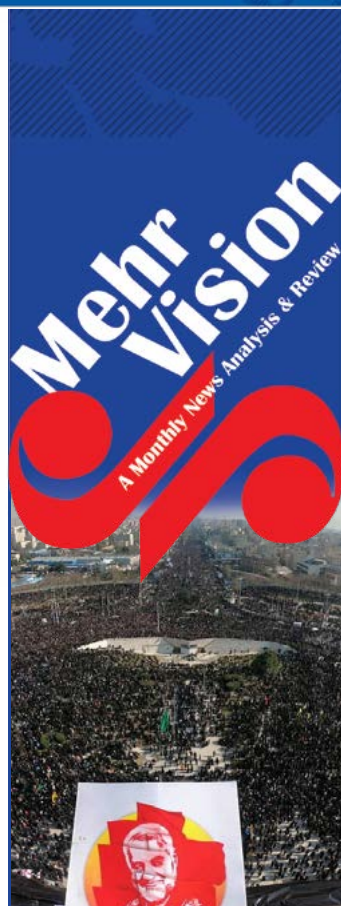


Martyr Soleimani foiled US plots in West Asia, hence his assassination:

Iran's Leader





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Military operations won't suffice; US corrupting presence in region must end: Leader



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei addressed the nation live on TV on January 8, hours after the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) targeted the US airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq after launching a wave of attacks to retaliate the US assassination of IRGC Quds Force commander, Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani.

During the meeting, the Leader praised the character and role of Gen. Qasem Soleimani in having foiled the US plots in the West Asian region, saying "the US plot for Palestine was to keep them at a weakened state, but martyr Soleimani helped Palestinians to stand strong and resist."

"The US plots for Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon were all foiled by this great martyr. The US wanted for Iraq to be nothing more than dairy cattle, but Hajj Qasem helped this expansive front [against the US]."

"For Lebanon, the US intends to deprive the country of Hezbollah, but Hezbollah has been becoming stronger by the day."

Talking about Iran's retaliation for the US assassination of

IRGC Quds Force commander Lt. Gen. Soleimani, the Leader said "our revenge was a different matter, which was carried out last night," referring to IRGC missile strikes on the US airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq.

"What is important in addition to retaliation is that military operations do not suffice. It is important to end the US corrupting presence in the region," the Leader stressed.

"Americans are insisting on bringing corruption and destruction into our dear Iran. Talks of sitting down at the negotiating table is a preface to interventions, which must end. Regional nations do not accept the US presence and its meddling measures," he added.

"The US enmity toward Iran is not temporary; it's inherent. It is a 'gross mistake' to think if we took a step back and compromised, the US would stop its enmity," he stressed.

The Leader then praised the Iranian Parliament's motion designating the Pentagon and all subsidiaries terrorist following the US assassination of Lieutenant General Soleimani. He also praised the Iraqi Parliament's resolution requiring the government to order the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.

Turkish politician:

Story of Soleimani's role in resisting US regional designs should come out in future

Interview by Payman Yazdani

General Qasem Soleimani who was martyred by a US airstrike ordered by President Donald Trump at Baghdad International Airport on Friday, was hailed as a charismatic brave hero in Iran and beloved by the troops. Once, Iran's leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called him a "living martyr".



Soleimani devoted his life to defend Iran's national interest in the region so he is considered as a national hero for Iranian people regardless of their different political and religious tendencies.

Many believe that Soleimani was not only a national hero for Iranian people but also he was a person who played a significant role in defeating ISIL which is a real threat for the region and even for Europe, Caucasus and the central Asia. He also had a great role in confronting the US regional policy and plans aiming at redesigning the map of countries in the Middle East.

To know more about Soleimani and his role in foiling the US orchestrated plots for the region we reached out to Dr. Osman Faruk Logoglu, a senior member of Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP).

Logoglu said, "The assassination of General Qasem Soleimani has been a fatal mistake on the part of President Trump. It will certainly draw a calculated response from Iran, one that will be specially timed and executed in line with a well-prepared plan. That much is clear. What is not so clear is whether the USA will retaliate in return, an action that will certainly escalate the tension. An all-out war between Iran and the USA is unlikely, yet things can get easily out of control. The assassination will serve to unite the Iranian people

and deepen the will to resist American sanctions. Equally importantly, It will exacerbate the tensions already besetting the region and further reduce the chances of reaching solutions to the problems in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Libya, including a peace settlement between Israel and Palestine."

He added, "General Soleimani has been at the forefront of the struggle between Iran and the USA. The story of what specific role he may have played in resisting American designs in the region should come out in the near future.

Iran is an experienced state with a tradition of effective diplomacy. This is the time to avoid a broadening of the conflict with Washington. And Iran will act with greater wisdom to deter America from making further mistakes."

The martyrdom that would lead to a real "Islamic Awakening"

By: Ali Rajabi

Less than a decade ago, people of Arab countries began to protest against their dictators to achieve justice and freedom also named "Arab Spring". This moral path took a detour and lost its right way. It was the US effort to mislead the people by creating some terrorist groups including ISIL, AL_NOSRAH and ETC.

Donald Trump, the current president of the US, condemned Barack Obama for the creation of ISIL. (Time; August 11, 2016). ISIL and other terrorist groups like Al-Nosrah and Al-Qaeda had committed many violent crimes against people in Iraq, Syria, Lybia, Lebanon and even Iran for five years (Independent 4 December 2019).

On the other hand, the Resistance

Front, led by Gen. Soleimani was trying to fight with ISIL. After several years, the Resistance Front in cooperation with the Iraqi troops (Hashd-Alshaabi), Syrian military, and local people could defeat terrorist groups and bring peace to the region.

But Trump's foolish command for attacking Gen. Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Al-Mohandes, could clear the real face of the US current governors and made the Middle East people rethink about this old question: What the hell the US is doing here in the Middle East? There is a proverb in the middle east that says "your enemy's enemy is your friend" so when people see that the US assassinated their enemy's enemy (Gen. Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Al-Mohandes) they



could simply realize that the US is a friend of ISIL.

This is the truth that mentioned by other countries like Russia as well. Russian Defense Ministry recently tweeted: Under the direct leadership of Gen. Qasem Soleimani resistance against ISIL # AL-Qaeda was organized in Syria & Iraq long before "Int'l coalition" led by US.

The important point that can be considered now is that can we expect another "Arab Spring" amid this chaos in the Middle East without the US troops?

Soleimani played a pivotal role in combating terror movements: prof. Adib Moghaddam

Interview by Payman Yazdani

General Qasem Soleimani who was martyred by a US airstrike ordered by President Donald Trump at Baghdad International Airport on Friday, was hailed as a charismatic brave hero in Iran and beloved by the troops. Once, Iran's leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called him a "living martyr".

Soleimani devoted his life to defend Iran's national interest in the region so he is considered as a national hero for Iranian people regardless of their different political and religious tendencies.

Many believe that Soleimani was not only a national hero for Iranian people but also he was a person who played a significant role in defeating ISIL which is a real threat for the region and even for Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. He also had a great role in confronting the US regional policy and plans aiming at redesigning the map of countries in the Middle East.

Following his martyrdom, we discussed the role of General Soleimani in tackling the US and Saudi backed ISIL threat in the region with Professor Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute.

Adib-Moghaddam said, "General Soleimani became the nodal point of a web of movements that oppose the presence of the US military in their respective countries and are united in their efforts to upset the foreign policy preferences of the Israeli right-wing. More crucially, General Soleimani played a pivotal role in combatting terror movements such as Daesh, both in terms of military strategy and ideological outreach.



Whereas the role of the United States and other regional actors such as Saudi Arabia has been ambiguous, Iran has had a clear interest in eradicating al-Qaeda/Daesh, etc."

He added, "Soleimani's legacy as a soldier is rooted in this principled leadership in the war against Daesh next to his involvement in the liberation of Khorramshahr during the Iran-Iraq war. As such, he represents a historical synthesis between the modern politics of Iran and Iraq in particular, and especially after 2003, that is at a time when US foreign policy caused the chaos, human tragedy, and ensuing civil war, that almost divided historic Mesopotamia into separate entities. With his death, the highly emotive narrative space carved out by the movements tied into the resistance narrative stands reinvigorated and is likely to accelerate the end of US hegemony in West Asia."

General Soleimani was a brilliant strategist: Entessar

Nader Entessar, Professor Emeritus of Political Science from the University of South Alabama, lauded the capabilities and services of General Soleimani.

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

"General Soleimani was the most significant geostrategic figure in post-monarchical Iran. He was a consummate professional who selflessly devoted



his life to defend Iran and its national interests in the region. He was a brilliant strategist whose understanding of the US regional goals was unmatched among Iranians," said the professor.

Chairman of the London Energy Club told MNA:

US assassinates Soleimani to have more room for involvement in region

Interview by Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

General Qasem Soleimani who was martyred by a US airstrike ordered by President Donald Trump at Baghdad International Airport on Friday, was hailed as a charismatic brave hero in Iran and beloved by the troops. Once, Iran's leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called him a "living martyr".

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To know more insight about the is-



sue, we have reached out to Mehmet Ogutcu, Chairman of the London Energy Club.

Ogutcu said, "As we know, Iran has in the past collaborated with the US in fighting ISIS and Al Qaida across Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan as it also fits Tehran's strategic objectives. Rafsanjani revealed such support from Iran."

"In particular, Tehran supported Kurdish peshmerga in resisting the domination of ISIS in northern Iraq. General Qasem Soleiman was also the one who persuaded Putin to come to the rescue of Esad In Damascus," he added.

"However, there was also a significant divergence of interests with the US in certain other regions including the Persian Gulf, Israel, and Central Asia, where it turned into a zero-sum game. Iran and Turkey remain the strongholds in the region preventing any redrawing of geopolitical and energy maps, as declared by the US military establishment," he noted.

Ogutcu went on to say, "General Qasem Soleimani was in charge of wide-ranging covert military and intelligence operations, most recently in Iraq, advancing Iran's geopolitical and military clout since 1998. The US wanted to remove him so that the Iranian influence and operations in the region could be dealt a severe blow, curtailed and more room would be made for greater US involvement. It is likely that we will see the tit-for-tat escalation of further conflict across the region in the aftermath of this assassination which hurt Iran's national pride and which will create the conflict to spread."

In the next step of revenge Saudi Arabia should be punished

By: Payman Yazdani

Some of the nondemocratic reactionary kingdoms of the Persian Gulf region particularly the Saudi Arabia in order to survive after Islamic Awakening (Arab Spring) have been following destructive regional policies that not only is devastating the region and inflicting heavy damages to the interest of people of the region but also threatening the security and stability of the neighboring regions such as Europe.

Another strategy which these nondemocratic states have taken to guarantee their survival is following the US and the Israeli regime's policy in the region in order to pave the way for the disintegration of the region in line with the US "Greater Middle East" plan. In fact, reactionary regimes such as Saudi Arabia and UAE are key tools and puppets in the hands of the

US and Israel which are sponsoring the US-orchestrated regional plots financially and ideologically.



Everybody is aware of the Saudi and some other reactionary Arab states' destructive measures in the region especially against Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and other states in the Middle East and Africa. Saudi Arabia and UAE have been aiding ISIL and other terrorist separatist groups in northern Syrian and Iraq.

Definitely the assassination of Lt. General Qasem Soleimani in Iraq who challenged the US plots for the region and devoted his life to combating US and Saudi created terrorist groups in the region has been carried out with the intelligence cooperation of these reactionary regimes.

The assassination of Soleimani is a clear violation of international law and norms because he was targeted in the soil of the sovereign state of Iraq in a terrorist attack not on the

battlefield and above all, he was an Iranian official recognized by Iran's constitution.

Following the criminal act of the US, Iran's Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed "hard revenge awaiting the US". Iranian security and military officials later announced that the revenge will be "tough but not hasty and not limited to military one".

According to what Iranian officials vowed the first step of revenge became operational last night when the Iraqi parliament passed the bill obligating the country's government to expel US troops from Iraq.

I think in the next step to curtail the continuation of the US and Israeli plots in the region, their regional mercenaries and proxies particularly Saudi Arabia should pay the price and be punished.

Haj Qasem's message to Trump: I am Alive & more Powerful

Haj Qasem Soleimani and his comrade Mahdi al-Mohandes were assassinated by an airstrike directly ordered by the US President Trump in Baghdad, three days ago.

Keeping in mind the simultaneity of assassination of the two major figures, let's see what Trump is picking up just few days after his naïve decision.

First, Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, previously called simply as 'Haj Qasem', is now 'Martyr Soleimani'. The second title is much more prominent, popular and in consequence more powerful and effective.

Haj Qasem, as the commander of Quds Force for over 20 years, was playing his major role out of Iran's borders. Common people in Iran know him for his participation in the 8-year-old imposed war with Iraq besides his undeniable and great role in fighting and uprooting the ISIL in recent years. He is also admired for his simple life style.

The point is Haj Qasem, well-known among his comrades for his kindness, humbleness and braveness, was not interested in making interviews or showing off his achievements. His reputation is to be definitely ever-increasing after his martyrdom. The hero will become a legend. A legend with its own specific culture which will expand and cannot be assassinated.

In Iran, Haj Qasem's martyrdom, despite the recent unrest and draconian US sanctions and tough economic conditions,



reshuffled the nation to stand side by side announcing hatred for Trump's anti-Iranian policies and more for himself. The 'unprecedented' funeral ceremonies of the great Iranian soldier and his comrades held in various cities across the country. Millions of people flooded mourning into streets for Haj Qasem's sake, which proved Iranians' anger towards enemies besides their loyalty and thankfulness for the ones who serve the nation and seek to preserve Iran's dignity.

In hid funeral processions, flags of Iran, Iraq, Hashd Al-Shaabi and Lebanon's Hezbollah could be seen hoisted, which can be translated into a new era for the region. Martyrdom of Haj Qasem, regathered all the regional elements and requirements of the resistance axis. It created a new wave of resistance in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and etc., which is more anti-US than before. The wave regards Americans as main source of regional insecurity and is decisive to expel them.

Sunday's Iraqi Parliament's ratifica-

tion, Hassan Nasrallah's remarks and the fifth step of Iran in reducing JCPOA obligations go hand in hand transmitting a big message to the US and its allies.

Martyr Soleimani has been on US streets after his assassination. Anti-war protesters rallied in several American states, New York, Washington and etc., opposing Trump's measure and his decision to send thousands more troops to the Middle East.

People showed respect to Martyr Soleimani in various cities across the world, too.

International experts have warned of ISIL return after assassination of Lit. Gen. Soleimani, while they condemn the US measure as a terrorist act which can be sued legally in international courts.

For sure, Trump has undermined the consequences of his decision for assassination of Lit. General Soleimani. The US President had blacklisted Haj Qasem as a terrorist, someone similar to Bin Laden and Al-Baqqadi, which he never was.

Trump had no image of what Haj Qasem can do even after his martyrdom. Trump has immaturely ignited a fire which can entrap the US in a predicament in the Middle East. The issue, besides his other warmongering policies, have brought the US into a disrepute.

The US President considered Haj Qasem as an individual but "when you break a huge mirror it changes into million pieces with the same quality," this is the big lesson for the US. Now, it must wait for the #Hard_Revenge.

Hegemons' media warfare to complete the Soleimani assassination project

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

The media outlets of the hegemonic system have made certain efforts to ignore Major General Qassem Soleimani's attempt in confronting terrorism, naming him only an Iranian commander and downplaying his international and special role in the fight against terrorism.

In a desperate attempt, the media outlets are trying to portray the martyrdom of General Soleimani as an irreparable loss for Iran, while the history of resistance has shown that with the martyrdom of each commander, the next ones have led the resistance movement stronger, more enthusiastically and determinedly.

They are trying to imply that the U.S. terrorist act was a precautionary move against terrorism, while all the oppressed people around the world see Soleimani as a great commander who fought against terrorism, which based on lots of evidence was created by the U.S. in the region.

The wave of numerous regional and international reactions to the martyrdom of General Soleimani, coupled with hatred and condemnation of the assassination, reveal global anger at the terrorist nature of the United States. The global anger drives from Iran's genuine work in establishing security in face of the U.S. behavior in creating insecurity in the world.

Another point is that the statements by Iraqi officials condemning the assassination reveal that the claims over the coordination between the Iraqi government and the U.S. in committing this horrific crime are fake. In the past few hours, U.S.-affiliated media outlets, in a coordinated and preplanned move, have been seeking to create a dispute between the Iranian and Iraqi nations. They intend to introduce Baghdad as a partner in the crime, while the remarks by the Iraqi officials proved the opposite of this claim and foiled the enemy's plot.

The undeniable crime by the U.S. in fact amounted to "state terrorism". The Americans have proven that they are the leading element of state terrorism at regional and international levels. In the meanwhile, the deafening silence of international organizations, including the UN, in the face of U.S. state terrorism is completely unacceptable.

The regional countries have adopted the same approach as international organizations toward American terrorism and policies, choosing to remain silent. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are among the countries that have not even said a word regarding the assassination, while some other parties, such as the Zionist regime, have clearly and publicly declared their support for the U.S. state terrorism.

The main goal behind this terrible crime is to under-



mine the resistance movement not only in Iraq and Iran but throughout the region. However, the path of the martyred general and other martyrs of the resistance movement including the PMU will continue. This is what the Leader of the Islamic Revolution insisted in his condolence message on Soleimani's martyrdom.

Commander Soleimani is in fact a thought that will continue to exist. The thought of the martyred commander and the resistance movement will not fade away. General Soleimani himself followed the path of the great commanders during the Sacred Defense (defense against Saddam Hussein's war against Iran in the 1980s).

The cycle is still at work, and other sincere commanders are continuing Soleimani's path.

History has shown that the assassination of great figures by state terrorism of the U.S. and Zionist regime will not disrupt Iran's advance in various fields. For example, it can be obviously seen that with the martyrdom of Major General Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, the country's missile industry progressed and with the martyrdom of nuclear scientists like Majid Shahriari and Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, the Iranian nuclear technology continued to develop. On this basis, the process of combating terrorism by the Islamic Republic will be strengthened following Soleimani's martyrdom.

In addition, it should be noted that the U.S. terrorism has targeted not only the Islamic Republic of Iran but the resistance movement in general. Martyring Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes, the second-in-command of the PMU, and several other members of his resistance group confirm the claim. The Leader of the Islamic Revolution also emphasized, "The criminals who have the blood of General Soleimani and other martyrs of the attack on their hands must await hard revenge".

US can't evade consequences of assassinating Gen. Soleimani: Rouhani

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said the United States will definitely face the consequences of its terroristic measure in assassinating the top Iranian commander, Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani.

"The US cannot evade the consequences its terroristic measures and will definitely receive the response of its wicked crime," Rouhani said during a cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

The president described the Americans' martyring of the brave general and his companions in Iraq against all international regulations and norms and an international terrorism and war crime, saying, "The Americans failed to achieve their goals by this criminal act."

There is no doubt that the US had goals by this act, he said, adding, "They were after sowing discord inside Iran, creating fear and division in the region and distance between the Iraqi government and people and the Iranian government and people, as well as affecting regional dynamics and efforts that were directed towards full liberation of the region from terrorists, which they failed to do so."

"Of course, it is possible that this action was because of the internal issues and complications in the US and the White House, which will yield opposite results with the awareness of the American people and the public opinions of the world," he said.

Rouhani also praised the greatness of the Iranian people, saying, "People's huge presence at the funeral of Martyr Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani was a miracle."

He added, "I cannot recall anything like this in the history," referring to the fact that people around the world, including Yemen, Syria and Kashmir took to the streets to commemorate these martyrs.

"In fact, this unprecedented presence was the manifestation of people's respect for these martyrs' moral values and lofty causes," Rouhani added.



"Martyr Soleimani was not just a military commander, but also a capable politician and strategist in negotiating different groups and even high-ranking authorities in the region and outside," he said.

Rouhani also said that the Americans made a grave historic mistake by this criminal act, saying, "If General Soleimani wished, he could terminate hundreds of American commanders in different parts of the region, but he was one of the most moderate military commanders in the region and the world."

He said, "General Soleimani used to act very carefully and never went to any extreme," adding that he had been making efforts in the path of jihad in the past 40 years with increasing spirit.

"General Soleimani's goal was protecting security of Iran, stability of the region, the freedom of Quds and protecting the security of the region by regional states," he said.

Rouhani noted, "The Americans thought that they burned Gen. Soleimani's body with missile, but they burned the hearts of millions of free people in the world and it is natural that America cannot distance itself from this catastrophe and it will definitely get a response

for this crime."

Referring to decisive responses that the US has received until today, the president said, "The first response was the big presence of the people of Iraq in Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf, Basra and other cities of this country."

"This proved that the people of Iran and Iraq are on the same route and jihadist commanders of these two nations are on the same path," said Rouhani.

He also described the Iraqi parliament's ruling of expelling American troops from the country as another response to the US' criminal act, saying, "The Parliament of Iraq courageously paved the path for the permanent expelling of US from Iraq and the region in the future."

"America thought that they could create division in Iraq by killing General Soleimani, but on the contrary, Iraq became more united and stood against the US unanimously," he added.

"If the dear General Soleimani tried months and years to make the region this much united against the US, he would not achieve this goal," he said.

Rouhani added, "This was a major historical event that made our people more united and integrated than ever."

Politics



Trump aims at diverting public opinion by unveiling 'Deal of Century': expert



US officials, especially President Donald Trump, have ramped up efforts in recent days to unveil the so-called 'Deal of the Century' in a bid to eliminate the Palestinian issue. Trump has also invited the Israeli regime's Prime Minister to attend the ceremony.

An adviser to Lebanese president and former MP Amal Abou Zeid noted that "There is no doubt that Trump's effort to resolve the Palestinian issue is based on the principle of non-recognition of the right of the Palestinian nation to have an independent state; a right recognized by international assemblies and resolutions."

"Inviting Netanyahu to Washington is nothing more than Trump's attempt to affect the US Senate regarding what is going on against him. The Senate is currently trying to remove Donald Trump from power, and Trump is calling for Netanyahu to seriously gain the support of the Jewish-Zionist lobby in the United States," he added.

He further pointed to Lebanon's stance on the Deal of the Century, noting that "speaking about the aforementioned Deal by the US is a direct threat against Lebanon's situation because creating an alternative country for Palestinian refugees raises fear and concern which are not in line with Lebanon's interest. It will deny the Palestinian refugees their right of returning to their homeland."

Highlighting the stance of Arab states on the Deal, Amal Abou Zeid said that "US insistence on making the deal stems from the fact that they are well aware of the turbulent situation in the Arab world and know that these countries are politically fragmented and suffering from many economic, political and social problems so that we do not see a comprehensive and unified stance of the Arab States regarding the Palestinian's right of having their own country."

Referring to Jordan's stance on Deal of the Century, the Advisor maintained that "it is crystal clear that the Deal may cause some changes in the geographical map of Jordan as some Palestinian territories will be joined to this country and will be under its control which can threaten Jordan in the future."

"The success of the deal and its implementation by the US require the approval of Palestinian National Authority as well as Palestinian people and their political representatives. This is the key to implement the deal because if the sides involved do not agree on the terms and do everything in their power to oppose it and protect their rights, the Deal will not be successful", he added.

"The Palestinian people will use all legitimate means such as Resistance to counter these suspicious efforts", the adviser emphasized.

The US thirst for oil



By: Mohammad Ghaderi

The Americans, including Trump, claim that they are standing next to the nations and defend human rights and the freedom of nations.

Their claims of human rights are hypocritically shown in their unprecedented sanctions in history on the Iranian people.

A look at some Americans' behavior reveals other facts.

1. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed hope that the Libyan oil facilities be reopened due to the Berlin conference held to examine Libya's crisis.

2. The US Embassy in Libya also called for the resumption of oil exports from Libya.

3. After the meeting with Jens Stoltenberg in London, at the beginning of the NATO summit, Trump said, "We have total control of the oil. And, frankly, we had a lot of support from a lot of different people. But, right now, the only soldiers we have, essentially, in that area, are the soldiers keeping the oil. So we have the oil, and we can do with the oil what we want".

4. Russian Defense Ministry released satellite images of some areas in Syria on October 26, 2019, showing oil was actively extracted and massively exported for processing outside Syria, under the reliable protection of US troops. Despite US sanctions against Syria, Washington makes about \$30 million a month through international banditry.

5. "Iraq has the second-largest oil fields in the world. \$15 trillion dollar worth of oil second Saudi Arabia. I said very simply that if it is me, we take the oil," Trump said in an interview

with the American TV news channel Fox News.

6. Trump has also repeatedly stressed that the US support for Arab countries is due to their oil resources.

This kind of stance shows that what has been carried out by the US in Iraq, Libya and Syria was not for the sake of democracy and justice in these countries, but for their oil. Therefore, the US current concern over the situation of these countries is not about violence against people but about oil reserves.

Such a behavior can be regarded as Western democracy and human rights, which are based on oil interests. The behavior indicates that the only way of establishing peace and security in the world, especially in Africa and West Asia, is to end Western domination, which is pursuing its colonial interests.

The US behavior represents American economic terrorism that merely seeks to plunder the wealth of other states.

The difference between Iran's view, which insists on the authority of nations over their countries' fate and resources, with that of the US, which is seeking to plunder and colonize other countries, has led the nations in the world trust Iran and distrust the United States.

In fact, it is the result of the Iranian sincere behavior and American dishonesty that caused the regional states to hold great funeral ceremonies for Major General Qassem Soleimani, while asking for the US pullout from the region.

The behaviors by the US reveal the legitimacy of Iran's stance on the need to expel aggressors from the region as the main solution for establishing peace and security that will be achieved by the nations' vigilance.



MEHR NEWSAGENCY
Photo: Leila Ghodrattollahi Fard

MP elaborated on details of plan for Iran's withdrawal from NPT

Chairman of Parliament Committee for Pre-Emptive Measures against the United States on Wed. elaborated on the plan to move out of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if Iran's nuclear case is sent to the UN Security Council.

In an open session of the Parliament on January 28, the plan of Iran's withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was put at the agenda of members of the Parliament, MP Amirhossein Ghazizadeh told Mehr News Agency.

Once this plan is approved by members of the Parliament, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is duty-bound to revoke implementation of all requirements as stipulated in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) immediately in order to take countermeasure against violation of US and European commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) if Iran's nuclear case is sent to the UN Security Council (UNSC). The plan also forces the government to cut cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, he said.

Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) are entitled to submit a comprehensive report with regards to the measures taken on this law to the Iranian Parliament within one week after Iran's nuclear program is referred to the UN Security Council, Ghazizadeh Hashemi highlighted.

After Britain, France, and Germany, collectively known as the E3, formally triggered a dispute settlement mecha-

nism featured in the JCPOA, a step that could lead to the restoration of UN sanctions against the Islamic Republic, Iran warned that Tehran would leave the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if EU took Iran's nuclear case to UN Security Council.

"The European's statement is in no way legal. If the Europeans take another step, Iran will consider leaving the NPT according to a letter by the Iranian president in May 2019," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had said.

According to the EU's foreign policy chief, the European Union will discuss ways to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) and the possibility of triggering a dispute mechanism featured in it.

"There is agreement that more time is needed due to the complexity of the issues involved. The timeline is therefore extended," said Josep Borrell said in a statement on Friday.

"All agreed to pursue expert-level discussions addressing the concerns regarding nuclear implementation, as well as the wider impacts of the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA (the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and its re-imposition of sanctions."

In a recent interview with Der Spiegel, FM Zarif stressed that the decision not to build a bomb does not derive from NPT. "It derives from our own moral and strategic convictions," he said, adding that the Leader of Islamic Revolution has issued a fatwa prohibiting weapons of mass destruction.

UK envoy's behavior inconsistent with international norms: MP



The British ambassador took part in a small gathering that was against the Islamic Republic; he took photos of the gathering and tried to organize it; this is inconsistent with the international norms and regulations," Abolfazl Hassanbeigi, a member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, told Mehr News Agency.

Noting that Macaire has "interfered in the internal affairs of our country and acted against the security protocols by participating in an illegal gathering", Hassanbeigi urged the Foreign Ministry to expel the UK ambassador to prevent the repetition and normalization of such behavior in the future.

Macaire was briefly detained during a protest in front of Amir Kabir University in downtown Tehran on January 11 when he was organizing and provoking people angry at the government's handling of the aftermaths of a plane crash earlier this week.

He was summoned to the Iranian Foreign Ministry on Sunday for "unconventional behavior" inconsistent with his diplomatic status and being present in an "illegal gathering".

How Guterres suppressed the Western media warfare against Iran

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

On the morning of September 14, 2019, the Saudi Aramco oil facilities in Buqayq and Khurais in eastern Saudi Arabia were attacked by the Yemeni army and Popular Resistance Committees, which cut the country's oil production by %50.



From the earliest moments of the event, Saudi Arabia and the U.S., which were in great shock, held Iran responsible for the attacks without any evidence.

However, the Yemeni army spokesman took the responsibility for the attacks and stated that they were launched in response to the Saudi invasion into Yemen. The spokesman also rejected statements by U.S. and Saudi officials about Iranian or Iraqi intervention in the event.

Saudi Arabia and the U.S. were pursuing several considerable goals by accusing the Islamic Republic of Iran of involving in the attacks, including:

1. Derailing the public opinion from the main reason triggering the event, which was the continuing aggression of the Saudi-UAE coalition into Yemen and the daily killing of Yemeni women and children.
2. Refusing to accept that the Yemeni army has dealt such heavy blow since they did not believe that Yemen would be able to carry out such an operation.
3. Engaging Iran in the event to prove Tehran's active role in

the Yemen war.

4. Making excuses to justify further legal, political and military reactions and measures against Iran in order to complete the maximum pressure campaign.

These accusations, however, failed to convince local and international public opinion due to the lack of substantiated evidence.

On the one hand, the inability to convince the public opinion as well as

international organizations raises the question about the U.S. technical capabilities to identify from which side the attacks originated. Although an international fact-finding committee was established by the UN, there was no sign of Iran's involvement in the attacks.

A few days ago, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres affirmed in an official statement that the UN is "unable to independently corroborate" Iran's role in attacks on the Aramco oil facilities.

In fact, statement by Guterres has suppressed the Western propaganda campaign against Iran over the past three months, which sought to describe the Islamic Republic as a destabilizing factor in regional and international developments. The West was trying to justify the continued killings and aggressions by the Saudi-UAE coalition in Yemen, which are being carried out through financial and military support by the U.S., the Zionist regime, Britain, France and Germany.

Iraq's PMU a key check and balance against US-sponsored terrorism: Cartalucci



US forces on December 29 conducted drone strikes on a number of bases for Kata'ib Hezbollah, which is part of Iraq's PMU, known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, in western Anbar province, killing at least 25 individuals and leaving another 51 injured.

The US attack prompted massive public anger in Iraq on Tuesday, with protesters storming the US Embassy in Baghdad and seizing the building after American diplomatic personnel had been forced to evacuate.

Many believe these aggressive measures come from Washington's fear of the empowerment of such forces that disturb the activities of its mercenaries in the region.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, the Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher Anthony Cartalucci elaborated on the PMU's role in nipping the US' plots in the bud and the reasons behind American's assault against the popular units' positions in Iraq

How do you see the role of Iraq's PMU in foiling the US plots for the country?

The popular mobilization units have been a key check and balance against US-led state-sponsored terrorism across the Middle East. They have served on the front line against Al Qaeda, ISIL,

and various affiliates and allies. They also help serve as a check and balance within nations like Iraq which still stand divided after years of extensive US meddling and political interference. Whatever direction the Iraqi military may go in, there is at least the PMU's to ensure communities have a means of defending against deliberately coaxed sectarian violence.

The PMU also serves as an indirect - and thus difficult to disrupt - form of influence Iran and its allies can exert across the region to counter America's likewise indirect methods of projecting power and influence. Because the PMU's are drawn from the region and sponsored by nations in the region, they have many "homefield" advantages over America and its proxies.

Why did the US attack the PMU?

The US is losing not only its regime-change war in Syria but also its influence over nations like Iraq despite literally militarily occupying them. The attack on PMU's is meant to provoke conflict, invite escalation, and serve as an attempted show of power.

Unfortunately for Washington - the region has watched the US wage large scale war and covert war for now nearly 2 decades. A handful of additional airstrikes makes little difference and if

anything serves to illustrate American impotence. The PMU's and their sponsors must exercise caution and patience - continue on with the successful formula they've used to help usher the region out from under US hegemony - and avoid falling into traps sprung by such provocations.

Isn't the US attack a violation of Iraq's sovereignty?

The US attacks are most certainly an absolute violation of Iraq's (and Syria's) sovereignty. The US carried out the attacks unilaterally and in direct contravention to international law. They also found themselves condemned strongly by the Iraqi government itself. The PMU's have served on the front line against terrorist groups the US itself - at least superficially - acknowledges must be confronted and eliminated. Thus the US essentially ignored Iraqi sovereignty, Iraq's best interests, all in an effort to attack militias engaged in a critical battle against internationally recognized terrorist groups.

In many ways, these attacks serve as a new low point in US foreign policy. We can only hope that in the new year to come more rational minds prevail in Washington and the Middle East can find relief from this enduring belligerence.

From a 'color organization' to 'Joker's mask'

By Mohammad Ghaderi

Theories of soft subversion have always been popular around the world, in the form of "symbolization" in social movements and protests.

"Symbol" in protests is a sign that represents a common ideology or concept, and for a group of protesters with the same demands, it has a deeper meaning. This sign is chosen to incite people.

The effect of the symbol is so strong that it can be used as a weapon for years. Many countries try to symbolize and then incite citizens to undermine their rivals.

It should be noted that the symbol does not cause a protest, but it serves as a means to control it.

In recent decades, "color revolutions" have been one of the US tools for interfering in other countries' affairs, in which the use of symbols has been widely practiced. This type of revolutions are one of soft subversion's methods that includes a kind of power transformation and displacement, coupled with negative struggle and civil disobedience.

This method was mainly used for the Soviet countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Although the method failed in many cases after its initial success, it worked well in removing barriers by the American hegemony.

On the other hand, a general assessment of using such a method showed that the color revolutions usually failed to complete the subversion project, and the desired result was not achieved, so the Western countries changed their attitude toward the protesters in their rival countries.

Joker is the name of a character formerly known as an anti-hero in the Batman story, and in most of the past stories had an unknown identity, though he was previously known as a "popular criminal" by audience.

Recently, a movie was made about the life of a "Joker" and why he became a criminal, which changed the way that audience connect to this anti-hero.



The "Joker" movie tells the story of a poor man who lives with his mother and has to play the role of a clown for the rest of his life.

Suffering from "pseudobulbar affect" disorder, Joker hopes to become a famous comedian to make people laugh. However, being constant rejection and humiliation, along with the immense corruption of the community he lives in, change his life and eventually turn him into a professional murderer with a tendency to uncontrollable chaos.

He only triggers chaos without any plans and sheds blood without trial. The people of Gotham (his hometown), who are victims of class distinctions and discrimination just like the Joker, follow his lead and take into streets. The rioters rob shops, set public places on fire, commit crimes and kill rulers.

As the movie was opened at the same time as uprisings in the West Asian region, some analysts suggest that the movie aimed at symbolizing and training protesters in these countries. Although this matter does not mean that the Joker movie staged the protests in these countries, the violence accompanied the protests and the killings by the demonstrators suggest that there is a will to derail popular protests against shortcomings and discrimination.

In other words, the Joker's role here is to "justify" the violence, and it seems that after failing in the peaceful conflicts, this time the enemy's plan is to

agitate and justify the protests by using new symbolization.

For example, the current events in Iraq have in fact risen from symbolism. Protesters who are rightly frustrated by the country's situation, kill their innocent compatriots and take a photo with their hanging body, describing their tough living conditions as justification for these brutal crimes.

The interesting point is that the protesters used the Joker mask and image, which reveals their identification with the character.

Some experts believe that the potential to lead people in expressing their objections was considered in the characterization of this anti-hero since the Joker was already a popular character and it was predictable that the movie would be welcomed.

Therefore, it appears that the imperialist domination (the hegemony) has reached a model in using different approaches to overthrow the political systems that opposed it, within the framework of soft subversion theories. It assumes that if the model is carried out properly, it can complete other scenarios to transform ruling systems in those countries.

Compared to the previous difficult approaches, if launching soft subversion projects could have made a significant stride in removing obstacles to the US hegemony, in the next step "color" symbol had turned into a "live" symbol.

Nigeria's pressure on Zakzaky increased: IHRC head

Interview by Ramin Hosseinabadian

In an interview with Mehr news agency, Head of the London-based Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), Massoud Shajareh, said that Nigerian government's measures prove that the pressures are increased and the conditions are not set for having the leader of Nigerian Shiites, Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, released.



Following is text of the interview with Mr. Shajareh:

Sheikh Zakzaky is in jail in Katona. Please inform about his present conditions.

Yes, Zakzay has been sent to the central jail of Kantona, Nigeria. It is worth noting that the named prison does not meet the standards to guarantee the health of the prisoners. It is among the most dangerous prisons not only in Nigeria but in Africa.

All its prisoners are dealing with terrible conditions. Sheikh was transferred to that prison while Kantona court did not issue the order to send him to the hospital. We believe that being under tough conditions, Zakzaky had to be sent to hospital but due to the Nigerian government's decision, he was transferred to prison.

Have the measures taken by IHRC been fruitful? What barriers have you been faced?

Despite the made efforts in the long-run, we could not reach any conclusions. We sought to transfer Sheikh to a hos-

pital in other countries than Nigeria but we did not become successful.

We also attempted hard to provide documents to get him out of prison in the hope of improving his conditions.

Our efforts did not bear fruit due to the measures done by the Nigerian government. We had to negotiate the issue with different bodies and organizations but the Nigerian government put barriers on the path of the held talks.

Some media have recently reported the probability of having Sheikh released before February 2020. Even his doctor has put forward the subject. What is your idea about the news?

The chance for his freedom is low. In the past two years, the Nigerian government has increased his pressure on Sheikh, while we expected the conditions to improve.

Presently, there is no sign of improvement in their behavior with Sheikh. In general, the conditions are not going on in his favor.

What about Sheikh's wife, Zinat Ibrahim? How high are the possibilities for her freedom?

The chances are low for her, too. Her health conditions are tough and the put restrictions has worsened the situation for her, as well.

Sheikh and his wife have been coping with terrible conditions in the prison for the past four years and based on our estimations, their conditions are getting tougher incrementally.

US attack on PMU aggression against sovereign Iraq: US analyst

US forces launched deadly airstrikes against Kata'ib Hezbollah bases, which is part of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), on Sunday night, claiming that the attacks have been in response to alleged attacks targeting US and coalition forces.

To know more about the real reasons behind the US illegal act against an independent country, the issue was discussed with American analyst and columnist Stephen Lendman.

Commenting on the role of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in foiling the US plots for the country and the region, Lendman said, "The PMUs and other resistance groups in Iraq, Syria and throughout the region are important to challenge the hostile US presence in the region where they'll never be peace as long as Pentagon forces remain."

Being questioned about the reasons behind the US attack on PMU, he reiterated, "The US is waging forever regional wars, inventing pretexts to keep waging them."



Touching upon the illegitimacy of the US attack on a sovereign country, he added, "I'm sure they'll be more incidents like Sunday's. They're aggression against sovereign Iraq and Syria, and of course, US proxy war on Iran goes on by incidents like days of riots, violence, vandalism, and chaos last month."



Changing label of Iran's sanctions to make it harder to remove sanctions: Nephew

Interview by Javad Heirannia

Richard Nephew, who served as the lead sanctions expert for the US team negotiating with Iran, is of the opinion that "It is true that this is the Trump Administration's intention: to make it much harder to remove the sanctions in the future because now entities and individuals are considered "terrorists" in addition to "proliferators"."

The fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, says that it is harder to see US pressure on Iran "the president has the authority to remove these designations no matter what they are, provided that they are not required explicitly under US law. The term "nuclear-related sanctions" has no legal standing in US law, only in the JCPOA as a term of art."

Following is the text of the interview:

The United States recently sanctioned Iran's central bank under the label "fight against terrorism". What changes has this label made to Iranian trade?

I do not believe that this decision has made any real difference in Iranian trade, though this is because the existing sanctions were already sufficiently severe as to preclude much of it. This is a difficulty that the United States will soon have, as there are few "new" sectors, entities or individuals to sanction that has not already been sanctioned or affected by other measures already in place. Of course, the existing measures will continue to have very serious economic impacts so the degree to which measures are "new" is only meaningful as part of the political narrative for the Administration.

A Few days ago US sanctioned IRISL. IRISL was sanctioned beforehand and changed its sanction's label. What is the effect of changing the label of IRISL on shipping the agricultural commodities, food, medicine, and medical devices to Iran via IRISL?

This measure will potentially have a meaningful effect. Previously, IRISL was sanctioned but only as an element of the Iranian government. The sanctions did not preclude foreign business with IRISL. Now, the sanctions will create real costs for foreign entities or individuals who do business with it, essentially recreating the situation that existed for IRISL prior to the JCPOA.

Ultimately, I suspect that this measure will have less impact on Iranian humanitarian trade than could be anticipated, simply because there are other cargo carriers that will be prepared to operate in and with Iran. But, there are many fewer of them today than in the past.

To address the immediate humanitarian risks, the United States has permitted transactions to "wind down" with IRISL for six months. This is an unusual situation and reflects a sense in the US government that taking precipitous action here could be damaging, if not to humanitarian trade than to the narrative that the United States is not trying to deny such trade.

President Trump has changed some labels of Iran sanctions. Since removing them are not under the President's authorization. Then, the US future president is not able to remove them that were under the label of Iran nuclear program sanctions. What is

your opinion?

It is true that this is the Trump Administration's intention: to make it much harder to remove the sanctions in the future because now entities and individuals are considered "terrorists" in addition to "proliferators."

Ultimately, though, the president has the authority to remove these designations no matter what they are, provided that they are not required explicitly under US law. The term "nuclear-related sanctions" has no legal standing in US law, only in the JCPOA as a term of art. Grouping those sanctions made sense in 2013-2015 but it may make sense to broaden the definition of what sanctions could be removed if a future deal is negotiated with Iran in a future administration.

It is also worth noting: the fact that so many US officials and their supporters outside in the think tank community have said explicitly that they are changing the nature of these sanctions from "nuclear-related" to something broader in order to make it hard to negotiate a new deal with Iran will make it politically easier for a future Administration to change the terminology used.

Are there other sanctions to be imposed on Iran?

Almost certainly. There are entities and individuals not sanctioned, sectors not targeted thus far. But, of course, there is a difference between whether such sanctions could be imposed and whether those sanctions will be impactful in excess of the pressure created by existing measures. In my view, there are few sanctions that could yet be imposed on Iran that would have the power of the measures already imposed.



Intl. reactions to Saudi scandalous verdict on Khashoggi murder

By: Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

Alongside the announcement of the Saudi court verdict over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Turkey, UK, and international rights groups and bodies condemned and criticized the court's conclusion.

Jamal Khashoggi, a columnist for the Washington Post and a critic of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was living in a self-imposed exile in the United States where had been granted residency status. He had been sharply critical of Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Mohammad bin Salman, and the country's king, Salman of Saudi Arabia. He also opposed the Saudi Arabian-led intervention in Yemen.

Khashoggi went missing on October 2 after entering the consulate in Istanbul to obtain documents needed to marry his Turkish fiancée Hatice Cengiz. Agents of the Saudi government killed Khashog-

gi inside the consulate and apparently dismembered his body, which has never been found.

Audio recordings, CCTV footage, and forensic evidence all point to his murder. According to Turkish officials, Khashoggi was killed by a hit squad of 15 men who arrived from Saudi Arabia on 29 September and were present in the building on the day of Khashoggi's disappearance, leaving shortly afterward.

US President Donald Trump announced an investigation, but he insisted that the US will not waive trade or diplomatic ties with Riyadh, regardless of the outcome.

The disappearance of Khashoggi received a fair amount of attention internationally in the past year. Turkey, in particular, believes it was premeditated murder, and after denials, Saudi Arabia ultimately admitted to the murder of the journalist.

The CIA found that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman proba-

bly ordered the operation. But Riyadh has consistently denied that the crown prince was involved. Saudi Crown Prince denied allegations that he had ordered Khashoggi's murder but said he took full responsibility for it since it was committed by people working for the Saudi government.

The first trial session of suspects in the Khashoggi murder case was held on 3 January 2019 in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

The Saudi government has characterized Khashoggi's death as a rogue operation and detained 21 suspects, charging 11 of them but Riyadh has repeatedly denied allegations that any members of the royal family were involved in the incident.

On 23 December 2019, the Saudi public prosecutor has stated that the court has sentenced five people to death over the Khashoggi case. Another three people face a total of 24 years in prison for covering up the murder and



violating regulations and another ten had been questioned and released due to the lack of evidence against them.

The verdict says the Saudi investigation concluded that the killing was not premeditated and that Saudi Arabian consultant Saoud Al Qahtani was cleared of any wrongdoing.

In the immediate aftermath of the court's announcement, Saudi media was flooded with commentators saying that justice had been done while some countries and international rights groups condemned a Saudi court verdict on Khashoggi murder.

Khashoggi's son Salah accepted the verdict but others were less impressed.

Earlier this year, Salah took to Twitter to deny that a settlement had been reached between his family and the Saudi government after a source told CNN that Khashoggi's family has received millions of US dollars in cash and assets as compensation for the killing.

But Hatice Cengiz, Khashoggi's fiancée, in a tweet message on Monday said that she would never forget Khashoggi, nor his "murderers" or "those who are trying to cover up" his murder.

Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International's Middle East Research Director, said it was a whitewash. "The verdict fails to address the Saudi authorities' involvement in this devastating crime or clarify the location of Jamal Khashoggi's remains," Amnesty said in a statement.

The human rights group said, "Only an international, independent and impartial investigation can serve justice for

Jamal Khashoggi."

The Washington Post's publisher, Fred Ryan, also condemned the findings.

"The complete lack of transparency and the Saudi government's refusal to cooperate with independent investigators suggests that this was merely a sham trial," he said in a statement. "Those ultimately responsible, at the highest level of the Saudi government, continue to escape responsibility for the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi."

UN Special Rapporteur Agnes Callamard called Monday's court rulings "anything but justice" in a series of posts on her official Twitter account. The UN expert previously found "sufficient credible evidence" that called for the Saudi Crown Prince to be investigated.

Callamard criticized the court's conclusion that the killing was not premeditated, citing, "the presence of a forensic doctor," how the "defendants had repeatedly stated they were obeying orders" and how the consul general "took all necessary precautions to ensure there will be no eye witness present."

She added, "Bottom line: the hit-men are guilty, sentenced to death. The masterminds not only walk free. They have barely been touched by the investigation and the trial. That is the antithesis of Justice. It is a mockery."

Turkey described the verdict as "scandalous" and said those responsible for the murder had been granted immunity.

"Those who dispatched a death squad to Istanbul on a private jet ... and sought to sweep this murder under the

rug have been granted immunity," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's top press aide, Fahrettin Altun, wrote on Twitter.

Turkey also said the Saudi findings left many unanswered questions.

In a written statement, Turkish foreign ministry spokesperson Hami Aksoy said the verdict was disappointing as "important aspects of the murder remain in the dark."

"It is not just a legal necessity but also moral responsibility and obligation that light is shed on this murder committed on our soil and all those responsible are punished," Aksoy added. Aksoy also renewed Ankara's demand for judicial cooperation from Saudi authorities.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said in a statement: "The killing of Jamal Khashoggi was a terrible crime. Mr. Khashoggi's family deserves to see justice done for his brutal murder. Saudi Arabia must ensure all of those responsible are held to account and that such an atrocity can never happen again."

Paris-based media rights watchdog Reporters Without Borders said that justice was "trampled on" with the death sentences meted out after a trial that did not respect international standards of justice.

Even the US Department of State official told reporters after the ruling, "Today's verdicts were an important step in holding those responsible for this terrible crime accountable," adding, "We're pressing them [Saudi Arabia] for more transparency and for holding everybody accountable."

Iran missile program not in violation of JCPOA: prof. Entessar



*Interview by Javad Heirannia
Translated by Mohammad Ali Haqshenas*

Nader Entessar, Professor Emeritus of Political Science from the University of South Alabama, highlights that Iran's missile program doesn't violate the terms of JCPOA and that European countries seek other aims by their letters and threats.

"The letter of the E3 to the UN Secretary-General was not only provocative but also full of lies; Iran's missile program does not violate UNSC Resolution 2231," Entessar told Mehr News Agency on Friday.

"The three European countries aim to undermine Iran's deterrence and defense power and since they were not successful in forcing Iran into destroying its missile and defense program, they want to fulfill this aim via the United Nations," he said.

"If the issue is referred to the UN Security Council, three permanent members of the council will vote against Iran, so Russian and China will have an important role in approval or rejection of an anti-Iranian resolution."

The remarks came as France, Germany and the United Kingdom penned a letter to the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, making allegations that Iran's ballistic missile activity is "inconsistent" with the call in a council resolution endorsing the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. "Latest E3 letter to UNSG on missiles is a desperate falsehood to cover up their miserable incompetence in fulfilling bare minimum of their own JCPOA obligations," FM Zarif wrote in a tweet on Thursday in reaction to E3's letter.

European signatories of the deal have so far failed to fulfill their obligations under the nuclear deal and safeguard Iran's economy from damages of US unilateral sanctions after Washington withdrew from the deal in 2018. Meanwhile, Iran has announced that it is reducing commitments to the deal in a

transparent and reversible manner to create a balance. Tehran says it has the right to do so according to Paragraphs 26 and 36 of the deal. E3 has called on Iran to return to full implementation of the deal and even threatened Tehran to use a mechanism in the deal which can return the UN sanctions against Iran.

European countries consider the trigger mechanism as their winning card against Iran, Entessar said, adding, "If Iran officially withdraws from the JCPOA like what US did, Europe will lose the tool of 'trigger mechanism' ... of course, Westerners will try to adopt anti-Iranian resolution in the UNSC but this will become harder without this mechanism."

"I believe the four steps that Iran has taken to reduce commitments to the JCPOA not has failed to influence the behavior of the E3, but also has turned them into claimants with aggressive behavior."

He went on to say that "Bringing up the missile program and in particular, following the case in the UN Security Council would be the last blow to the body of the JCPOA that is now in a coma."

"One of Iran's biggest mistakes after US withdrawal [from the JCPOA] was pinning hope on the Europe," said the professor, adding that European countries can never distance themselves from the United States and play an independent role.

He confirmed that there are no legally-binding term in the JCPOA to limit Iran's missile program and on the other hand there is no legal framework in the international community to define or restrict missile programs of other countries, adding that Western countries "have stripped Iran missile program of any legal perspective, turning it into a totally political issue so as to achieve their aim."

"Enemies of Iran seek to turn the country into a defenseless body that has no important role in the region," he said, noting, "they consider Iran's missile program as the biggest obstacle in achieving their aim."

Dossier

**Dossier: Iran-Russia-China Joint
Naval Drills in Indian Ocean**





Navy Cmdr. to Mehr:

Iran's joint wargame with Russia, China delivers message to world

During a visit to Mehr News Agency on Nov. 27, Iran's Navy commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi answered a question posed by the MNA English Desk on Iran's joint wargame with naval forces of China and Russia in the country's southern waters in the vicinity of the northern Indian Ocean.

Asked about the message of the wargame for the regional and trans-regional powers regarding the balance of power in this highly strategic region, the Navy commander said "when we talk about joint wargames, we are talking about two or more countries with a high level of relations in various political, economic and social fields, which culminate in cooperation in the military sector, with wargames usually being the highest level of such cooperation."

"A joint wargame between several countries, whether on land, at sea or in the air, indicates a remarkable expansion of cooperation among them," he noted.

He went on to add, "the joint wargame between Iran, Russia, and China, which will hopefully be conducted next

month, carries the same message to the world, that these three countries have reached a meaningful strategic point in their relations, with regard to their shared and non-shared interests, and by non-shared I mean the respect we have for one another's national interests."

"The wargame seeks to deliver this message to the world that any kind of security at sea must include the interests of all concerned countries. We do not condone the kind of security that only caters to the benefits of one specific country at a specific time and which disregards the security of others."

"Seas, which are used as a platform for conducting global commerce, cannot be exclusively beneficial to certain powers," he stressed.

"It is no longer viable for a country to resort to force and bullying tactics to sanction another country's oil by restricting its passage through international waters," said Rear Admiral Khanzadi, adding "They need to realize that those countries with common interests have close military cooperation with one another in a bid to achieve a desirable level in their collective security."



Iran, China, Russia joint military drill success of Iran's defense diplomacy

By: Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

Iran's joint military drill with China and Russia was considered as one of the greatest achievements of Iran's defense diplomacy.

The joint drill which was called 'Maritime Safety Belt' was held on December 27, 2019.

Russian Navy participated in this drill with three vessels, including a Neustrashimy frigate class named "Yaroslav Mudry", a tugboat named "Yevgeniy Khorov" and a tanker named "Yel'nya".

Chinese Navy took part in the drill with a Type 052D destroyer named Xinling.

The composition and capability of warships deployed by China and Russia to the waters of the region to conduct joint drill with Iran show that this joint event is of strategic importance to Russia and China as the two countries have deployed advanced and new vessels to carry out the exercise.

On the other hand, this joint naval drill of Iran, China and Russia was considered as the counter to the US-led coalition for maritime security in the Persian Gulf.

In this regard, Iran Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi said in an interview with Mehr News agency in late November, "The joint naval drill to be staged by Iran, China and Russia delivers this message to the world that any kind of security at sea must include the interests of all concerned countries."

"A joint wargame between several countries, whether on land, at sea or in the air, indicates a remarkable expansion of cooperation among them," he noted.

According to Commander of Iran's Army Major General Seyyed Abdolrahim Mousavi, this drill demonstrated the determination of countries that are seeking security in the region against those countries that are after creating insecurity, and enemies should take lessons

from the drill's messages.

The drill has political goals, as well as the exchange of tactical and military experiences and represents a kind of convergence between participants.

Noting the joint naval drill of Iran, China and Russia is of particular importance, Shekarchi said, "The Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman are key areas of world trade, so security in this area is important and vital."

"Iran has so far proven that it has always strived to secure international waterways, especially in this key area," he said, adding, "The military drill will be held to enhance and strengthen the international trade security in the region."

He went on to say, "The exchange of security experience between Iran, Russia, and China, fight against terrorism and piracy are among the most important goals of the joint naval drill."

"The security implications of this drill will be for all countries around the world and bring security stability," Shekarchi noted.

Experts shed light on role of Iran-Russia-China trilateral naval drills on security in vital waterways



The naval drills, the first of their kind, were launched on December 27 with the aim of promoting the security of international trade in the strategic regions, as well as sharing experience among participants against piracy and marine terrorism.

The joint maneuvers with China and Russia can be considered as one of the greatest achievements of Iran's defense diplomacy, sending messages to the West amid US efforts to woo countries into a maritime coalition for patrols in the Persian Gulf.

Dr. Bilgehan Alagoz, an international relations professor at Istanbul Marmara University says, "I think the main goal of the US maximum pressure policy on Iran is to contain China's emerging power in World politics and to limit Russia's influence in the Middle East. Because China relies on Iran to diversify its energy supply and Russia is dependent on Iran to penetrate in the Middle East. In this context, the four-day exercise in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman aims to cope with the US policy of containment."

Dr. Luciano Zaccara, Research Assistant Professor at Qatar University, believes the joint military drill is a clear message to the US and the [P]GCC states about the strong ties between Iran, Russia and China in terms of security, in case a military option is still considered by the White House to deal with the Iranian file.

He also said, "It also shows the Russian will to play a significant role in the Indian Ocean security, far beyond their main area of interest in the Levant."

Javad Heirannia, an Iranian political analyst, also says the unprecedented drill shows Iran's different options to tackle

the anti-Iran threats from US-led coalition in the Persian Gulf. He also says holding the second session of Regional Security Dialogue in Tehran participated by Russia, China and India recently and also the formation of a block by Iran, Turkey, Qatar and Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur all indicate that Iran has many options to confront the US efforts to corner Tehran.

Payman Yazdani, another Iranian political analyst, believes the joint naval military drill of Iran, Russia and China in the northern part of the Indian Ocean shows the importance of establishing the security of the shipping lines for these three countries due to the significant role of the regional developments on the world economy. Yazdani also says the drill is supporting the regional balance of power.

The three countries have sent some of their most advanced vessels to take part in the four-day exercises.

Rear Admiral Gholamreza Tahani, Iranian flotilla chief, said the maneuvers cover 17,000 square kilometers and consist of "various tactical exercises," including target practice and rescuing ships from assaults and fires.

The United States has been trying to persuade its allies into an international coalition with the declared aim of providing "security" for merchant shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and other strategic Middle Eastern shipping lanes.

Washington claims Tehran played a role in two separate attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman in May and June, without providing any credible evidence to support the accusations, which Iran has categorically dismissed.

The US has sent troops and missile systems to Saudi Arabia following escalating tensions in the Persian Gulf.

Iran has always reiterated that foreign military presence brings insecurity to the region.

The secret of tripartite drills: US loses its influence in the region

By: Maryam Khormaei

Launching unprecedented drills alongside two world powers, Tehran has shown that it can overcome the efforts that aim to isolate Iran and push regional calculations into a new phase by resorting to the option of the coalition.

The Gulf of Oman is a particularly sensitive waterway as it connects to the Strait of Hormuz - through which about a fifth of the world's oil passes - which in turn connects to the Persian Gulf.

The three countries are holding the four-day joint naval exercise, dubbed Marine Security Belt, under the slogan of boosting international security and trade, especially in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, the world's main energy transit routes through which 18 million barrels of oil pass per day.

What is going on in the region's waters from Friday to Monday can be seen as a response to Europe and the US that in the past few months have formed two quasi-coalitions, under the pretext of securing energy transition, which were not welcomed by regional and trans-regional allies.

International reactions to the Iran-Russia-China joint naval drills

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif stated in a tweet that the drills show the Islamic Republic's commitment to secure vital waterways.

Russia, meanwhile, described the drills as unprecedented and in line with cooperating and training navies.

Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian confirmed that the country's Xining, a guided-missile destroyer, would take part in the drills.

However, China has made every efforts to dismiss the speculation that the drills as "alarming", so the Chinese defense ministry spokesman stated that the drill was a "normal military exchange" between the three armed forces and was in line with international law



and practices. The region has witnessed blasts at the port of Fujairah, attacks on the Aramco oil facilities and the formation of parallel coalitions.

It should be mentioned that in late November, China also launched a naval exercise with Saudi Arabia, indicating Beijing's effort to flaunt its power to the US, without the partial support of the regional states.

In response to the joint Iran-China-Russia naval drills, the US claimed that "we know and observe". The Pentagon spokesman also reiterated the need for safeguarding freedom of navigation in the region.

China's importance for Iran and the reason for its participation in the drills

During these years that Iran has been under sanctions, China showed that it was willing to maintain a strategic relationship with Tehran, despite all the threats. It should be kept in mind that Beijing will never cooperate with Tehran at the expense of its lukewarm relation with Washington, unless there are national interests. However, Tehran is confident of China's support, and the continued purchase of Iranian oil also implies this matter.

The fact is that China seeks to take power to challenge the US global position and balance the distribution of power internationally.

China's most bold move in the recent years is the establishment of its first overseas military base in Djibouti, which has a strategic position as it neighbors the Bab al-Mandab strait and the Gulf of Aden and has a short distance to the Strait of Hormuz. The base is officially used as China's logistics supporter in anti-piracy operations.

China, on the other hand, is the largest exporter of goods and transports most of its cargo through sea, thus it insists on the security of its shipping lanes. Launching drills along with Iran not only provides China the opportunity to carry out its anti-piracy plans, but also allows it to showcase its military capabilities in the fields of resources and control of energy transmission lines.

At the same time, China's presence in the Persian Gulf, while the US navy has repeatedly challenged Beijing's ownership claim over the South China Sea can be seen as a retaliation.

Russia and a continued strategic competition

In the face of the US-European parallel coalitions in the Strait of Hormuz, Russia has presented a plan for collective security in the Persian Gulf aimed at establishing a security organization in the region with the participation of neighbors and the observation of permanent members of the Security Council.

The Russian plan has many similarities to Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE) Initiative proposed by Iran, as it emphasizes the non-interference of the trans-regional states in the affairs of the Persian Gulf.

Since the Syrian crisis, Moscow has introduced itself as a key trans-regional power in resolving Middle East disputes, while expanding its influence to Yemen and Libya. At the same time, Russia, along with Iran and China, has been described as one of the challenges facing the US in 2020, especially in

the Middle East, and this is a matter that David Schenker, US assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs affirmed.

The Russians have essentially taken a series of measures to expand their confrontation (deployment) against the US, which stretches from Syria to the Persian Gulf, and not to allow the US influence spread to the north of the Persian Gulf. Therefore, holding this exercise can be a way for Moscow to play a role and to highlight its presence.

It can be concluded that holding the drills, under the current circumstances that the US and its regional allies are trying to isolate Iran, could be a real turning point for the Islamic Republic. The new position that Iran has defined for itself was created months ago by downing US drone and then seizing the British-flagged tanker Stena Impero, and will now be strengthened with such advanced drills. What political, security, and economic achievements await each of the three countries participating in the exercise will be determined over time.

Joint naval drill with Russia, China shows Iran is not isolated: energy expert

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Dr. Omid Shokri is of the view that the recent joint naval drill of Iran, Russia, and China shows that Iran is not isolated and shares some mutual interests with Russia and China. Following is the text of our interview with him:

What is the importance of Iran, Russia, and China's joint military drill for these three countries from the energy perspective and also the importance of the region which the drill was held?

US sanctions against Iranian oil exports aimed at reducing Iran's oil exports not only reduced Iran's oil production and exports but also provided an opportunity for Iran's rivals in the oil market to gain part of Iran's share of the world oil market. Iran was able to retain some of its share of the oil market, especially East Asia, by selling oil on the gray market. The control of resources and energy pathways (which play a role in energy security and economic growth of major energy-consuming countries) has always been a priority of world powers and factored in heavily to global political equations. The United States sees an opportunity to control oil trafficking in important export zones such as the Strait of Hormuz to reduce the economic growth of China and other countries.

For China, oil security is the most important issue in regard to energy security, while for other countries it is often gas or other fuels. According to the latest statistics, China is the biggest beneficiaries of the Strait of Hormuz; they receive about 4 million barrels of oil per day from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates. Around 42% of China's imported oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz. China's main goal for participation in the naval drill is energy security, China has good relations with both Iran and Saudi and trying to solve any problem in the region which directly or indirectly treats China's energy security and China's economic growth.



After playing an active role in the Syrian crisis, Russia is trying to increase its influence and presence in the Middle East. Russia is by no means willing to control the US transit route and energy control resources. Last week, the US Senate approved a plan to ban companies active in the Rolling Stream and Leaving Stream projects. Russian-American competition in the global energy market is increasing day by day. Reducing Russia's share of EU energy exports to the EU market is America's main goal.

China and Russia have incentives for a coalition with Iran, particularly the Russians who have suffered numerous sanctions and conflicts between the Russians, Americans, and Europeans after the invasion of the Crimea. The Chinese were attacked by Washington because of their political rivalries with the US. Chinese want to secure the Persian Gulf, the strategic region of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Can Iran reach an alliance with Russia and China through the drill?

Looking at the larger geopolitics, it can be said that the Iran-China-Russia coalition is likely to form, and the joint patrol between Russia and China in the waters of Japan and South Korea in the East China Sea reinforces the possibility of becoming partners. The drone attacks on the Aramco refinery facility and drop in production and exports of the world's largest oil company made the US send more troops to Saudi Arabia at the request of bin Salman.

This naval drill shows that Iran is not isolated and shares some mutual interests with Russia and China at the moment, but it is not clear how long such collusion will last; it should be noted that after the US withdrawal from JCPOA, both China and Russia energy firms' left Iran energy sector and other industries.

'Marine Security Belt' drill in the eye of world media

By: Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

The geographical and strategic location of Iran has made it the focus of international attention. The waters around Iran, especially the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf, have become the hotspot for saber-rattling for many countries, including the US and some of its allies to form a maritime coalition for patrols in the Persian Gulf these days.

The Sea of Oman is a particularly sensitive waterway as it connects to the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 30% of the world's crude oil passes and which in turn connects to the Persian Gulf.

Iran, Russia, and China started a four-day joint maritime drill, codenamed "Marine Security Belt", which includes tactical exercises such as rescuing frigates under attack, began on Friday in the port city of Chabahar in southeastern Iran and are due to continue in northern parts of the Indian Ocean.

The joint drill, which is the first of such cooperation with Iran since the 1979 victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution with two major world naval powers at this scale, is aimed at promoting the security of international trade in the strategic regions amid heightened tensions between Iran and US.

Holding trilateral exercise between the three countries have received mixed reactions from international media in recent days which shows the significance of this drill both in the region and world, as Jonathan Eyal, associate director at the Royal United Services Institute, said the joint naval drills had been choreographed by the three countries to send a message that US influence in the region was waning.

"This is a carefully calculated exercise in which all three participants are winners: Iran gets to claim it is a regional power, Russia demonstrates its role as the key actor in the Middle East, and China can show it is a global naval power," Eyal said. "The strategic message is that these are the countries shaping events in the Middle East."

"Iran has long stated its readiness to work with our neighbors to secure the Persian Gulf," wrote Foreign Minister Mo-



hammad Javad Zarif in a tweet on Friday, adding, "HOPE - Hormuz Peace Endeavour - is on the table right now."

Zarif then noted, "Our joint military drills in Oman Sea/Indian Ocean with our Russian and Chinese partners make clear our broader commitment to secure vital waterways."

Alongside the start of the joint naval exercise, Rear Admiral Gholamreza Tahani said on state television, "The message of this exercise is peace, friendship and lasting security through cooperation and unity ... and its effect will be to show that Iran cannot be isolated."

The exercises brought the reaction of the US, with the state department telling the Financial Times that Iran should "think twice" about conducting joint naval exercises, warning that such actions "should concern all nations with an interest in safeguarding freedom of navigation in the region".

The Pentagon spokesman Commander Sean Robertson said the US was monitoring the joint exercise and would "continue to work with our partners and allies to ensure freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce in international waterways".

Reuters wrote about the regional importance of the exercise, "Waters around Iran have become a focus for international tensions, with the United States exerting pressure for Iranian crude oil sales and other trade ties to be cut off."

It also noted to the sending a guided-missile destroyer to the four-day drills by China, adding that both Russia and China also have good relations with Saudi Arabia.

"Iran, Russia, and China began an unprecedented joint naval exercise in the Middle East amid fears they will take on the US and Western powers," wrote Daily Mail.

Referring to the beginning of the naval exercise, Associated Press wrote that some analysts believe that the drill is a response to recent US maneuvers with its regional ally Saudi Arabia.

"Tehran has been seeking to step up military cooperation with Beijing and Moscow amid unprecedented economic sanctions from Washington," AP wrote, adding, "Visits to Iran by Russian and Chinese naval representatives have also increased in recent years."

It also quoted the message of Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian, "The drill will deepen exchange and cooperation between the navies of the three countries."

Time of Israel wrote in a report titled, "New triangle of sea power: Iran, China, Russia start unprecedented naval drill".

Israeli regime's Army Chief of Staff Aviv Kohavi on Wednesday lamented that Israel is alone in the fight against Iran and its proxies in the Middle East. "It would be better if we weren't the only ones responding to them [militarily]," Kohavi said, in an apparent criticism of the United States and Persian Gulf countries, which also see Iran as a major foe, the report added.

Relating the joint drill to boosting of US troops in Saudi Arabia, CBS News also wrote, "Iran, Russia and China team up for military drills as America boosts troops in Saudi Arabia."

Economy



Islamic Banking plan; bankers confrontation with MPs



By: Haniyeh Sadat Jafariyeh

The Iranian Parliament Members (MPs) ratified outlines of their own prepared Islamic banking plan in mid-December and are resolved to finalize it by the end of this Parliament (May 2020) not to have it postponed for the next one.

The plan, which can be named as a 'scheme to revise the decades-old banking regulations', includes different sections covering 'usury-free banking', making amendments in structure of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) and establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran Development Bank.

The pros and cons of the plan, however, have developed a confrontation between banking experts and the Parliamentarians.

Proponents of the plan, who are mostly the MPs, assert that the plan has been prepared by experts of the Iranian Parliament since under US sanctions Iranian banking, monetary and financial system is in dire need for a revival. It is modifiable and open for being discussed and criticized, they underline.

The plan's advocates believe the newly approved scheme will provide the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) with a higher level of independency for applying and implementing macro-policies and gives it a free hand for providing production and industrial units with low-price facilities.

Those backing the plan also note that it has been prepared paying a specific attention to traditional Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) to addresses the concerns discussed by Islamic Marja's about usury.

On the other hand, opponents to the approved plan are banking experts, bankers and mainly the CBI governor Abdolnaser Hemmati, who announced his sharp disagreement about the Islamic Banking Plan, in an open Parliament session.

"Under the conditions that the CBI is sanctioned, its structure must not be changed by the ratified plan," Abdolnaser Hemmati said.

"I am not convinced about the plan and want MPs to vote against it," he added.

"The plan includes 205 articles," he

said, "Is it possible to do such a number of amendments in the banking system?"

He urged the MPs not to pass the plan into a law and let the government initially prepare a related bill then submit it to the parliament.

"Having the plan implemented, CBI would need almost two years to regain its stability," he noted, "Under the present sanctions, it is not vital to make such amendments."

Banking experts do not reject the positive aspects of the bill but note that it includes major weaknesses. They believe that the bill had to be prepared initially by the banking system and experts and after getting investigated by the government would be eventually ratified by the Parliament. Lamenting about its large number of articles, they claim that approved bill has been planned unilaterally by the Parliament members without considering views of experts from domestic state-run or private banks.

The ratified bill is called a naïve scheme that has been prepared hastily without taking advantage of experts'

views on the threshold of the next round of the Parliament elections.

It has also been labeled as a propaganda since it comprises too many unnecessary modifications in domestic banking system, while the country is coping with the toughest US sanctions.

To shed light on the issue, Mehr news agency conducted an interview with Iranian banking expert, Bahaoddin Hosseini Hashemi.

"The plan has not been passed to become a law yet," he said, "The 'usury-free banking' law was initially planned and ratified by the Parliament in 1983 and was to be reviewed after five years from its ratification. But it was not. Therefore, the Parliament has still the right to make a review over or make its desired amendments in its 36-year-old plan."

In addition, the banking expert noted that "The MP's plan, focused on domestic banking system, includes banking network, the CBI and the whole structure affiliates to banking procedures. Therefore, it deals with various issues such as appointment or dismissal of the CBI governor besides his impeachment in a Parliament session."

As he elaborated, "CBI governor is not presently a member of the Cabinet, due to present regulations, MPs cannot impeach him and to find answers to their questions about functionality and measures of the CBI, MPs have to summon the finance minister or the President. Through the proposed plan, MPs seek to modify CBI fundamental rules to have the right for questioning its governor while respecting his authority and independency."

As he went on, "banking officials always confirm the need for some modifications in banking system regulations, however, they assert that the impracticalities of this system are rooted in causes other than the current laws and regulations."

"For years, Iran has been under the US sanctions and experiencing an economic stagnation. It is a long time that the government has been receiving loans from the country's banks to compensate its budget deficiency but it was not able to fulfill its commitments," he noted.

"Accordingly, banks had to deal with

a large volume of arrears that they had not been paid to. Besides they were cut out from international financial resources," he added.

"The conditions made state-run banks and private ones compete. Since the state-run ones were in charge of supplying financial resources of the private banks, the private ones commenced granting more interests and advantages to lure customers. They, in result, made the governmental banks encounter a liquidity risk i.e. state-run banks lost their financial resources and could not receive back the resources they allocated to customers as facilities and loans before the pre-determined deadline," he described.

"Capital adequacy ratio (CARs) of governmental banks dropped, consequently. They could not grant loans as before, which attracted a chorus of criticism among Iranians," Hosseini Hashemi said.

"Criticisms suggested MPs that banks prevent providing loans to applicants despite having required financial resources or because they are running firms or acting as relators," he added.

MPs, as the nations' representatives, were accordingly convinced that the banking regulations must be modified. They prepared and ratified the recent plan in the Parliament despite bankers' disagreement.

"Bankers and banking officials believe that the practicality of Iranian banking system has reduced due to some reasons other than bad regulations or its structure. Thus, the CBI and banking experts did not accept to help MPs get this plan prepared and it was planned fully by the Parliament. Bankers assert that impracticality is rooted in economic status quo, the applied monetary and financial policies," the expert reiterated.

All across the globe, banks are acting as mediators i.e. they take money from depositors and grant it to the investors in cash or in form of credits. Banks in the world do not interfere more and just act as supervisors via assessing the possible risks and credits. However, in Islamic banking the wage or interest banks receive to act as mediators puts them in place of creditors against loan takers, which

is called usury. To resolve the issue, in Islamic banking banks are appointed as the lawyers and the customer are their clients. Banks are allowed then to use the deposits in real economic investments. This pulled banks into investing activities and running firms. The procedure, in better words, dragged banks out of their mediating roles into running economic projects. The whole routine has been imposed to the banks by the implemented policies through the times. Banks were also asked to provide the government with loans, which have not been cleared yet.

Being asked about the practicality of the MPs' plan in case of being passed into law, Hosseini Hashemi said, "Probabilities for passing the plan into a law by the end of the current Parliament (May 2020) is low."

"Regarding the described complex conditions, making any amendments in banking system regulations will worsen the conditions. Even a group of banking experts and top economists would not be able to improve the situation by revising the whole banking regulations from A to Z," he added.

Answering a question about the possible solution for the predicament, Hosseini Hashemi said, "The prescription is embedded in economic improvement. The government needs to minimize its budget deficiency, seek privatization, pay its arrears to the banks, improve ties with international and foreign banks to be able to take advantage of international credits."

Besides the discussed deficiencies of the MP's plan, experts are gradually putting forward further shortfalls.

For instance, the plan has not considered any specific connection between the required monetary and foreign exchange rate policies, despite the significant influence of the forex rates on various economic sectors of Iran, some claim.

In a letter to the Parliament Speaker, a group of Iranian bankers and experts have urged the parliament to reject the plan due to its 'fundamental deficiencies'. The plan, in their view, is unilaterally designed by MP's without reflecting the views of banking system professionals.

Italians persistently willing to preserve trade with Iran under sanctions

By: Mahnaz Abdi



Although the U.S. renewed sanctions against Iranian economy are preventing Iran's European trade partners to do business with the Islamic Republic, Italian traders and businessmen seem strongly determined to preserve their trade ties with Iran.

They did not leave the Iranian market even in the previous round of the sanctions.

During a number of meetings between Iranian and Italian officials and businesspeople after the imposition of the new round of sanctions, the Italian side has repeatedly expressed its eagerness and determination to preserve and even expand economic and trade cooperation with Iran.

In a meeting with Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafe'i in Tehran in mid-June, the previous Italian Ambassador to Iran Mauro Conciatori emphasized that the cooperation between Iran and Italy will be maintained at all levels.

Mentioning the growth of trade turnover between Iran and Italy in recent years and the interest of Italian businessmen and entrepreneurs in investing in Iran, he stressed, "We should not worry about the future of Iran-Italy economic relations."

"Despite the U.S. sanctions, the two countries' trade turnover is currently more than 4 billion euros" Conciatori said.

"We are currently in the process of "contemplating" to plan better future relations, and I'm sure we will have a bigger jump forward after this era", he added.

According to the data released by

European Union's statistics agency Eurostat, among the European importers of Iranian products in 2018, Italy was the biggest one through purchasing €2.9 billion of goods from Iran.

The country's imports from Iran in 2018 was 31 percent of the total of European countries' imports from the Islamic Republic. However, the figure registered an annual decrease of 13 percent in 2018 from its previous €3.36 billion in 2017.

During another meeting participated by the ICCIMA head and the new Italian Ambassador to Iran Giuseppe Perrone in early July, the Italian envoy said the ground is prepared for cooperation between Italian and Iranian companies.

Making the remarks in a meeting of Iran-Italy Joint Chamber of Commerce at the place of ICCIMA, the ambassador said that the activities of the joint chamber in fact show that there is high interest for cooperation between the two countries and based on the available data, Italy is one of the major trade partners of Iran.

Expressing his satisfaction over the eagerness of Iranian and Italian private sectors for cooperation, the envoy said Italian embassy is ready for offering any kind of cooperation in this due.

"We are in a special condition created as the result of sanctions pressure on both sides and under the current condition Iranian and Italian governments and private sectors have a double responsibility to remove the barriers", he stressed.

According to Chairman of Iran-Italy Joint Chamber of Commerce Ahmad Pourfallah, despite the U.S. sanctions Italian companies are still willing to engage in trade with Iran.

The official says that despite the U.S. pressures, small and medium-sized Italian enterprises have not cut their ties with Iran and Italy still holds the first place among Iran's European trade partners.

"In the post-sanctions era when the sanctions were removed from Iran's economy, over 1000 business firms and more than 300 companies from Italy came to Iran," according to Pourfallah.

He says that Italian companies are still looking to find ways to continue their economic ties with Iran, every month four or five Italian companies visit Iran to hold trade talks.

The official says that the two sides have on the agenda to boost their mutual trade to \$13 billion.

Meanwhile, in an interview conducted by ILNA on Saturday, Lida Shahabi, the secretary general of Iran-Italy Joint Chamber of Commerce, said that Italian private sector is pressuring the government to set up a financial channel to boost economic ties between the two countries.

"Italy cannot ignore the attractive market of Iran", the official further emphasized.

She went on to say, "SMEs are very important in the Italian economy. 90 percent of Italian SMEs are active with less than 10 employees and have no ties with the U.S., so they do not fear the sanctions. These SMEs express high willingness to have trade with Iran as they consider the high potential of Iranian market."

Therefore, the officials of the two sides should lay the ground for expansion of bilateral cooperation and in fact they should act as a catalyst in this due, she commented.



ECO Role of regional digital development in increasing tourism coop. in ECO

By: Mahdi Pourhasani

The 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism following the 5th High-Level Experts Group (HLEG) on tourism was held on 3-4 October 2019, in Khujand, Tajikistan.

The meetings were hosted by the Committee of Tourism Development under the government of the Republic of Tajikistan. Delegations from the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan (host), the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Uzbekistan as well as the delegation of ECO Secretariat attended the meetings.

The essay is to demonstrate the relationship between the development of information and communication technology and the improvement of cooperation in tourism among ECO member states.

The increasing development of information and communication technology over the past two decades has an effect on regional and global integration and development of globalization. It has positive effects on employment in startups and innovative companies, growth, and development in technology and other sectors as well as creative fields like e-government, e-tourism and so on.

ICT network impact will depend on

the level of development and digital readiness of countries and their stakeholders. It will also depend on the policies adopted and implemented at the national, regional and international levels. According to ITU 2017 Global ICT Development Index, position of ECO member state was included Kazakhstan 52, Azerbaijan 65, Turkey67, Islamic Republic of Iran81, Uzbekistan 95, Kyrgyzstan 109, Islamic Republic of Pakistan 148 and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 159 that showed existence of digital divided between member countries but this problem could increase opportunities of ICT cooperation among these countries.

In the tourism sector, digital technology like cell phone applications, digital cameras, internet, GPS, big data, virtual reality are creating a new competitive global market and countries and companies are allowed to access the global market through advertising campaigns, market making and analyzing the global market. For instance, according to some research, VR tours are effective not only in enticing people to visit an area but in helping them plan out what they're going to do and how they're going to spend their time once they're there.

The "2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development" and proposed "Plan of Action" was agreed by a ministerial meeting in 2017 to serve as a

framework for future joint activities in the field of ICT under the umbrella of ECO.

ECO region with an area of more than 8 million square kilometers and a population of around 450 million inhabitants is well-known for its natural beauties and diversity of its historical- cultural heritage.

This region has potential opportunities to further cooperation in tourism and attract foreign tourism. One of the approaches to achieve this goal is incising cooperation in information and communication technology to the improvement of IDI in this region and development of cooperation through this field such as e-healthy, e-learning, and other methods. In this regard, regional countries can support launching ECO TOURISM WEBSITE; the website should creation by the chamber of commerce of member states to introduce tourism attraction and credible company to offer e-tourism service to the ECO region at affordable prices.

As a result, access to affordable, high-speed broadband network strengthens regional cross- border digital trade and digital literacy in member state countries documented in "2025 ECO Regional strategy for information society development" has a positive effect on the development of tourism in the region and would increase the level of tourism cooperation within ECO region.

IRICA taking more steps to facilitate imports, combat sanctions

By: Mahnaz Abdi

Since the US re-imposition of sanctions against Iran's economy, the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) has been taking various measures to facilitate the customs process both for exports and imports of the commodities to reduce the effect of sanctions.

IRICA Head Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi says that this round of sanctions is tougher than the previous round; so more strategic actions are needed to nullify them.

As the sanctions may make the country face a shortage of basic goods, the government and IRICA have taken various measures to avoid such a condition.

One major action is facilitating conditions for the importers of the basic commodities, for example providing them necessary foreign currency through NIMA (Iran's Forex Management Integrated System).

Also in August, Iran's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjpasand, in a directive addressing the IRICA head, obliged the customs administration to take measures for facilitating customs processes.

Meanwhile, following a previous directive by President Hassan Rouhani, IRICA has been providing new facilities for importers of basic goods which makes them able to clear their commodities in less than an hour.

And now a new bylaw announced by IRICA Deputy Head



Mehrdad Jamal Orounaqi on Monday is to facilitate imports more in line with combatting the sanctions.

The new instructions declared to the country's customs departments require the representatives of the related organizations to act under the supervision of IRICA for conducting necessary controls and inspections.

Controls like medical inspections and those related to quality and standards should be done under the supervision of IRICA, according to the new bylaw.

It says that the related organizations should submit the result of their controls and investigations to IRICA through the electronic system and based on the procedures defined by IRICA.

And it is emphasized that the new regulations are to protect the economy against the sanctions.

Iran achieves knowledge of building space engines: ISRC head

Head of Iran's Space Research Center says the country is now capable of manufacturing space engines.

"Iran has achieved the knowledge of building space engines; such engines were formerly built only by the US," Hossein Samimi told Mehr News Agency on January 18.

He said the new achievement includes the design and development of various versions of "Arash space engine" the first sample of which was tested successfully late 2019.

Referring to the rapid developments of the country's space sector, Samimi noted that "space engines were not needed before because the Iranian satellites were put into the low orbit in the past; however, now that we are seeking to send satellites into the high orbit, we need such engines."

"Arash space engine will be put in the orbital transfer system to help thrust satellites from the low orbit into the high orbit."



Iranian scientists have in recent years made astonishing progress in the development of the country's space program.

Iran launched its first locally-built satellite, Omid (Hope), in 2009. The country also sent its first bio-capsule containing living creatures into space in February 2010, using a Kavoshgar-3 (Explorer-3) carrier.

Director of Iran University of Science and Technology, Jabar Ali Zaker said this week the university had delivered the home-grown Zafar satellite to Iran Space Agency, noting that the satellite is now ready for launch.

He did not provide a schedule for the launch but said it will be put into orbit in the next three months.

Zafar is a 90-kilogram remote-sensing satellite equipped with color cameras and can be used for surveying oil reserves, mines, jungles and natural disasters. If the launch is successful, it will orbit the earth at an altitude of 530 kilometers.



Culture

'Crows in the Rain' is a pathway to every person's infinite inner world'

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Post-rock is one of those really tricky genres. The music could either be the best thing you've ever heard in your life and will continue to be on loop to the end of time, or it may come across as generic and repetitive and completely unmemorable and already ticked off your playlist after the first listen.

Fortunately for the Tehran-based 'Crows in the Rain', their music falls into the first category. Each track could easily be someone's favorite, and I, personally, have a hard time skipping on any of them. The music, composed on piano, electric guitar, bass and drums, tugs at your heartstrings with its mournful, melancholic tone, and re-vitalizes your artistic calling, no matter how much or little of it you think you have.

"What has attracted us to this particular genre is its ability to represent the infinite magnificence of the smallest moments we have lived," the band said in explanation of the appeal of the post-rock genre that brought Crows in the Rain into existence some five years ago.

Faithful to the band's name, each track sounds like the gentle pitter-patter of rain against the windowpane and a pleasant scent of the petrichor that comes after.

"Emotions such as sorrow, loss, grievance...have always acted as strong driving forces for our music and we find great fragility and infinite purity in these emotions."

Bands, even the highly successful and well-established ones, are hardly ever consistent with the quality of the music they produce. That has never seemed to be an issue for the Crows in the Rain, with four albums already under their belt, and a fifth one soon to be released.

When asked about their 'secret', the



band said "We have a principle in our band which is no piece is released unless we are deeply influenced or moved by it when we listen to it."

What follows is my interview with Crows in the Rain about the story behind the formation of the band, their aspirations, the process of composing a piece, and the joyful moments and challenges they have encountered along the way to be where they are today.

The first time I listened to a track by 'Crows in the Rain', which was 'You Are Still Here Floating' from your 2016 album, I didn't even entertain the possibility that the band would actually be hailing from Iran. Please tell us about the band. How and why it was formed, the members and their musical backgrounds, the visions, etc.?

There was no initial planning for the formation of the band. The idea behind forming a band stemmed from the friendship between Masih and Hamed. As mentioned in many other interviews, in October 2014 on a rainy day, we (Masih and Hamed) got together and played for the first time and decided to record everything we

played. Hours later, our very first piece was composed and recorded entirely from improvisation. We stood by the window while listening to our first piece and looking outside; it was raining heavily while a flock of crows was flying above the house. This was the inspiration for the name of the group.

Hamed Fahimi Joo is our guitarist who has had many experiences playing in genres such as Rock, Fusion, Blues, and Experimental in other bands before. Masih Taj, who's another member of our band, was a pianist before the band was formed; however, he did not have any professional career in music before Crows in the Rain. In 2017, after the release of the second album, Ashkan Karimi also joined the band as the bassist. He started pursuing his musical career as a bassist professionally after joining the band. Lastly, Masood Keramat is a drummer who joined us later and is currently an active member of our band. Masood has had years of experience in the field of music, playing in genres such as Progressive, Rock, and Experimental.

As someone who favors dark, melancholic vibes above all else, listening to your music is a real treat

that never disappoints. From your first released track 'Forgotten Childhood' (2016) to the latest album 'Sorrow for An Unfinished Dream' (2019), the traces of sorrow and suffering are palpable. Where do these acute feelings come from? And how do you keep this consistency and distinctive sound in all of the tracks you have so far released?

We have always strived to play music solely for the sake of music itself and what we experience in our inner world. Certainly, every band has their visions and dreams. One of our biggest and most important visions is to enable anyone who listens to our music to explore and delve into their inner world which they may suppress or ignore and to listen to and perhaps grasp an experience of that world within.

We have a principle in our band which is no piece is released unless we are deeply influenced or moved by it when we listen to it and every time we choose the pieces that affect us between the ones we have composed, we come to the understanding that these tracks are filled with the emo-

tions that we are experiencing in ourselves. Emotions such as sorrow, loss, grievance, etc. have always acted as strong driving forces for our music and we find great fragility and infinite purity in these emotions. From the start till now these emotions have been and are still the essence of any new music we create and produce and despite all the changes along the way, we have always tried to keep the purity of this essence.

What is the appeal of the post-rock genre that brought 'Crows in the Rain' into existence?

We don't insist on playing in the Post Rock genre but till today, Post Rock has given us the best possible platform for expressing what we experience in ourselves. Apart from this matter, what has attracted us to this particular genre is its ability to represent the infinite magnificence of the smallest moments we have lived.

Your band name is indeed a very interesting choice, and also very telling of the sound of your music. So are the artworks for each album. Tell

us about the story behind them. Why haven't we yet heard a track by your band with crows cawing in the rain in the background?

We talked about the story behind our band's name earlier but regarding the sound of rain and crows, these elements were included in the first track ever recorded and the name of the track is "Crows in the Rain" which has not been performed live or released anywhere till today. Perhaps in the near future, this piece, along with other pieces will be released.

You performed several live concerts in Iran. How were the experience and feedback? When will be your next concert in Iran?

For our first concert, we had serious concerns about selling out the tickets but in just an hour and a half, we were sold out! In that concert, we played the tracks that were supposed to be released in the third album and our audience had never heard them before. The feedback we received during and after the concert was remarkably positive and a surprise to us and that became



a motivation to have another concert at a bigger venue, the main hall of Azadi Tower with 300 seats available, in less than a month. Later we also had concerts at the University of Tehran, Evan Shams Hall, and Niavaran cultural center.

Yet, from the first day of forming this band, we decided to dedicate ourselves to creating music regardless of its career-wise successes or setbacks and we didn't draft a set plan for any of the events and concerts or other sides of this journey in advance. This is still a core principle to us and makes us genuinely excited and enthusiastic about every event we have as if it is our very first concert. This has allowed us to connect with our audiences on a much deeper level.

When we are performing live on the stage, where there's less distance with our audience, expressing our emotions in the form of music with them feels as if we are sharing our world with them and they are sharing theirs with us and I think this builds up this strange and unique atmosphere in the room that creates a distinctive experience for each and all of us.

Our next concert will be after the release of the fifth album, in winter 2020. Based on what we have planned, we'll have a concert in Tehran and some other cities in Iran as well. Information on the time and the venue of these concerts will be announced soon.

Have you performed in any other country? Do you have any plans to? What about working with a foreign musician as collaboration?

Yes, we've had offers to perform in other countries such as China and some European countries such as Germany and Switzerland. Besides, we are planning for next year's events. We've also talked to some foreign bands and international record labels for future collaborations which we'll inform our audiences about this news soon.

How do you describe the experience of being a non-mainstream musician in Iran? How has living in Iran influenced your musical development? Do you face any particular challenges for

reaching your targeted audience, and if yes, how do you overcome them?

We were well aware that Post Rock is not a mainstream genre in the music industry around the world since the beginning; hence, this has never been a serious concern to us. For sure we've faced many challenges in our way due to the restrictions implemented in Iran. Challenges particularly with regards to the limitations in the music industry of Iran and communicating with the audience; Nonetheless, these challenges have prompted our growth and development in many ways too. It's also worth mentioning that the cultural context of our country and society has created a distinct effect on our music too.

As mentioned, Post Rock, in many parts of the world, is not a well-distinguished genre but particularly in Iran, there have never been any attempts to promote a platform for this genre or any other non-mainstream genres to be introduced and publicized on a big scale. This, however, has never acted as a setback for us; therefore, we don't feel the need to overcome this hindrance and any progress we've ever made, small or big, has always brought us joy and delight.

Your latest album, 'Sorrow for An Unfinished Dream', judging by the name of some of the tracks, seems to be built on the true story of the Japanese girl Sadako, who tried to make a thousand origami cranes to be granted a wish, which in her case, was to live through her disease Leukemia caused by the radiation in the wake of Hiroshima bombing. Tell us more about the album, and why you decided to focus on this story in particular.

We used Sadako Sasaki's story as a shell to develop and express the emotions we experienced during composing the tracks of this album. Each track has a special meaning to each of the members of our band and Sadako's story truly gave us a unique approach to articulate our mind. It's worth mentioning that we have always had a special interest in the Japanese culture and we composed a track called Hiro-

shima which we included in that album (named "This is our cry" in the track-list) and this helped us significantly in shaping the concept of the album.

How do you go about composing a track? Tell me about the process, the inspiration, and the challenges. Which member(s) is in charge of coming up with the idea and the general sound of each track?

All of the tracks we have ever composed have been based on improvisation. We always gather together and one of us starts playing based on whatever emotions they are experiencing at that moment and the other members slowly join and start playing along and develop the piece that's being crafted. This process continues until the end of the piece. The entire course of composing a piece is generated through an empathetic and telepathic process between us as a group; hence we can't consider any singular member of our band to be the sole composer of any track.

Where are you planning to take the band next, music-wise? Are you working on a new album?

We certainly have short term and long term agendas; however, we're not restricting ourselves to these plans and we try to navigate our path through this journey with an open mind and flexibility. Currently, we've finished recording the fifth album, mix and mastering have been finalized and if all goes according to plan, our fifth album will be released this winter. Our vision is to move towards a purer and more exclusive genre with its distinct signature inscribed to Crows in the Rain. The atmosphere, melodies, and emotions in the upcoming album are dissimilar to any of our previous pieces and perhaps this album is the beginning of a new chapter for Crows in the Rain.

If you could describe 'Crows in the Rain'-- its sound, its visions, its concept -- with non-musical terms, how would you do it?

Crows in the Rain is a pathway to every person's infinite inner world.

Persian calligram: a modern art style seeking world recognition



An Iranian calligrapher, Majid Khandagh Abadi, believes that one of the reasons the Persian calligram has become so popular in the last forty years is because the art style is looking to find an audience outside the country.

Persian calligram is a modern art style made up of a combination of calligraphy with painting and graphics. In the composition of calligram artworks, letters and words are arranged in such unique and aesthetic ways that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish between them.

Iranian calligrapher Majid Khandagh Abadi, whose calligram exhibition 'Asheghaneh' ('Romantic') is on display at Khavaran art gallery until Monday, told Mehr correspondent that his exhibition includes 35 calligram artworks, all inspired by the romantic poetry of Persian poets and mystics, mostly Rumi, Hafiz, and Sa'adi.

Noting that he has used acrylic and gold sheet in creating the artworks, Khandagh Abadi explained about the calligraphy used in the works, called 'Nasta'liq': "I tried to make sure that no

harm was done to the characteristics of the letters and the combination of the Nasta'liq—an issue that is currently challenging calligram. Some fellow artists change the characteristics of the letters, probably to make it more beautiful, and for sure there is an artistic justification for it, but I, personally, decided to make no changes to the form of Nasta'liq."

Talking about the limitations and potentials of calligram these days, he said "For starters, I think there shouldn't be any boundaries when it comes to the art of calligram; that is, we shouldn't try to put down a line and say an artwork is only a calligram up to this line and it no longer is a calligram over the line. Another point is related to the audience's taste. At the moment, the audience may not take too well to the old style and texture of Nasta'liq, because the script has been used for centuries and may no longer appeal to the taste of the modern audience."

"The third point is related to the artist's skill. I talk about myself: for example, my skill is limited to the creation of my own works and I don't have the cour-

age to change anything about Nasta'liq letters and combinations; but of course, many of my fellow artists do that and some of them manage to create very beautiful works of art."

"I think that the audience and the artist's skills are the deciding factors for choosing a particular style over the others," he added.

At the end, the artist talked about the potential of Persian calligram for becoming international: "The truth is that I have not yet had a chance to hold an exhibition overseas, but it is only natural that when painting techniques take over the calligram techniques, it would probably appeal more to the international audience, since calligraphy alone cannot attract the audience from other countries."

"Perhaps, one of the reasons that Persian calligram has become so popular in the last forty years was because of the attempts to make the art more accessible to people across the world, especially because Nasta'liq is a completely Iranian script and a foreign audience would not understand it," Khandagh Abadi added.

Never compromise, Polish director Joanna Kos-Krauze tells budding filmmakers

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Tehran, Shiraz and Isfahan – three Iranian metropolitan cities – recently played host to a week-long film event dedicated to the most distinguished works of the Polish cinema. The event, organized by the Polish embassy and Iran's Art & Experience Cinema, opened at the Iranian Artists' Forum in downtown Tehran on December 1 with the screening of Joanna Kos-Krauze's 'Papusza' (2013) – an award-winning, gripping, monochrome narrative of the rise and fall of the most distinguished Polish-Gypsy poet, Bronislawa Wajs, widely known as Papusza, and the turning point in her life where her talent was discovered by writer Jerzy Ficowski.

Ms. Kos-Krauze, who was present at the event as a special guest and later led a workshop on "Polish and Iranian Art Cinema and Co-production", was kind enough to sit for a brief interview with me half an hour before the screening of her film.

A graduate of Polish and Hebrew studies, she is considered as one of the most important directors in contemporary Polish cinema. Meeting Krzysztof Krauze (whom she married later on) was a turning point in her cinematic career, which she continued to further expand on by collaborating with him on several highly successful projects, including the biopic 'Papusza' and the multi-level, emotionally-charged drama 'Birds Are Singing in Kigali'.

She credits her venture into filmmaking to 'accident', with her dream job having been a surgeon, and still reminiscing about the loss chance with a wistful smile and in good humor.

"Surgeons are out there, being brave and making tough decisions," she says.

But doesn't that also describe filmmakers?

"What you really need when you choose this path, I think, is bravery," she tells me when the interview is near-



ly over. "To have the courage to make what you really want to make, and to never compromise."

Well, I think she agrees.

What follows is the full text of the interview:

Would you please give a little introduction about yourself and your career for our Iranian audience? How did you get introduced to filmmaking?

I don't know. By accident, maybe. I always wanted to be a doctor, but my marks weren't good enough – I guess I was too lazy (laughs). Even now, sometimes I find myself regretting the fact that I'm not a surgeon. Because they are brave and they make tough decisions; this is something real and tangible that you can do. Meanwhile, film directing is a very risky endeavor.

The starting point for me, I think, was a competition for writing a script for the TV. I took part in it and won the prize. Then I became the chief of the screenwriting department for one series. After that I worked on some short documentaries for TV, and was a casting director for quite a long time. Then, gradually I stepped into the realm of feature films. The turning point, of course, was when I met my husband, and then we started to work together, for almost twenty years.

What were your visions when you first started as a filmmaker and how many of those were you able to accomplish by now?

I can't say that I started with any particular vision. The duty of the artist is to keep looking for questions, not the answers. I'm just trying in my own way to show something. Visions are for religious leaders, I think, not the artists.

Two of your films were selected for screening at the second Polish Film Week in Iran, 'Papusza' (2013) and 'Birds Are Singing in Kigali' (2017). Let's talk about 'Papusza' first. What inspired you to work on this subject?

I wouldn't really call it inspiration when I decide to work on a project. Usually, you have three or four ongoing projects that you're trying to develop. But if you want to know how the film came to be, back in high school, I had a very good teacher, and one day we were analyzing Papusza's poems. Then my curiosity led me to a book on the world of gypsies. The gypsy community, we could say, has disappeared from the Polish cultural landscape. Jerzy Ficowski, also a character in my film 'Papusza', wrote that book. One chapter about Papusza in the book stayed with me. After many years, when we were looking for some

new ideas, I thought about this subject, and it took my husband and I some four or five years to develop just one movie because our style of working consists of doing a lot of research on the subject we wanted to work on in order to get fully acquainted with the world of it. For seven or eight years we couldn't find a way how to show this vanished gypsy world. It wasn't just Papusza's poems that grabbed my interest, but also her story, which we knew nothing for sure; everything was like a fairytale, something very dramatic that we decided to work on. She is considered as the first established female gypsy poet in history, which in itself, was incredible.

And from what I've gathered, your 'Papusza' is the only film ever made on this subject.

There was one short documentary on her, but that's all.

You worked both as a screenwriter and as a director on 'Papusza' and several other projects, a trend that is pretty common among some Iranian filmmakers who are trying to make a name for themselves out there. How do you find the experience, and what are some of its benefits and challenges?

I think working both as the screenwriter and the director on a project is much better. Because this way, you can have your own way and exert your own influence on how you want the project to progress. I was also the producer on my last film, which yielded further influence to me. It might be tough sometimes, obviously, taking over all those responsibilities, but it also gives you so much freedom, considering the current state of cinema, with distributors and digital platforms that want to have influence over everything. I think in the artistic cinema, this is the natural way of doing films. Many Polish filmmakers are nowadays producing their own films, because this way, they will have a lot of influence; otherwise, outside producers may push you into making a box office hit, or decide on which actors to cast, or even the length of your film. It's a tricky process. There might be challenges, but it depends on how well you can handle the whole project.

Polish inventors have contributed a lot to the development of cinematography and television. As a Polish filmmaker yourself, with many years active in the film industry, how do you see the changes and developments in this field over the years?

A lot has changed for us Polish filmmakers, because nowadays we've got a good system – I think the best one there is – of public funds in Poland. We've got the Polish Film Institute, and now finally the cash rebate scheme. Generally, I think our cinematography is very artistic, and is based on the directors, not the producers. We don't have a lot of private money, so everything is almost entirely based on the artist.

Polish cinema is more or less familiar to the Iranian audience. How familiar is the Polish audience with the Iranian cinema?

It depends. I think like all other educated people around the world, the well-informed Polish audience really knows the Iranian cinema. On the other hand, Polish film critics such as Artur Zaborowski are doing a lot to introduce the Iranian cinema to us. To be honest, though, we wish to have more exposure to Iranian films, because we usually only have access to big names and blockbusters, such as Asghar Farhadi's 'A Separation', or Abbas Kiarostami or Jafar Panahi; it's too little; but I think things like New Horizons sections in film festivals with a special focus on the Iranian cinema will help a lot. I do believe that the Polish and Iranian cinemas have many connections; especially the contemporary Iranian cinema, which I think is linked through the tradition of Krzysztof Kieślowski. I think we have the same taste and the same concerns and problems when it comes to films.

The sense of alienation, loss, anxiety, and grief with central female characters feature heavily in two of your films that were selected for this film event, namely 'Papusza', and 'Birds Are Singing in Kigali'. Was this something you considered consciously when deciding to work on a project?

No, I never start a movie like that, by thinking about the motifs and sym-

bols. That would make the movie come across as pretentious. I'd rather the audience find something in the movie on their own. Of course, in contemporary cinematic works, you can see those issues being featured a lot, that sense of loneliness. But people have always felt lonely, so it's not something I'd consciously choose to approach a project with.

As a writer, what kind of story do you find more urgent to be told given the current state of affairs in the world?

I'm not a teacher, or a religious leader or a politician, so I always worry that I cannot recognize what is truly urgent to talk about. To me, everything seems urgent, the situation of refugees, the ecology, the situation of women, or even how lonely people have become in this digital world. I really can't say what is most urgent to talk about. I don't think I'm qualified for that.

What advice do you have for filmmakers just starting out?

Become a doctor instead (laughs). I actually hate giving or receiving advice in my life. What I can say though is that you should realize that this path is both challenging and wonderful. It's something you can do for the rest of your life; even if you're 100 years old, they put you on a wheelchair or hook you up to a monitor, and still you can act or direct. What you really need when you choose this path, I think, is bravery. To have the courage to make what you really want to make, and to never compromise. If you feel like you're being forced to cast this actor or take that cinematographer or work on that script, don't do it.

Are you working on any new project?

All the time, to be honest (laughs). I have, like, three or four projects on mind, and it's like a lottery which one I'd pick next. For one I feel like I'm better prepared but I don't have the money, or for another I don't think I'm prepared enough but they want to give me the money, so I have to decide if the funding should be my concern or the story I want to tell. This is my biggest challenge. But I also think that when you're ready, everything will fall into place like pieces of a puzzle.

Sport



Iran's star Hamed Haddadi reacts to death of Kobe Bryant

Besides other NBA superstars and Iranian athletes flooding social media with condolences after the death of Kobe Bryant and his 13-year-old daughter Gianna, Iran's Hamed Haddadi reacted to the incident.

In his Instagram stories, Haddadi posted a picture of himself as Memphis Grizzlies member playing against Bryant. Haddadi wished peace for the American professional basketball player.

Haddadi is a basketball player for Nanjing Monkey King of the Chinese Basketball Association. He plays at the center position and is 7'2" tall and weighs 280 lbs. Haddadi was the first Iranian to play in the National Basketball Association when he debuted with the Memphis Grizzlies in 2008.

Bryant's death sent shockwaves throughout the NBA and beyond, prompting not only his colleagues but a range of celebrities worldwide to pay tribute to the basketball icon.

A five-time NBA champion, who was also known by the nickname Mamba, and two-time Olympic gold medalist, Bryant died in a helicopter crash in suburban Los Angeles that also claimed the life of his 13-year-old daughter Gianna and seven others. Madison Square Garden, home of the New York Knicks, was awash in the Los Angeles Lakers colors of purple and gold – the team Bryant played for when he won his championship titles – and so too were the pylons that mark the



entrance to Los Angeles International Airport.

Iran national basketball team captain, Samad Nikkhah Bahrami appreciated Bryant for all the things he gave to basketball. "Thanks for everything that you gave to this game of basketball," he wrote in an Instagram story while posting Bryant's photo.

Key Iran national football team players Ashkan Dejagah, Alireza Jahanbakhsh, and Saman Ghoddos also honored Kobe and his daughter in separate posts.

Iran climbs one place in Asian clubs' ranking in 2020

In the latest ranking of Asian Football Confederation (AFC), Iran's football has climbed up to one place in Asian football clubs' ranking in 2020, above from South Korea, and stood at fifth place.

From 2017 to 2020, Asian Football Confederation (AFC) calculates the score of Asian clubs which participate in the Asian Champions League (ACL) and AFC Cup according to a certain formula.

This was happened at the condition that football teams of Esteghlal and Shahr-e Khodro of Iran advanced to the stage group of ACL with gaining sweet wins over their rivals.

Accordingly, Iran will compete with four representatives in this edition of ACL at the stage group.

In the Preliminary Stage 2 of AFC Champions League, Esteghlal of Iran have thrashed Qatar's Al-Rayyan 5-0 at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium on Tuesday.



AFC ban on Iranian teams continuation of anti-Iranian scenario: expert



Reporting by Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

A veteran sports journalist believes that the AFC's initial decision to ban Iranian teams from hosting 2020 ACL in Iran is a continuation of a scenario that aims to put pressure on Iranian authorities through sports.

The report on the ban of Iranian teams for hosting their rivals in the 2020 AFC Champions League has provoked a furious but united response against what has become known as the most political decision of the AFC.

Initial reports on the ban started interestingly with a Saudi Arabian TV host who announced the news citing informed sources. A day later, the Iranian Football Federation confirmed that it has received a letter from the AFC which says Iranian teams should host their rivals in 2020 ACL in a neutral venue due to security concerns.

Using lobbies, Saudi Arabia managed to persuade AFC officials to hold football matches of its teams with Iranian ones in a neutral venue. The decision came as Tehran and Riyadh had cut political ties. Iranian sports officials were criticized at the time and even now for giving in to that AFC's decision which may have also affected their recently-announced ban.

Although the decision is not final yet as the AFC's Executive Committee has not endorsed it, millions of Iranian football fans along with officials have expressed their anger at the initial decision.

Tens of thousands of fans took to Twitter and Instagram to voice their strong protest for banning a country which has a major share in ACL's rate of attendance at stadiums.

Meanwhile, the four Iranian participating teams in the 2020

ACL sent a letter to Asia's governing football body announcing that they will host their rivals only in Iran not anywhere else.

To shed more light on the issue we reached out to the editor-in-chief of Mehr News Agency's sports desk, Reza Khosravi.

"The decision made by the AFC's Competition's Committee regarding Iranian representatives in the AFC Champions League is the continuation of a scenario which has started months for Iran's sports aimed at put pressure on the country's authorities through sports," he told me.

"The scenario started with the interference of the International Judo Federation in the case of Saeid Mollaei's immigration and then continued with chess and now it's time for football. Due to the huge presence of fans, sports have special importance across the world and is the best tool to implement measures that could be positive or negative in nature.

"This time, the AFC officials are trying to challenge Iran's sports and politics through an unprofessional and anti-football act under the influence and pressure of some countries and political figures; and what can be a better means than forcing Iranian teams to host their rivals in a neutral venue," he highlighted.

"Iran's sports officials have made the best decision and perhaps if they had stood against AFC's earlier decision of holding Iran-Saudi matches in neutral venues, the confederation would not have thought of repeating the scenario and putting pressure on Iran's football.

Iran's Persepolis and Sepahan have already secured their place in the group stage of the 2020 ACL while Esteghlal and Shahr Khodro have to play in the Preliminary Stage to advance to the group competitions.

Mohammadian bulldozes all rivals, incl. Olympic champion, to win Matteo Pellicone

Iran's freestyle wrestler of 97kg category Mohammadhossein Mohammadian gained commanding victories against all his rivals on Friday to win the gold medal of the Matteo Pellicone in Italy.

He started the campaign with an 11-0 win over Alisher Yergali of Kazakhstan who had earlier qualified his country for the 2020 Olympics.

Mohammadian then proved his readiness by walloping the reigning U23 world champion, USA's Bo Nickal, 10-0.

In the quarterfinals, he shut Olympics gold medalist USA's Kyle Snyder out before the half time with an 8-0 win. He then continued the chain of victories, this time with an 11-0 one against 2018 world bronze-medal finisher Abraham de Jesus Conyedo Ruano of Italy. Eventually, he won Aliaksandr Hushtyn of Belarus 9-0 in the final match to complete the seismic day and win his first career Rankings Series title.

Iran also won another gold medal on Friday. Amir Hossein Zare stunned the three-time world champion Bilal Makhov of Russia in the final of 125kg category.



Here are the results of the Friday competitions in freestyle discipline as reported by the United World Wrestling:

97kg

GOLD - Mohammadhossein MOHAMMADIAN (IRI) df. Aliaksandr HUSHTYN (BLR), 9-0

BRONZE - Kyle Frederick SNYDER (USA) df. Abraham de Jesus CONYEDO RUANO (ITA), 12-1

BRONZE - Murazi MCHEDLIDZE

(UKR) df. Pavel OLEJNYIK (HUN), 8-4

125kg

GOLD - Amir ZARE (IRI) df. Bilal MAKHOV (RUS), 5-3

BRONZE - Amarveer DHESI (CAN) df. Daniel LIGETI (HUN), 8-4

BRONZE - Yusup BATIRMURZAEV (KAZ) df. Nick MATUHHIN (GER), 8-3

The four-day tournament kicked off January 15 and will wrap up today in Ostia, a port city of ancient Rome located 30km away from the city center.

According to a report by the United World Wrestling, the stacked entry list includes seven reigning world champions, all three 2019 Wrestlers of the Year and over 30 world medal holders from the 2019 World Championships.

Jahanbakhsh tells of his 'incredible feeling' after scoring first goal for Brighton

Iranian midfielder Alireza Jahanbakhsh scored his first-ever goal for Brighton & Hove Albion which was also the quickest goal of the team in the Premier League history.

The 26-year-old moved from Alkmaar in the Netherlands to Brighton & Hove Albion on the English south coast last season after impressing in the Eredivisie Dutch league. He made 19 appearances in the Premier League for the Seagulls however failed to score a goal.

On just his second appearance this season the winger netted with a nice strike beating Bournemouth keeper Aaron Ramsdale. Brighton went on to win the game 2-0 with Aaron Mooy also getting his first goal for Brighton.

"It was an incredible feeling," he told the club's website. "When I knew I was playing I had a good feeling that I could help the team. I've had to wait a long time for this moment, and I am glad I took it. It was the perfect afternoon for us: three points, a goal for myself and a clean sheet."

"It took longer than I expected to get my chance this season and I was determined to grab it," added Jahanbakhsh. "I've been training well day in day out and every time I get my

chance I want to make an impact.

"I always felt we had control of the game. We have had some good performances recently and been a bit unlucky.

"At home, with our fans behind us, I thought we did a great job as a team. Every individual helped each other, we created chances and defensively we were very good."





What awaits Iran volleyball at 2020 Tokyo Olympics?

Reporting by Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Iranian men's national volleyball team managed to secure tickets to the 2020 Olympics, obtaining the aim that had been set long ago.

Iran gained a commanding 3-0 win over China in the final of AVC Men's Tokyo Volleyball Qualification in China on Sunday. The win gave Iran the second consecutive berth to one of the most prestigious sports events in the world.

Officials in the Iranian volleyball federation had repeatedly said that the team's main aim is to advance to the Olympics and so tried to downplay the importance of other world events in 2019 such as the FIVB World Cup in which Iran didn't show the expected performance.

Twelve teams will compete for the title in two pools of six at the 2020 Olympics from July 26 to August 9. The composition of the pools has been determined based on the FIVB ranking of the teams.

Six teams of Italy, Poland, Brazil, the USA, Russia, and Argentina had earlier

won their ticket in international qualifiers. In the next stage of qualifications that was held last week in each continent, Iran, France, Tunisia, Venezuela, and Canada won their respective tournaments to join the first six teams in addition to Japan as the host country.

Here are the two pools, drawn according to FIVB ranking:

Pool A: Japan, Poland, Italy, Canada, Iran, and Venezuela.

Pool B: Brazil, USA, Russia, Argentina, France, and Tunisia.

A first glance at the pools reveals that competition on Pool B seems to be more intense as three semifinalists of the 2016 Olympics (Brazil, Russia, and the USA) are showing their teeth for the next stage.

Meanwhile, Pool A seems more ideal for Iran as the team has shown to be able to defeat at least Japan, Venezuela, and Canada; though victory against Italy and Poland is not impossible. However, one should never forget that it is the Olympics and all the teams have been great enough to qualify.

Iran has locked horns with all the teams of Pool A, except Venezuela,

during the 2019 FIVB Men's World Cup in Japan. Igor Kolakovic's men only emerged victorious against Canada (3-1) while suffering defeats to Poland (0-3), Italy (2-3), and Japan (0-1). The last match between Iran and Venezuela was held in qualifications for the 2016 Olympics which finished 3-2 for the Persians.

In the 2016 Olympics, Iran gained two wins and suffered three defeats in the preliminary round, advancing to the next stage as Pool B's fourth team. However, Iran then lost the match against Italy (3-0) in quarterfinals.

Some experts believe that the players who are now playing in Team Melli are the golden generation and the ones who can make history for the country's volleyball by standing on Olympics podium. It's no secret that Iran has lots of talents in this sport but these players have been playing along with each other for the past several years. Some of the key players such as Saied Marouf, Mohammad Mousavi, or Farhad Ghaemi will most probably announce retirement before the next Olympics, so now it seems the time to make the most out of this generation.

IOC confirms Iran's Saeid Marouf candidacy for election to Athletes' Commission

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has confirmed the candidacy of Saeid Marouf, captain of the Iranian national volleyball team, for election to its Athletes' Commission.

The captain of the Iranian national volleyball team successfully passed the second round of requirements that would determine his eligibility as a candidate for the election to the IOC Athletes' Commission, and will now officially represent Iran among other candidates.

This stage included a test administered by the Inter-

national Olympic Committee that confirmed Saeid Marouf's full eligibility to run for IOC Athletes' Commission election.

The IOC Athletes' Commission is a body maintained by the International Olympic Committee for the purpose of representing athletes. Established in 1981, its function is to act as "the link between active athletes and the IOC."

The Commission meets once or twice a year, and organizes an Athletes' Forum once every two years.

An election for Commission members is held at each edition of the Olympic Games, with members being chosen by a secret ballot of the athletes competing at those Games.

Four or five members are elected at each Summer Games and two or three at each Winter Games. They replace the group that was elected at the Games of the same series eight years earlier.

Marouf's candidacy makes Iran's first serious presence at the election to IOC Athletes' Commission. Iran has had no representative at this Commission so far.

The International Olympic Committee is a not-for-profit independent international organization made up of volunteers, which is committed to building a better world through sport. It redistributes more than 90 percent of its income to the wider sporting movement.



Iran female alysh wrestlers win 2019 world title

Iranian women's team of alysh claimed the title of the 2019 world championships on Monday, in Kazakh capital of Nur-Sultan.

The team collected one gold, one silver and one bronze medal in the event, securing 93 points.

Hanieh Ashouri won the gold medal of +75kg. Fatemeh Fattahi Juybari gained the 60kg category silver while Zahra Yazdani snatched a bronze in 55kg.

This is the first time that Iran claims the title of the event. The Kyrgyz Republic and Kazakhstan ranked next with 89 and 63 points respectively.

The event was held in the Kazakh capital of Nur-Sultan under the official name of 'Belt Wrestling World Championships' where wrestlers competed in two disciplines of alysh and Kazakh Kuresi from Dec. 20 to 23.

In men's alysh, Iran added another silver to its tally on Monday to finish the event runner-up with 85 points. Kyrgyz

Republic (96) claimed the title while Mongolia (76) finished third.

Iran's last silver was gained by Pourya Ramezani in the +100kg category.



Mohammadreza Fahimi, the world's most loyal fan

By: Masoud Hossein

Football is much more than just a game for Mohammadreza Fahimi; a football fan who has been hospitalized for 18 years.

In May 2001, Mohammadreza, 11-year-old, attended a match between Shamushak and Persepolis at the Mottaqi Stadium in the city of Sari, north-east of Tehran, where the stadium collapsed because of lack of crowd control and about 100 people were taken to hospital and several people lost their lives.

He got out alive but was involved in a car accident on the way back to his home and suffered a spinal cord injury. Mohammadreza has been hospitalized since that time but has not abandoned his beloved sport.

His favorite teams are Tehran based Persepolis and Nassaji Mazandaran. To watch the matches of the second one is easier since they play in Vatani Stadium in Ghaemshahr but he cannot travel to Tehran's Azadi Stadium because of his physical condition. Distance is an



MEHR NEWSAGENCY
Photo: Amir Ali Razzaghi

obstacle for him.

In the match between Nassaji and Shahr Khodro on Friday, the photographers snapped photos of Mohammadreza laying down on a bed to watch the game.

Nassaji has disappointed their supporters in the current season but he remains loyal.

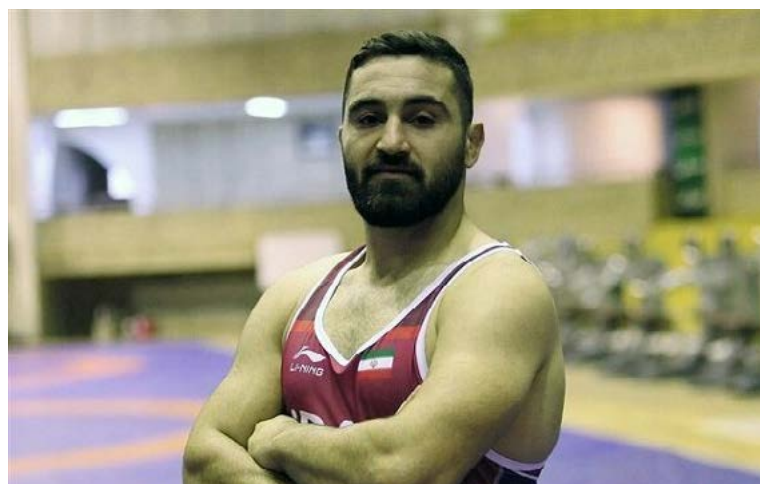
Mohammadreza is the world's most

loyal fan.

He likes to watch the Iran league matches across the country but travel costs are expensive since he should be taken by ambulance.

Mohammadreza stays in the intensive care unit (ICU) of Sari's Emam Khomeini Hospital for many years and FOOTBALL is the only pleasure in his most difficult days.

Iran's Goleij selected as best U23 freestyle wrestler of 2019



Mojtaba Goleij of Iran has been selected by the United World Wrestling as the best U23 freestyle wrestler in the world in 2019.

The United World Wrestling announced the news via posting a video of Goleij in its official Instagram account on December 20.

Goleij won his second U23 gold medal in 2019 after beating 2017 Junior World champion Shamil Musaev of Russia in the final of 97kg in U23 World Wrestling Championships in Hungary.

Also, Iran's Rahman Amouzadkhalili has been named United World Wrestling's Cadet Freestyle Wrestler of the Year 2019 after winning back-to-back world titles.