congress. See: <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/9/18072660/saudi-arabia-nuclear-deal-congress-123-agreement-sherman>

Furthermore, some members of Congress have called for the US-Saudi negotiations to be suspended altogether. A letter sent to President Trump on Oct. 31 signed by five Republican Senators (Marco Rubio (R-FL), Todd Young (R-IN), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Rand Paul (R-KY) and Dean Heller (R-NV)) <https://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?id=8F7C-FEEC-998A-472C-AD87-C664404C4CD7> and a similar letter by Democratic Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) <https://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senator-markey-calls-for-suspending-all-civil-nuclear-cooperation-with-saudi-arabia> suggest suspending the talks.

In recent weeks, the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi has hard- ➔

ened resistance in Congress to any nuclear agreement, especially one that would allow for the transfer of sensitive enrichment or reprocessing technology to Saudi Arabia.

Will Saudi Arabia accept a nuclear agreement with the US as the one US has signed with UAE?

Probably not. Responsible states should—as the UAE did—pledge not to pursue uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing, and ratify the additional protocol. There is a glut of uranium for nuclear electricity production. Domestic uranium enrichment is not necessary to exploit nuclear energy production. Plutonium is not needed for civilian nuclear purposes and is well-suited for nuclear weapons.

We and many others will oppose any US-Saudi nuclear cooperation agreement that does not include the “Gold Standard” and certain additional non-proliferation safeguards. Our more detailed assessment of the risks and the options is described in this Arms Control Association report from April 2018: <https://www.armscontrol.org/issue-briefs/2018-04/risks-nuclear-cooperation-saudi-arabia-role-congress>
The US knows very well that if it tries

to include firm and serious terms in possible agreement with Saudi Arabia, this may result in Riyadh’s tendency to have nuclear cooperation with Russia and China or South Korea. How will Washington solve this problem?

Even if Saudi Arabia chose to go with a South Korean firm, it would still need consent by the United States for various nuclear technology transfers.

Also, Russia and China may not be appealing partners for Saudi Arabia because US technology has a better record of safety and reliability than what Russia and China have available for export, and another reason the kingdom may not desire Russian systems is that they are the top supplier of nuclear reactors to Iran.

Furthermore, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (which includes Russia and South Korea) has a set of voluntary guidelines that prohibit its member’s states from transferring sensitive uranium enrichment or plutonium reprocessing technology to be transferred to any state in a region of proliferation concern, such as Saudi Arabia.

The US always expresses its concern about the issue of non-proliferation which will be contradictory to US possible agreement with Saudi’s

enrichment. If Trump administration agrees with Saudi demand, will the congress approve it?

I do not believe the Congress will approve a civil nuclear cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia if it does not meet the “Gold Standard.”

Some say that the US will never agree with granting a strategic concession like enrichment to Saudi Arabia that can change the balance of power against Israel. What do you think of this?

The Israelis have been vocal about their concerns regarding an expansion of the Saudi nuclear program, and have raised their concerns multiple times with the US administration. However, Israel realizes their ability to stop the deal is limited, and so have presented to administration their preferred parameters for a deal. For more on that, see <https://www.axios.com/israel-united-states-red-lines-demands-saudi-arabia-nuclear-deal-d010de3e-69ad-4de1-bc5e-0387dd5b91dc.html> While many members of Congress have been very vocal about retaining a 123 agreement that adheres to strong nonproliferation standards, few, if any, have used a balance of power against Israel as a justification for their beliefs.

US new sanctions to impact Iranian nation: Dorsey

Interview by: Javad Heirannia

James M. Dorsey, a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Singapore’s Nanyang Technological University, says the new US sanctions will affect the lives of the Iranian people.

Dorsey also says, “Iran would retain the moral high ground by remaining committed to the JCPOA.”

Following is the text of the interview:

The US has returned all sanctions against Iran. Do you think that the sanctions will meet the US national interest in the long term?

The proof will be in the pudding. In the short term certainly not. However, longer term much will depend on developments in Iran itself.



US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has announced that Washington wants the world-wide payment network to cut off its services to the entities that were affected by the Iran sanctions otherwise SWIFT might be sanctioned as well. Can the US do it?

The US could but it would escalate

disagreements with Europe to accelerate efforts to transact in currencies other than the US dollar.

If Iran cannot export oil or banned from SWIFT, then what that means for the JCPOA? I mean in that case is it rational for Iran to stay in the JCPOA?

Iran would retain the moral high ground by remaining committed to the JCPOA.

Some argue that these new sanctions will not affect the Iranian people. What do you think?

There is no doubt that they will.

Do you think that the mechanism called the “Special Purpose Vehicle” will fulfill Iran’s trade with other countries?

It won’t be perfect but it could help alleviate some of the impact of the US sanctions.

Al-Khalifa regime threatened people to vote in elections: Bahraini cleric



The Director of Bahrainis Seminary in Iranian holy city of Qom Sheikh Abdullah al-Daghigh condemned the recent elections in Bahrain as a farce, saying that the Al-Khalifa regime had threatened the people to vote.

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Daghigh, who previously served as the representative of prominent cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim in Iran, told Mehr News Agency (MNA) correspondent that the Saturday's parliamentary elections in Bahrain was a 'farce' as the Al-Khalifa regime had threatened the people to turn out to vote otherwise they would face big problems living in the country.

He said that the people of Bahrain boycotted the polls because the situation in Bahrain had got worse than ever, adding that the elections would not be real unless the Bahraini authorities reached a real agreement with the people.

"The opposition groups boycotted the elections with the hope of a reaching rule of law and a national reconciliation. But the ruling system seeks to establish a parliament through which

they can implement their plans and programs and carry out all of their actions in the name of the Bahraini people," he said, stressing "the Bahraini opposition and the people of this country will never accept this."

With the regard to human rights situation in his country, Sheikh Abdullah al-Daghigh said "the prisoners in Bahrain are in a terrible condition. Al-Khalifa regime's forces are escalating crackdown on the people.... A former Bahraini MP who had asked a question on boycotting the elections in a tweet on his Twitter account is in jail now. Everyone in the country who speaks out against injustice is put behind bars."

The Bahraini cleric said that some parts of the society turned out to vote in the elections because they were under immense pressures from the authorities.

With regard to the silence of the international community against the Al-Khalifa regime's actions, he said that the international community with the United States at the top are supporting the Saudi kingdom and Al-Khalifa regime and their call for respecting human

rights is just words and no actions as they only care about their own interests.

He said that Al-Khalifa regime is the Western countries' strategic ally and they will not cut their support for it unless their interests requires them to do so.

With respect to attempts by Arab countries, especially Bahrain to normalize relations with Israel, al-Daghigh said "we condemn the process of normalizing relations and the so-called the Deal of the Century... Palestine is our number-one issue. Any country seeking to normalize relations with Israel is a traitor because Israel is an illegitimate government and a cancerous tumor that colonists created in the Arab world.... Anyone who participates in this process will be thrown into the dustbin of history."

He touched upon Iran's role in supporting the resistance movement, saying "Iran deos a lot in support of religious and press freedom. It tries to send the message of our oppressed people to the world, and this is done through television networks and media programs."



EU army won't threaten NATO future: ex-CIA official

Interview by: Javad Heirannia

Professor Paul Pillar, who was CIA intelligence analyst for 28 years, tells the Tehran Times that "today the idea of a European military force clearly is getting a boost from the many frictions between Europe and the Trump administration in the United States."

Pillar says an irony is that European self-sufficiency in defense, as a European military force would embody, would mean Europe assuming more of the burden for its own defense--which is what Donald Trump has been calling for every time he complains about NATO and its members.

Following is the text of the interview:

The idea of forming a joint European army is not a new idea, but in recent days, with the comments of Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel and the reaction of Trump has taken a new dimension. What are the reasons for the progress of this project by countries

such as France and Germany?

The idea is indeed old, dating back to the proposed European Defense Community in the early 1950s--which never was established for reasons largely involving domestic politics in the United Kingdom and France. Today the idea of a European military force clearly is getting a boost from the many frictions between Europe and the Trump administration in the United States. The highly nationalist and narrowly focused policies of Trump have led many Europeans to conclude that they simply cannot rely on the United States for their security.

Speaking to the "Europe 1" radio, French President Emmanuel Macron called for the formation of a real European military to counter Russia's threats and also independence from the USA. In the interview, the French president said: "We have to defend ourselves against Russia, China, and even USA." Why does France now name the United States alongside China and Russia as a threat?

President Macron probably did not mean that he envisioned a US military attack on France or Western Europe. He probably meant there was a need to "defend" against the United States in the sense that the Trump administration's policies and perspectives were causing real danger to European security in other ways.

Trump opposed the plan and in response to Macron's remarks called the formation of this army offensive. Due to Trump's reaction and his renewed appeal to Europeans to give money to NATO, can these disputes threaten NATO's future?

There is no reason NATO's future needs to be threatened by any of this. An irony is that European self-sufficiency in defense, as a European military force would embody, would mean Europe assuming more of the burden for its own defense--which is what Donald Trump has been calling for every time he complains about NATO and its members.

Senior analyst:

US had no choice but to grant Iranian oil buyers waivers

Interview by: Javad Heirannia

A senior Iranian oil and gas market analyst says the current state of oil supply in the market is not comparable with that in the 2011-2012 period where a major producer like Iran could be eliminated from the global oil market or even its supply be halved.

When the list of the anti-Iranian US sanctions was released, the world rightly acknowledged that the oil policy of Trump Administration had failed, and the world was still in need of Iran's oil supplies. Now, Tehran is free to sell oil to eight countries such as Japan, South Korea, India, China, Italy, etc. Why Trump was defeated in its oil policy towards Iran is the topic of an exclusive interview Shana held with Fereydoun Barkeshli, president of Vienna Energy Research Group in Austria and the National Iranian Oil Company's former general manager for OPEC and international affairs, who stresses that "Iran needs to set up an energy strategy roadmap based on its own interests and the full knowledge of the global conditions."

The following is an excerpt from Shana's interview with Mr. Barkeshli.

Why did the US fail in boycotting Iran's oil?

In fact, President Trump's failure in imposing sanctions on Iran's oil exports was clear from the start. Trump, in his personal manner, explicitly said that he would bring Iran's oil exports to zero. From the very beginning, this statement made observers think whether Trump might have backed down on imposing embargos on Iran; inasmuch as market experts know well that every crude oil supply with certain characteristics and technical specifications are suitable for different refineries or petrochemical com-



plexes. Incidentally, given the arrival of shale oil (very light crude) supplies into the market, the need for a kind of relatively heavy crude oil from Iran is unavoidable, and I guess that even some US refineries will need some of Iran's crude oil supplies.

The other point, however, concerns the oil market structure. Of course, it is true that on the demand side, there was a slight decline in the second half of 2018, which is due to a decline in consumption in China; but on the supply side, none of the producers including small ones like Gabon and Angola, or major ones, such as the sheikdoms in the Persian Gulf and North Africa, could even produce OPEC quota allocations. This is a valid report which has been endorsed by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the International Energy Agency in Paris.

By the end of the first half of 2018, Saudi Arabia and Russia increased their production to some extent and began to stockpile oil. The US has also kept stocking crude oil, but the inventories are still below the average of the past five years.

Therefore, the supply situation is not like the years 2011 and 2012, when

a major producer like Iran could be eliminated from the global market, or its exports be halved or even brought to zero. In effect, the market structure, beyond the price trend, imposes its conditions on political decisions.

What is the most important reason for the US to grant waivers to oil buyers?

From the outset, the United States had announced that countries which would reduce their oil purchases from Iran prior to imposition of the sanctions would be granted waivers. As we saw, a number of countries and companies cut their purchase of Iranian oil from a while prior to imposition of the sanctions and, in some instances, some completely cut their oil imports from Iran. In fact, this was a kind of collusion between those countries and the United States so that they would be granted waivers if they supported US policies against Iran. At the same time, Washington intended to assess market conditions without Iranian oil; granting sanction reprieves to eight countries to continue buying oil from Iran shows that the US has had no choice but to back down from its initial stance to bring Iran's oil exports to zero.





How much will oil prices rise after Iran sanctions?

Well, I remember the time when Iraq's Saddam invaded Kuwait in the 1990s which coincided with an OPEC meeting. Reporters woke Zaki Yamani, the then-Minister of Oil (Petroleum) and Mineral Resources of Saudi Arabia, during night and asked him now that Saddam had attacked Kuwait and 4.5 mbd of crude oil had been removed from the market, "what do you think will be the price of crude oil?" Yamani responded it would be \$100 per barrel. I should remind you that at that time, the price of crude oil was \$20 per barrel. Of course, the prices did go up to only \$32 a barrel, but they never reached \$100. What I mean is that the risk of predicting prices in the oil market is high, and it is interesting to note that when experts predict the prices, they will never be reprimanded even when they do not predict the prices correctly. Brent crude is now priced at around \$70 per barrel. Future and geopolitical changes can alter the situation. The difficult and unstable conditions in the Arabian Peninsula may have more significant effects on oil prices.

The Americans are at war with us, but they have taken their warships to Saudi coasts to protect the Saudi regime. Anyhow, by the end of 2018, there can be no expected change in the price of crude oil.

What impact does tapping oil inventories have on the global market?

Withdrawal of oil from strategic reserves is like triggering the alarm for the oil market. If you remember, President Trump announced a while ago that he would tap US strategic oil inventories, which was in fact one of his biggest mistakes and may have been a sign of his frustration. When Henry Kissinger asked NATO and industrial nations in 1974 to build strategic oil inventories, he said in his speech in Paris, "our goal was not to physically use these reserves, but they are made for our enemies to know that they can never impose embargos on us." This announcement by Trump was a perfect illustration of his weakness and fear in light of the decision to impose sanctions on Iran's oil exports.

How long can the US continue its bullying behavior in the world?

President Trump is striding in sever-

al, sometimes overwhelming, fronts, at the same time; pulling out of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and exerting pressure on Mexico, putting pressure on the European Union and weakening NATO, the various economic and political challenges with China, centralization of the already-unstable Middle East as the center of his foreign policy and many other domestic and international policies, have put Trump in a difficult situation. The strategic economic depth of Iran is not comparable to any other country in the Middle East; there are over 20,000 medium-sized and large industrial units in Iran; the technological intelligence capabilities of the Iranians are tremendously high; the widespread presence of Iran's Internet network in the world is ranked seventh. Of course, one of our main weaknesses is in the public relations, which is not capable of presenting the country's capabilities at the required level. When and how the US bullying policies will end is not up to Iran. People choose their leaders as they wish. Our goal is to preserve and regulate our relationships and interests.



Opinion

The sad fate of Europe's leading figure

By Hanif Ghaffari

According to a new poll conducted by IFOP, French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Edouard Philippe's popularity ratings hit new lows as the "yellow vest" protests are getting more and more serious.

The poll's results which were published on Tuesday, indicated that Macron's approval rating fell to 23 percent, down six percentage points on the previous month, while Philippe's fell to 26 percent.

It's to be noted that the "yellow vest" demonstrations were initially held on Nov. 17 in protest to fuel-tax rises. But then it took an anti-Macron color and became a broad movement.

The poll also shows that France 40-year-old president's score now matches the low charted by his socialist predecessor François Hollande in late 2013. Hollande was then widely considered to be the least popular head of state in modern French history.

Protesters condemn Macron of closing his eyes on the rising cost of living in France. During the recent rallies, four people have died and dozens were wounded.

The protests raised at a time when some analysts were speaking of Macron's role in leading Europe! Not long ago, there were talks of Macron becoming Europe's new Angela Merkel, and that he's slowly assuming her role as Europe's leading figure. As Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) fared badly in the September general elections, her status as Europe's leading figure has taken a hit. On the other hand, Emmanuel Macron emerged victorious from the French presidential elections, defeating France's far-right candidate Marine Le Pen and entered the Elysee Palace.

From that time on, Macron had several meetings with European authorities on migration, fixing the euro currency, Europe's defense, taxing digital companies and other issues. This was while his authority was flagging at home.



Attending in Germany's National Remembrance Day for the victims of war and dictatorship, Macron said that the French-German alliance "is invested with this obligation not to allow the world to slide into chaos, and to accompany it on the road of peace."

The picture which the French President was trying to draw at that time is way different from the reality which flaunts in Paris streets. Please use the sharing tools found via the share button at the top or side of articles. Now Macron-haters have seized upon the protests in Paris and are shouting that the French president stands revealed as a massively flawed leader — remote, arrogant and pushing an outdated neoliberal agenda.

Before this, the theory was that if Macron could demonstrate his ability to change France, he would also take decisive steps towards a genuine European economic government, and then a reformed, strengthened EU had the power to push back against the extremists and far-right movements which gathered lots of support over last years. But this theory has failed! Macron's domestic agenda ran into trouble, and as a result his international agenda is failing. This is the story of France's young president.

In the face of recent protests, Macron had no way but to withdraw from his or-

der to increase fuel taxes. It also seems that he should take more appeasing actions to satisfy the demonstrators. Under such circumstances, other reforms that were to be implemented by Macron's government in near future now look much less likely to happen. It will, in turn, prevent the realization of developments that Macron has promised the French citizens, which will subsequently lead to more anger inside the French society.

Now it seems that things are getting a lot worse. Protests and street violence are likely to go on for months, turning the mire even more frightening for both French citizens and their president. The outcome of the existing chaos can be the raise of a far-right or far-left president in France next elections.

Now Macron's dreams to be known as Europe's leading figure are all gone. Indeed, he'd be lucky if an early election doesn't terminate his presence in the Elysee Palace. The "yellow vests" are currently his most terrible nightmare. Macron, who came to power with the slogan of economic development in France and the economic and political leadership of the European Union, has definitely failed to become a strong leader in Europe. Today he's considered a defeated figure in the French economy and politics, rather than Europe's leading figure.

Tel Aviv's 'northern shield' operation's objective in Lebanon border

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

As the Zionists fear of Lebanese Hezbollah's power increases day by day, they make military drills to practice the real battle with the Lebanese resistance's group. On December 4, 2018, Zionists launched an operation dubbed "Northern Shield" to discover the Hezbollah cross-border tunnels.

On Tuesday, the Chief of General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces Gadi Eizenkot called off his trip to Germany due to Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's special meeting with the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Brussels, the Zionist media reported.

In fact, Netanyahu, who was scared of the Palestinian resistance after his defeat, has taken measures to restore his domestic image, especially since charges were brought against him about corruption and bribery.

With the start of the Zionists military movements on their border with Lebanon, the Lebanese army and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, were on standby. The Lebanese army issued a statement to the military movements of the Zionist regime near the occupied Palestinian border with Lebanon.

Lebanese army statement to Tel Aviv's military movement

The statement reads, "the situation on the Lebanese side is calm and stable, and it is being scrutinized, despite the fact that Israel launched Northern Shield operation over the alleged Hezbollah's tunnels in southern Lebanon on Tuesday morning. The Lebanese army forces are stationed in the region for normal border missions, in cooperation with UN forces in Lebanon, to prevent any tensions or instability in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese army is ready to deal with any possible incidents."

On the recent Israel's movement, Ali Rammal, mayor of Adaisseh village in southern Lebanon said, "the situation of the settlements and border areas is quite natural despite the operation of



the Israeli army on the other side of the border. Lebanese army forces and UNIFIL troops are on standby in Lebanon. Israel's threats do not change anything, especially since residents of the border village are always threatened anyways."

UNIFIL also released a statement that said, "the overall situation in UNIFIL's area of operation remains calm and peace-keeping forces have boosted their patrols along the blue line alongside the Lebanese armed forces in order to maintain stability and prevent any movement that could lead to tension. UNIFIL's commander, Dick Cole, is in close contact with all the Lebanese armed forces and the Israeli army, and wants all sides to maintain calm. UNIFIL watches the blue line around the clock and reports all violations of Security Council resolution 1701."

Lebanese President Michel Aoun also contacted Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon, Saad al-Hariri, the Lebanese Prime Minister, and Joseph Aoun commander-in-chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces, and during these calls, he assessed the situation with regard to the scope of the Zionist operations and requested that the Lebanese security forces closely monitor the situation.

Meanwhile, John Bolton, the US National Security Advisor defended the Zionist regime movement against the

Hezbollah cross-border tunnels.

The White House supports the illegitimate child of the Middle East

Bolton in a tweet message wrote, "US strongly supports Israel's right to defend its sovereignty, calls on Hezbollah to refrain from escalation and violence and to stop digging tunnels into Israel's soil.

He also asked Iran and its allies to stop taking provocative actions in the region that could threaten Israel.

Exploring the objectives of Zionist's operation on Lebanon boarder

By looking at the Zionist military moves, we realize that Israeli's operations are not a new issue or surprising change in terms of military and security affairs, because the Zionist military actions in the lines of confrontation on the border of the occupied territories have not stopped at all. In Gaza, Israel is always sought to uncover Hezbollah tunnels, and in southern Syria, the movements of this regime have not stopped in the occupied the Golan Heights.

But what's significant is Netanyahu's domestic situation, which is in deep crisis, due to the change of battle rule as his minister of defense' resignation, and on the other hand because of the Netanyahu and his wife's corruption scandal.

In addition, in the regional and inter- ➔

national affairs, the imposition of the US sanctions against Iran has failed.

The Zionist regime is aware of the dangerous changes in the conflict rules with the resistance group in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, and it knows too well that in the case of war, the three resistance groups will unite against their common enemy.

Hezbollah has always proclaimed readiness to confront any Zionist adventure and has a strategic capability that can complete the deterrence equation and deter attacks against the enemy. Hezbollah has also recently revealed strategic objectives within the occupied Palestine that has the situation under their nose.

Expert's view

Rafat Badawi, Lebanese analyst told Elnashra, "the outcry of the Zionist enemy is a shout of fear and horror, and propaganda and media devices are not important for misleading public opinion on either side. What the Zionist regime was doing on December 4 in a search of northern occupied Palestine, claiming the discovery of a tunnel linked to Lebanon was to mislead the public inside Israel and misguide the IDF from crises. Israel is not able and won't dare to confront Hezbollah. Since the Zionist regime has always been the cause of instability in the region, it is unlikely that the green light of the US will bring about moves aimed at disturbing the situation."

Given the strength of the Lebanese resistance, Hezbollah's Secretary General Seyed Hassan Nasrallah has given a definite answer, "It is unlikely that the Zionists carry out a stupid act, because they know they will have to face devastating consequences."

FATF member countries, the very center of money laundering

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

While Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif asks for joining FATF (The Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering), it is obvious that the member countries of this organization are already actively engaged in money laundering, Mehr news agency reported.

The foreign minister claimed that large amounts of money are laundered in Iran, but according to the official sources, 90 percent of European banks and Canada are systematically engaged in money laundering.

He further claimed that the opponents of joining FATF are against financial transparency and benefit from money laundering profits which amount to billions and joining FATF would prevent such transactions.

It seems that the term "financial transparency" has turned into a pretext for FATF defenders to silence critics and justify their claims.

The important question here is "is FATF a reliable organization in combating money laundering and do its members have total financial transparency?"

By looking at the background of FATF member countries, it is revealed that money laundering is still closely interwoven with their financial and banking systems and this international organization has failed to prevent money laundering.

Money laundering statistics in FATF member countries

Money laundering happens when money resulted from illegal activities enter the clean financial or banking system of a country; this phenomenon has now turned into a major problem in international financial and banking systems.

European Union member countries and North American countries are the major members of FATF, so it is expected that these countries comply perfectly with rules set against money laundering; however, in recent months, several international news agencies have reported of these countries' extensive engagement in money laundering.

According to Wall Street Journal, two



third of Canadian banks don't follow standards that combat money laundering.

According to the Week, at least 18 of the 20 biggest banks in Europe, including five UK institutions, have been fined for offences relating to money laundering over the last decade.

Donald Toon, director of prosperity at the National Crime Agency, admitted that money laundering in the UK was "a very big problem" and estimated that the amount of money laundered each year has now risen to a staggering £150 billion.

According to Reuters, Estonia, the European Union member country of just 1.3 million people, has been at the center of a money-laundering scandal involving Danske Bank, handled more than \$1 trillion in cross-border flows between 2008 and 2017.

However, FATF had not put Estonia on the list of high-risk countries in terms of financial transactions; and the country claimed that it cooperated with Council of Europe Select Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures (MONEYVAL).

According to these statistics, it seems that "fighting money laundering" is merely used as a cover-up to control some countries and holding them back in doing business with each other.

It seems that our Foreign Minister should look for systematic money laundering in the European Union and other world markets and publicize them. Contrary to his statement, there has never been money laundering with such magnitude in Iran and the existing money laundering activities can be controlled with complete enforcement of local laws against money laundering and following check laws as well as implementing the local scheme for tax on investment income.

West return to 2007: Europe's anger over incompetent politicians

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

The anger and discontent of European citizens over European politicians is increasing day by day. While more than ten years have passed since the economic crisis in Europe, we are still witnessing austerity plans in this block.

France's recent round of demonstrations isn't limited to this country anymore, and we're now witnessing demonstrations in countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands.

Many European citizens spent the years between 2007 and 2012 with the hope that the austerity policies would affect the devastated economy of United Europe and the Eurozone. That's why they tried to cooperate with their own governments (which were mainly the far-right and social-democratic administrations). However, after 2012, we witnessed the end of European citizens' patience towards politicians like Merkel.

Part of this dissatisfaction revealed itself in cases such as the European Parliamentary Elections in 2014, where more than 100 right extremists managed to enter the European Parliament. Now, in 2018, we are witnessing the continuation of the economic crisis in Europe in the security, social and political spheres.

It's not without a reason that the number of nationalist groups' supporters has increased in the mentioned areas. The security crisis is strongly felt in today's Europe. Common policies which were adopted by European authorities couldn't improve the security crisis within the Schengen borders and other European borders.

During 2015 and 2016 (and somehow in 2017), the Immigration and security crises in Europe caused other issues such as the economic crisis to become marginalized. But now it's shadowed over the whole of Europe. Under such circumstances, the main question of European citizens is that what was



the impact of austerity policies adopted for ten years inside the EU borders?

They can clearly see that the adoption of such policies has had no effects on improving their economic conditions. The existing economic crisis continues to be felt in everyday life of European citizens. The rise of the signs of the financial crisis in Europe, and the decline in credit ratings, and the growth of unemployment in countries that continue to be affected by the financial crisis have created many social crises in Europe.

The protests that are taking place today in France and other European countries are not merely an objection to rising fuel prices or tax increases for low-income groups. It is a protest against the unstable economic structure of the European Union and the Eurozone.

Emmanuel Macron, the young French president, as an economist, promised to redefine the existing economic structure in the Eurozone, with regard to the current economic crisis. However, Macron himself has now become the symbol of crisis in Europe!

The economic crisis in European countries doesn't limit to austerity policies! The external debt crisis in the Eu-

ropean countries should also be added to the economic and credit crises in the West. The crisis is heavily extended in countries like Italy, causing a lot of trouble for other member states of the Eurozone. The economic cohesion of the Eurozone member states has fueled this trend.

In any case, it seems that the patience of European citizens has come to an end. As noted, according to the predictions, these crises were to be resolved before 2012, and economic growth symbols was to be replaced by austerity symbols. But at the moment, there is little indication of economic growth in European countries, and austerity policies remain strong.

Finally, it should be concluded that the European countries, especially the EU member states, have no choice but to "self-destruct" their economic foundations and replace them with new patterns. If European officials continue to insist on existing methods and economic models, they will be doomed to failure in the near future. In this case, nationalist groups and far-right extremists will dominate Europe's political, economic, social and security equations, and this would definitely be a terrible nightmare for those like Merkel and Macron.

Will Clinton have the EU's support?

By: Hanif Ghaffari

In her recent remarks, the US defeated candidate in the 2016 presidential elections pointed to the current challenges in Europe and tried to take a stance accordingly! Hillary Clinton, who spoke briefly of her possible presence in the 2020 presidential elections before, warned against the raise of nationalism in Europe, while praising Angela Merkel's policies toward immigrants.

"Europe must get a handle on immigration to combat a growing threat from rightwing populists", Hillary Clinton has said, calling on the European authorities to send out a stronger signal showing they are "not going to be able to continue to provide refuge and support".

"I admire the very generous and compassionate approaches that were taken particularly by leaders like Angela Merkel, but I think it is fair to say Europe has done its part and must send a very clear message – 'we are not going to be able to continue provide refuge and support' – because if we don't deal with the migration issue it will continue to roil the body politic," Clinton added.

Clinton criticized US President Donald Trump for his support for the Brexit. Brexit, described by Clinton as the biggest act of national economic self-harm in modern history, "was largely about immigration" she said. Hillary Clinton also warned against Brexit consequences during her speech.

This is while Donald Trump has long been supporting the UK's exit from the European Union, and has even advised other European countries to follow London's decision to leave the EU. Regarding Hillary Clinton's remarks, there are some points that should be taken into consideration:

Firstly, Hillary Clinton's main goal of praising Europe is to implicitly appeal for a renewed European political support for her in the upcoming presidential election. We can remember that in the 2016 presidential elections, the leaders of the three European countries of Germany, France, and the UK, supported Clinton against Trump.



Hillary Clinton is now trying to regain this support. It should not be forgotten that Hillary Clinton will face a tough in-party competition for the 2020 presidential elections. This is while some Democrat leaders are no longer willing to support Hillary Clinton against her rivals as before.

The second point is about Hillary Clinton's role in creating the immigration crisis inside Europe and in the international system. In 2013, the former US Secretary of State has played an important role in the establishment of ISIS and other Takfiri and terrorist groups in West Asia. The United States' indirect financial and arms support for the terrorist and Takfiri groups reached its climax during Hillary Clinton's presence in the US Department of State.

Under such circumstances, the former foreign Secretary of State is one of the main agents in creating terror and insecurity in West Asia and North Africa. We all know that one of the main reasons for the immigration crisis in Europe is the insecurity raised in the Middle-East as a result of the American officials' intervention!

Many residents of the Wes-Asian and North African countries, due to the on-

going security crises, and because of the continuous presence of terrorist groups that have been fueled by the United States and its European partners, were forced to immigrate to Western countries. In such a situation, Hillary Clinton speaks as if she has basically had nothing to do with creating this crisis in the West!

The final point is that Hillary Clinton has twice been a candidate in the US presidential elections held in 2008 and 2016, and she was defeated in both. Hence, many Democrat voters prefer to support a second candidate during the 2020 presidential elections. Clinton, however, seems to be willing to re-appear in the next electoral competitions through the lobbies of her husband Bill Clinton, and other remarkable Democrat figures such as Al Gore and Madeleine Albright.

At any rate, the polls' results indicate that Hillary Clinton doesn't have a chance to win the next US presidential elections. According to recent polls conducted in the United States, people like Elizabeth Warren, Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders and even John Kerry have more chances to win the next elections compared to Hillary Clinton, a fact that Clinton doesn't want to accept!



France's unrestful days with Macron

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

French President Emmanuel Macron is going through hard times. On the one hand, Macron's popularity with the French citizens has drastically fallen during recent months, and the continuation of public protests in different cities of France has created a difficult situation for the young French president.

Under such circumstances, many analysts of the French affairs believe that Macron is not going to have a better fate than Francois Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, and if he's not removed from power before 2022, he doesn't have a chance to win in the next presidential election. Anyway, the "yellow vests" have severely disturbed the French president's dreams.

It should not be forgotten that in 2017, Macron came to power with the slogan of economic development in France and the economic and political leadership of the European Union. However, the French president has failed to become a strong leader in Europe. Today he's considered a defeated figure in the French economy and politics.

The polls conducted in France indi-

cate that Macron's popularity has fallen by 25% over the last months. Today, the French president is striving to resist the opposition groups in his country which are basically against his policies. These opponents are mostly members of the nationalist movement of France, along with conservative and socialist activists!

The fact is that in 2021, Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, will step down from power. Many analysts believe Merkel's successor won't be able to influence the European equations the way she could, at least not in the near future. On the other hand, regarding the Brexit, British authorities can't play an important role as the leader of the United Europe.

Under such circumstances, the French see themselves as undisputed leaders of Europe (after 2021). Therefore, Macron's political and social opponents are determined not to let him regain power in the next elections. Moreover, in 2017, French citizens practically turned their back on their country's two traditional parties, namely, socialists and conservatives.

Under such circumstances, Marine Le Pen and French nationalists are hopeful about the next year European Parliament elections. They hope that by winning these elections, they can take

an important step in defeating Macron in France's next presidential elections. It is not unreasonable that some analysts consider far-right extremists behind the recent protests in this country.

Undoubtedly, recent protests in France will not be the last round of protests against the administration of Emmanuel Macron. These protests will continue until 2022 (The time for France next presidential elections). Without a doubt, the French protests and the political fate of Emmanuel Macron will also affect the equations of the united Europe, making this block and the Eurozone even more vulnerable. In such a situation, it's not exactly clear that what would be the European leaders' final decision and policy towards France's ongoing protests.

It should be noted that France protests occurred just at a time when Europe was more vulnerable than any time before, due to the London's exit from the EU. This has motivated the opposition groups inside the European countries for departing the European Union and the Eurozone, which consequently resulted in the intensification of nationalism through the Green Continent, an issue that has raised deep concerns among European officials.

US propaganda war against Iran doomed to failure



By: Syed Zafar Mehdi

At a time when the Trump administration is facing backlash at home over its military support for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and disgraceful defeat in Afghanistan after 18 years of war, spin doctors in Washington are looking for convenient scapegoats to escape accountability.

Last week, five human rights watchdog bodies issued a terse statement, saying the US will bear shared responsibility for what may be the largest humanitarian catastrophe in decades if it doesn't end support for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Ironically, Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi's brutal murder has brought the spotlight on Saudi regime's war crimes in Yemen.

In Afghanistan, the US imposed war, which has stretched into its 18th year now, has turned out to be an exercise in futility. Even the top-notch US officials have admitted defeat there, thereby emboldening terrorist groups like Taliban and ISIS to up the ante.

Amidst this hullabaloo, the 'astute' advisers of Trump have come up with an innovative 'idea' to escape culpability for Yemen and Afghanistan. Only that this idea doesn't seem to work.

A few days ago, Pentagon unveiled what it called "new evidence of Iran's ongoing missile proliferation", claiming that Tehran's support of Houthi rebels in Yemen has "deepened" and it has been pro-

viding "materiel support" to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

A select group of journalists were invited for a briefing in Washington by Brian Hook, US special representative for Iran. Hook began by saying that the US deeply valued its "partnership with the UAE, Bahrain and Israel". That is how the agenda was set for the briefing.

UAE is an integral part of the Saudi-led alliance that has wreaked havoc in Yemen, with the US support. Bahrain, where Al-Khalifa regime has been committing horrendous war crimes, is home to the American Fifth Fleet. Israel, a key US ally, has been illegally occupying the Palestinian territories and brutalizing native Palestinians.

After the initial round of lavish praise for these three regimes, with terrible human rights record, Hook spoke about the imaginary 'dangers' posed by Iran's 'dangerous proliferation of missiles across the Middle East'. The agenda was clear: to spread misinformation against the Islamic Republic, which dares to say 'no' to the 'Big Satan' and all its allies, including these three regimes.

He conveniently forgot that his country's commitment under Article VI of Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to work towards total disarmament has turned out to be hogwash. He forgot that US ally Israel has refused to open its nuclear facilities for UN inspections and refused to adhere with the resolution regarding non-proliferation.

Displaying pieces of what he said were 'Iranian weapons supplied to militants in Yemen and Afghanistan', a tried-and-test-

ed ploy to intimidate Iran, Hook accused the Houthis' of 'reckless use of advanced weapons provided by Iran'.

He didn't mention the billion dollar arms deal between the US and Saudi Arabia, the same arms being used to slaughter Yemenis. He didn't talk about the blockade of aid supplies triggering world's worst humanitarian crisis with thousands of deaths over the past three years and more than 22 million people in need of assistance.

Iran, he said, has 'no legitimate interest' in Yemen, other than to 'expand its sphere of influence and to create a Shia corridor of control'. So, what interest does the Saudi regime have in Yemen and what interest does the US government have in supplying arms to Riyadh.

Pertinently, the US State Department had admitted in leaked cables that Houthis were not Iran's proxy and they received neither funding nor weapons from Iran. That's what happens when you don't do your homework well. Or maybe, ignorance is bliss.

He went on to accuse Iran of arming the Taliban, the same militant group that was on CIA's payroll once. The same militant group that has been holding 'secret parleys' with the US officials in Qatar. The same militant group the US wants to keep alive to justify its occupation of the war-torn country.

Taliban spokesperson punctured his claim saying the militant group has weapons depots spread in various parts of Afghanistan. He said the US government was just seeking to deflect global attention from its failures in Afghanistan by leveling such unfounded allegations.

As a reminder, on the afternoon of Oct. 7, 2001, when the US and its allies started the deadly air raid in Afghanistan, Rumsfeld said the objective of the 'campaign' was to decimate the Taliban and al Qaeda hideouts in the country. As of today, the war has completed 17 years, consumed thousands of lives, and cost US taxpayers more than \$150 billion. All this without achieving the stated 'objective'.

And it's not Iran supplying weapons to the Taliban. It is the United States. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), a US government watchdog body, in a report last year detailed the horrible job Pentagon does at keeping weapons that eventually end up in terrorist hands. And some of the weapons are from Soviet war days when Americans and Taliban were fighting together. Hook perhaps needs lessons in history.

Kornet missile wins over Netanyahu's cabinet

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict last week has had a huge impact on the Zionist regime's security and in its politics and media. Most of the Hebrew media, in their analysis, has noted that Israel's deterrence may have been damaged, for one thing.

The damage began when the Zionists sent in a Special Forces team which botched its planned operations in Khan Yunis, in the south of Gaza. A brief conflict ensued with Palestinian resistance fighters and this led to hundreds of home-made missiles being launched into Israel. The so-called "Iron Dome" proved to be porous.

Zvi Fogel, a former head of the IDF Southern Command told Maariv: "The security situation in which Israel is insulting, and not seen since the October 1973 war. It seems that politicians do not pay attention to the future of Israel and are engaged in political games. And even Benjamin Netanyahu gives us the story of an unacceptable illusion."

"After the recent clash with Hamas, we removed David's star and the blue

color from the Israeli flag, leaving only white in the sign of surrender. We have completely lost the deterrent power and Hamas has succeeded in achieving deterrence against Israel. We are in a state of ineffective security that we have not witnessed since 1973," he added, and also said that Israel had become relatively powerless and without an operational agenda. He suggested that Israel should target Hamas leaders, houses, cars, and their families, and put them in deep fear and force them to live underground.

Referring to this latest Middle East development, he said that the Middle East sees new and stronger enemies like Hezbollah in the north and Hamas in southern Israel. Israel fought against three Arab countries in the war of June 1967 and defeated all, but today, he said, Israel cannot apparently end the battle with Hamas.

Zionist TV network 2 also reported that the regime suffered a painful lesson from the failure of the Special Forces at Khan Yunis.

Yoav Limor, a military expert and security analyst for the Israeli newspaper Al-Youm, said: "We spent developments

began with a cease-fire in Gaza, and then the strategic mistake of sophisticated security operations continued to make matters worse. And then the exchange of allegations led to a dangerous military tension that ultimately led to the resignation of the Israeli Defense minister Avigdor Lieberman, and possibly the announcement of a new Israeli election."

He added: "The winner was Hamas in last week's developments. Hamas inflicted more damage than it received with its heavy rocket attacks around Gaza."

The failed Israeli operation allowed Hamas to launch nearly 500 missile attacks on Israel. It even knocked out an Israeli bus with a missile. The Resistance succeeded in turning the blockade into a crisis for the Israelis.

Analysis by the Zionists, especially the regime's troops, showed dismay at the apparent relative helplessness of the Tel Aviv authorities. Now, given the failed operation, there are political consequences for Netanyahu ahead similar to those which befell Ehud Olmert failures in Lebanon years ago, and Hamas is not nearly as powerful as Hezbollah.



Democrats vs. Trump: The dispute is intensified



By: Hanif Ghaffari

The mid-term elections in the United States ended with the majority of Republicans in the Senate, and Democrats' victory in the House of Representatives. Democrats in the House of Representatives are now preparing themselves to confront Trump and challenge his position at the White House, as they seem to be disappointed with the resistance of the Senate to Trump and his friends.

Describing the political sphere ruling over the US House of Representatives, the Washington Post writes: "Democrats took control of the House on Tuesday night, a victory that will transform a Republican-controlled chamber that supported and protected President Trump into a legislative body ready to challenge and investigate him."

The Democrats intend to quickly start with a legislative package of anti-corruption measures aimed at strengthening ethics laws, protecting voter rights and cracking down on campaign finance abuses.

Washington reports: "Tomorrow will be a new day in America," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) declared from the Democratic Party headquar-

ters in Washington. "It's about restoring the Constitution's checks and balances to the Trump administration. It's about stopping the GOP and [Senate Majority Leader] Mitch McConnell's assaults on Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, and the health care of 130 million Americans living with preexisting medical conditions."

In another report, the Washington Post focused on the angry stances some of the new representatives of the House took in facing the US President; "Energized by their success in last week's midterms and courting potential primary voters outraged by the actions of the Trump administration, virtually every Democrat considering a White House run is talking about fighting in one form or another — and trying to prove he or she is prepared for the match... Some, like Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, have taken aggressive stances that suggest a willingness to take on Trump directly."

It's to be noted that on election night, Warren said that Trump and his "corrupt friends" took the past two years "building a wall of anger and division and resentment." In her remarks, she pointed to the "fight" ahead more than two dozen times.

The Democrats are also planning to

investigate Donald Trump's administration, and their potential targets include Russian interference, tax returns, money paid to individuals to keep them silent over the president's moral corruption, security clearances, etc. The Washington Post wrote accordingly; "Democrats are likely to launch investigations into numerous aspects of the Trump administration, from its ties to Russia to the president's tax returns, as well as to step up oversight into Trump's executive actions on immigration, the environment, and other regulations."

Gerry Connolly, the Democrat Representative said; "Obviously the country gave us the mandate to provide some check and balance on the executive that that has been sorely missing these last two years, and that involves rigorous oversight and accountability." He added; "This is not a time for holding back or being less than vigorous."

Evidences suggest that in the coming weeks, the first phase of disputes between the House of Representatives and the White House will start. Democrats in the House of Representatives have threatened that they don't let the White House be indifferent to them. By this, they're referring to issues such as the GDP management which can disturb the activity of the government.



Report

Where borders divide, music unites: Poland celebrates national day in Iran with music

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

The Polish Embassy in Tehran celebrated the centenary of Poland regaining independence with a concert of classical music on Sat. in Vahdat Hall, welcoming diplomatic figures with various nationalities as well as the Iranian music lover community to a few hours of sharing common sentiments.

"Perhaps one of the greatest means to achieve global peace and harmony is cultural exchange. It opens up the vistas of human understanding and further expands our universal consciousness. Let us raise ourselves from the narrow perspective of being a citizen of a particular country to global citizenship that is the greatest demand of modern world." These are the words of Indian author-poet Preeth Nambiar in his poetry collection, 'The Voyage To Eternity', in praise of cultural relations as means to bridge the gap among all nations.

The sentiment behind these words seems to have resonated well with the Polish embassy in Tehran, which decided to do something different this year for the celebration of Poland's national day. Instead of the diplomatic norm to celebrate a country's national day by holding a formal, exclusive reception at the embassy for a specific guest list, the Polish embassy decided to reach out to a wider audience, that would include Iranian public, and bring them together at a cultural venue instead of a diplomatic site, and surround them by notes of music and harmony instead of diplomatic chatter. And indeed, what strikes me the most about such a decision is how the inherent patriotic nature of a country's independence day is set aside for a more inclusive approach, a warm embrace of another country's culture, a celebration, not of one country's exclusive existence with its distinctive features and borders, but of all the common values and sentiments that bring nations together, that gifts them a chance to experience a strong sense of oneness in a holistic way



that only music can manage.

For this reason, the Centenary of Poland Regaining Independence was celebrated with a concert of classical music on Saturday night in Vahdat Hall – one of Iran's most distinguished cultural institutions in downtown Tehran.

The event was attended by representatives of Iranian cultural institutions, ambassadors, attaches and other figures from diplomatic community, Polish expatriates living in Iran, and of course some Iranian music lovers, all gathered together to listen to Polish and Iranian music performed by young Iranian and Polish musicians in what the chargé d'affaires at Polish embassy in Tehran, Mr. Wojciech Unolt, described in his opening speech as the "best way to express the community of our values and sentiments."

Mr. Unolt opened the event by discussing the significance of Poland's national day (November 11) as the day the country regained its independence in 1918 after having resisted foreign dominion for more than a century.

Although "Poland was erased from the political map of Europe," the chargé d'affaires made a good point of reminding the gathering that the country always "remained part of its human and cultural landscape." He maintained that while Fryderyk Chopin did not see free Poland in his lifetime, but with his music, he built a monument of Polish, and universal, culture.

The concert was performed by Nilper Orchestra, founded in 2004 for performing contemporary classical music. The first part consisted of a four-movement piece by Ahmad Pejman (1937), an Iranian classical composer notable for his operatic and symphonic works, followed by 'Three Pieces in Old Style' (1963) composed by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, a Polish composer of contemporary classical music, and 'Orawa' (1986) by Wojciech Kilar (1932-2013), a Polish composer of music for more than 130 motion pictures. This part was conducted by Nilper's principal conductor, Navid Gohari (1984), who is also the founder of the Contemporary Music Circle of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

Part II was the highlight of the performance: Fryderyk Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in e minor Op. 11, under the baton of guest conductor Martyna Kosecka and accompanied by one of the most outstanding Polish pianists of his generation, Tomasz Zając (1994). Ms. Kosecka, who is praised for her neo-expressionist compositional soundscapes in music, was phenomenal on the stage, and the ensemble of Iranian musicians followed the demonstrations of her metrical rhythm with perfect ease and precision.

The night was concluded by a soulful solo piano performed under the expert fingers of Tomasz Zając, and the ensemble were escorted off the stage with a long, standing ovation.

Poland to celebrate centenary of regaining independence by classical concert in Tehran

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Nilper Orchestra will stage a classical concert on Nov. 17, partly sponsored by the Polish Embassy in Tehran, in celebration of the centenary of Poland regaining its independence.

2018 marks the the centenary of the state of Poland regaining its independence. The Chargé d'affaires at Polish Embassy in Tehran, Mr. Wojciech Unolt, put special emphasis on the word 'regaining' during a press conference held on the occasion at Vahdat Hall, a performing arts complex in downtown Tehran, on November 11.

Vahdat Hall was hosting the presser since the arts complex has been chosen as the venue for a major classical concert to be jointly performed by Iranian and Polish musicians in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Poland regaining its sovereignty (11 Nov. 1918).

The Polish chargé d'affaires was joined by executive director of Nilper Orchestra, Ehsan Tarokh, artistic director and principle conductor of Nilper Orchestra, Navid Gohari, and Polish musician and guest conductor Martyna Kosecka, who in turn gave a brief introduction on the joint classical concert scheduled for November 17.

Talking about the significance of Nov. 11 for Polish people, a day celebrated around the world as the Armistice Day – a day that ended the First World War – Mr. Unolt said that for Poles, the National Day is not the independence day, but rather the 'regaining' of independence.

"The polish independent state was born more than 1,000 years ago," he said. "And for several centuries, it was one of the biggest states in Europe. In the beginning of 19th century, however, Poland disappeared from the political map of Europe."

He added that this period during which Poland did not exist as a political entity corresponds more or less to the Qajar dynasty which ruled Persia from 1794 to 1925.

For more than 100 years, Poles had

been under foreign dominion in their country, he said, adding that independence finally came only at the end of First World War.

While it is the diplomatic norm to celebrate a country's national day by holding a formal reception at the embassy for a specific guest-list including the authorities of the host country, as well as friends and colleagues, this year, Poland has decided to commemorate the event with another goal in mind: to make the occasion an opportunity for Iranian people to get to know the Polish culture a little better.

"It seemed to us that with Iranian public listening together to Polish and Iranian music executed jointly by Iranian and Polish musicians in Tehran would be a far better way to celebrate the centenary of Poland's independence," said Mr. Unolt.

A cultural interaction through the medium of music indeed sounds like a good idea to bring the focus on what matters the most: the commonalities.

Music is a universal language, Mr. Unolt touched upon this very well-known fact, which was even proven by a study at Harvard University that underlined that "our shared psychology produces fundamental patterns in song that transcend our profound cultural differences."

The Polish envoy maintained that the main idea behind the concert was so that the people of both nations could easily

communicate with one another through the medium of music; "by listening to the music produced by musicians of both countries, the audience can feel and experience how close we are to one another, and how many values and sentiments we share," he added.

"Our hope is that this concert will contribute not only to make Polish history better known to Iranian public but also to share common values and sentiments," he stressed.

The concert, partly sponsored by the Polish Embassy in Tehran, will be performed by Nilper – a privately-owned orchestra founded in 2006 with a focus on performing both classical and contemporary music.

The event, slated for November 17, will be held in two parts: the first part will be performed under the baton of Iranian conductor Navid Gohari, and the second part will be conducted by Polish pianist, composer and conductor Martyna Kosecka.

Kosecka is no stranger to the Iranian classical music scene, as well as the Persian language. In 2013, together with Iranian composer Idin Samimi Mofakham, she co-founded Spectro Centre for New Music, specializing in giving workshops in area of modern music and organizing concerts. Their intensive efforts helped to run the 1st International Contemporary Music Festival in Tehran.



The short film appeal; a roundup of 35th Tehran Intl. Short Film Festival

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

A successful short film in Iran, which can appeal to the not-so-easily impressed taste of Iranian audience, seems to be built around a 'punchline', which serves as a figurative punch to the gut. If there's no punchline, then technique needs to come to the rescue; otherwise, the audience is left wondering about the whole point of the film.

"The most important cinematic event in Iran, and without exaggeration, the most significant international film fes-

tival in the Middle East," these are the words used by Director of 35th Tehran International Short Film Festival, Sadegh Mousavi, to describe the Iranian short film event currently underway at Mellat Cineplex in an upscale Tehran neighborhood.

With 34 successful editions already in the bag, the festival is noteworthy enough in terms of experience and volume of screened films and total number of audience and participating filmmakers from all around the world. But is the appeal of 'short film' able to over-

shadow the popularity of long features where famous, money-making film stars engage in lengthy dialogues and dramatic actions, and their stories become so important, so gripping, that the audience would sacrifice nearly two hours of their time and a big chunk of their savings just to see how it all ends? After all, there is simply not enough time in a short film to develop a full story, and the director and cast are not usually famous enough to act as in impetus to grab the audience's attention.

Despite this, the short film industry is booming because making short films is cheap. It can also serve as an easy way to gain experience as a filmmaker and see whether you are cut out for bigger projects. On the other hand, the audience may have started to grow an appetite for short films, if the high number of people tuning in to watch 30-minute something TV shows is any indication. The growing trend of short film enthusiasts is especially evident in Iran, perhaps thanks to the many international appearances (a formidable figure of 2,000 international events) and won awards (370 awards, according to the festival director), that put short films in the spotlight. A case in point is 'Retouch', directed by Kaveh Mazaheri, in which a startling look into the seemingly ordinary life of a young couple shocks the audience into bouts of disbelieving laughter and awed expression. The 20-minute film already has a Wikipedia page, and has made it into nearly 200 film festivals across the world, raking in awards as best short film and best screenplay.

The powerful presence of Iranian shorts in the international cinematic scene makes it all the more urgent to give special attention to the short film industry in Iran. As of now, the short films have just recently found a way into the Iranian movie theaters (mainly Tehran, and a number of major cities), presented in a package of five or six, during a particular season. On the other hand, Tehran Short Film Festival has still retained its free-of-charge policy, which →



makes for a good incentive for bringing in a huge number of audience and introducing them to the charm and power of short films, but it also makes no money to further support the short film industry.

Mousavi, who is also the managing director of Iranian Youth Cinema Society (IYCS) – the organizer of TISFF, goes so far as to describe short film as the “backbone of Iranian cinema”, adding that Iran’s cultural and artistic cinema is guided by short films.

He also said that the festival offers the “best perspective on Iranian short films situation to the world.”

For the most part, it seems to me, that Iranian shorts lend themselves to dark themes of tragedy and intense conflict that don’t necessarily resolve with a happy ending. A successful short film in Iran, which can appeal to the not-so-easily impressed taste of Iranian audience, seems to be built around a ‘punchline’, which – true to its name – serves as a figurative punch to the gut, leaving the audience gasping for breath at the moment of truth. If there is no punchline, the audience may be left wondering about the whole point of a short film.

For this reason, perhaps, the lines outside the movie theaters that

screened Iranian shorts were longer than the lines for foreign films. I watched some 20 foreign short films in the TISFF’s international section, and I wondered on more than 10 occasions about the point of the story: a daughter goes missing and the mother walks the streets at night in search of her. She finds out a girl’s body has been retrieved from the river, and the film fades out with the mother sitting on a hard plastic chair in a morgue, waiting to identify the body. Although the plot incorporates the elements of tragedy which are all-too-familiar with the Iranian film industry, it fails to deliver that punchline that was supposed to make a point. The film leaves you strangely dissatisfied as the credits roll.

If the story lacks a punchline, technique needs to come to the rescue. A number of short films at the international section had made good use of special and eye-catching techniques, which made you forgive the film for its unoriginal story.

Four days since the 35th TISFF kicked off in the capital, and the enthusiasm and love for watching more and more short films have not died down. According to the festival director, approximate-

ly 5,100 films had been submitted this year, mostly from France and the US. He said the festival’s panel in charge of selecting the lineup was especially interested in films that moved beyond what’s perceived as “ordinary”, and as such, only 64 films made it into the international section.

With a lineup of over 100 films, 40 foreign guests, 20 specific sessions on cinema, and an international short film market launched for the very first time, the 35th Tehran International Short Film Festival was a successful attempt at bringing back the focus of the filmmaking industry on a genre that is, regrettably, overshadowed by big silver screen productions, and allowing the audience to witness the artists’ play with various cinematic styles and creative experiments in a stimulating environment.

The festival’s main competition grants a total of \$13,000 to films in Best Fiction, Best Documentary, Best Animation, Best Experimental, and Video Art categories, and the Grand Prix for the best film of the main competition receives \$5,000 in cash prize.

Presided over by Sadegh Mousavi, the 35th Tehran International Short Film Festival is underway in the Iranian capital from 9-13 November 2018.





News in Vision



Tabriz drowned in fog



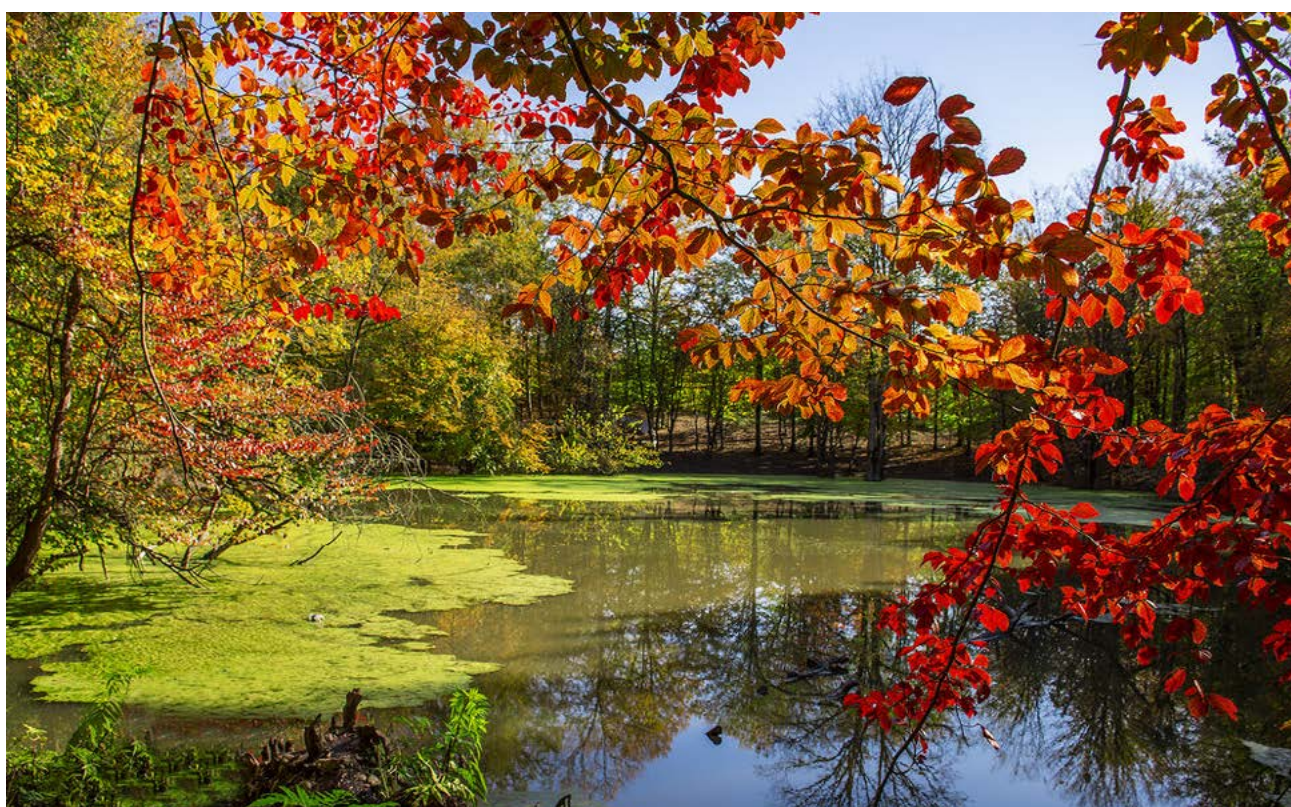
Yalda Night

Yalda Night



18th Doha Forum

**Beautiful
sceneries of
late autumn in
Mazandaran**





**Domestically-manufactured
Sahand destroyer**

Ghadir-class submarines



9th Iran Airshow



Intl. horseback archery championship in Shiraz



Leader meets with Iranian medalist of 2018 Asian Para Games



**Leader received Iraqi
President Barham Salih**



**Iran, UK FMs
meet in Tehran**



9th Iran Airshow