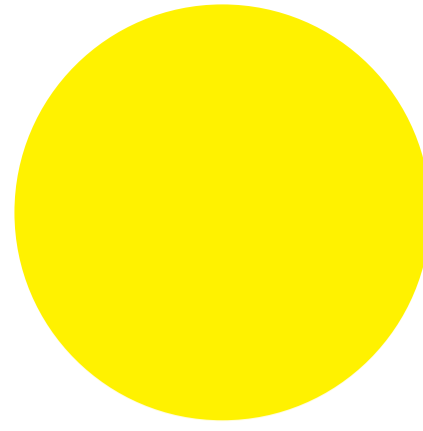


Palestinians will never give up national aspirations

4-5 >



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Leader: West irrational over women's issues

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses a group of women in Tehran on December 27, 2023. leader.ir

2 >

Joint energy projects will serve Iran-Iraq interests: Minister

8 >



Magnificent Malek Mansion, a testament to Iran's renewed legacy

3 >



Countdown is on for Iran volleyball coach appointment

6 >



Omid's likely midway break

7 >



Netanyahu seeking Iran-US confrontation

EXCLUSIVE

The Israeli regime's move in assassinating one of Iran's military advisers in Syria has given the right to Iran to retaliate against Israel at the right time. Iran and Israel have been indirectly at war for several decades as both sides have taken actions against each other in various ways. But Israel's assassination of the Iranian military adviser on Monday raised the question: Why did Israel do such a thing in the critical situation of the Gaza war? What is the goal or goals pursued by the regime behind these terrorist operations?

2 >

Israel kills nearly 200 Gazans in 24 hours

The Gaza Strip's health ministry said Wednesday death toll in the Palestinian territory surged above 21,000 after Israel killed nearly 200 people in just 24 hours.

Israel again pounded Gaza with air strikes and shelling after its armed forces chief warned the war raging with Hamas since the October 7 attacks will last "many more months". Explosion lit up the sky over the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis – a focus of heavy urban combat since the Israeli army said it had largely gained operational control over Gaza's north.

Heavy firefights however also raged again around Gaza City in the north, while an air strike wounded 11 near Rafah, a far-southern city crowded with internally displaced people, witnesses said.

Gaza's spiraling humanitarian crisis has amplified calls for an end to the hostilities.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly vowed to keep

up the campaign to destroy Hamas. "This war's objectives are essential and not simple to achieve," armed forces chief Herzi Halevi said Tuesday. "Therefore, the war will continue for many more months."

The campaign has killed at least 21,110 people, according to the latest toll issued by Gaza's health ministry, which added that more than 55,000 people had been wounded.

The Israeli army said the number of Israeli soldiers killed inside Gaza had risen to 164.

Gaza's 2.4 million people have suffered severe shortages of water, food, fuel and medicines, with only limited aid entering the territory.

An estimated 1.9 million Gazans have been displaced, according to the UN.

The Gaza war "goes beyond a catastrophe and a genocide," Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas charged in an interview on Egyptian television.

The Palestinian Authority chief argued the war "is much uglier than what happened" during the 1948 war that accompanied Israel's creation when 760,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes.

"Netanyahu's plan is to get rid of the Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority," Abbas said.

The UN Security Council, in a resolution last week, called for the "safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale".

The resolution, which did not call for an immediate end to the fighting, effectively leaves Israel with operational oversight of aid deliveries.

In Rafah, hundreds turned up at the Abdul Salam Yassin water company carrying baskets, pulling hand-carts and even pushing a wheelchair stacked with bottles to queue for clean water.

Violence has also flared across the occupied West Bank, with more than 310 Palestinians killed by Israeli troops or settlers, according to the territory's health ministry.

An Israeli operation in a refugee camp in the north of the West Bank left six people dead early Wednesday, it said. Israel also said it will not renew the visa of a United Nations staff member and will also deny the visa request of another UN employee as the regime yet again expresses its displeasure of the global body, which has criticized Israel's targeting of civilians and hospitals. An overwhelming majority of the more than 20,000 Palestinians killed are civilians.

"We will no longer remain silent in the face of the UN's hypocrisy!" Eli Cohen, Israel's minister of foreign affairs, posted on X on Monday. Israel has accused the UN of being biased.



A plume of smoke erupts over the northern Gaza Strip during Israeli bombardment from southern Israel on December 27, 2023.
● JACK GUEZ/AFP



The shrouded bodies of Palestinians killed in northern Gaza, that were taken and later released by Israel, are buried in a mass grave in Rafah, on the southern Gaza Strip on December 26, 2023.
● Mahmud HAMS/AFP

Leader: West irrational over women's issues



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses a group of women in Tehran on December 27, 2023.
● leader.ir

International Desk

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the West follows no logic in the issue of women and merely seeks profit and pleasure from them.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with a group of women in Tehran on Wednesday in the run-up to the celebrations commemorating the birthday anniversary of Hazrat Fatima (SA), the revered daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Press TV reported.

The Leader described the issue of women as one of Islam's strong points, saying, "Islam has a robust, rational logic in all areas pertaining to

women."

Stressing that the world's view on the issue of women is either of a Western approach or an Islamic approach, Ayatollah Khamenei said the two are complete opposites as the Western approach is summed up in seeking profit and pleasure from women.

"The cultural and civilizational system of the West is not willing to discuss such issues; it avoids entering into discussion and research," the Leader said.

He underlined that the West resorts to using force, causing an uproar, and buying off figures to get its own way on women's issues.

"The West is not ready to discuss and is not willing to answer questions

since it knows no logic," Ayatollah Khamenei noted.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution said a Muslim woman could not find a better role model than Hazrat Fatima (SA), advising women to follow the sacred figure in all walks of life.

Underlining the importance of establishing "gender justice" in the society, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "There are no restrictions on the presence of women in various managerial, political, social, and cultural positions."

The Leader also pointed to Iran's upcoming parliamentary elections in two months, calling on Iranian women to play a more active role in better introducing candidates and ensuring a promising turnout at the polls.

Netanyahu seeking Iran-US confrontation



By Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh

International affairs expert

EXCLUSIVE OPINION

The Israeli regime's move in assassinating one of Iran's military advisers in Syria has given the right to Iran to retaliate against Israel at the right time. Iran and Israel have been indirectly at war for several decades as both sides have taken actions against each other in various ways. But Israel's assassination of the Iranian military adviser on Monday raised the question: Why did Israel do such a thing in the critical situation of the Gaza war? What is the goal or goals pursued by the regime behind these terrorist operations?

Israel has faced a serious challenge in its military-security strategy in the Gaza war. Israel's military-security strategy is the result of five decades of war. In its important wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973 with the Arab countries, and the 1982 attack on Lebanon, this regime has used an iron fist policy in the form of its military-security strategy; in fact, the regime has relied on this strategy. The strategy was chal-

lenged for the first time during the 33-day war in 2006 against Lebanon's Hezbollah group. But the biggest challenge for Israel and its military-security strategy is the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas's Operation Al-Aqsa Storm has brought fear to the hearts of the occupied territories. On the other hand, Israel's scorched earth policy and the crimes it has committed against the Palestinian people have destroyed the possibility of a peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. The Israeli army and regime have not yet been able to achieve their goals in the Gaza war.

When one side of the war comes to the conclusion that its goals will not be stabilized after the end of the conflict, it usually tries to extend the war or expand its scope.

From the beginning of the conflict, the left factions in Israel, such as the Labor Party, were critical of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policy and believed that his policy would end in failure. Since a month ago, parts of the right-wing currents and even those close to the Israeli cabinet have gradually become critical of Netanyahu's war policy and have assessed that Israel will not achieve its goals. Therefore, it can be said that Netanyahu became a

victim of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm and, according to predictions, his cabinet will fall after the war. Therefore, he will try to delay it in order to gain achievements by intensifying the crimes and killing of the people of Gaza.

In such a situation, it seems that the assassination of Iranian Brigadier General Razi Mousavi in Syria is aimed at provoking Iran to enter the war. Of course, Israel currently does not have the ability to fight on several fronts, but the regime's plans to drag Iran into war is aimed at forcing the United States to enter the conflict, which would finally lead to a confrontation between Iran and the United States.

Although Iran is entitled to retaliate against the assassination of its commander, it seems that Tehran is aware of Netanyahu's plot and will respond to the Israeli terrorist act in the right place, at the right time.

Iran should focus more on weakening the Israeli regime by assisting the resistance fronts in the region. But both Iran and the resistance groups should not link the Gaza war to the US, which is the main goal of Israel. The struggle of resistance groups to expel the US from the region will continue even after a possible cease-fire in Gaza. Therefore, Iran will not fall into Israel's trap to confront the US.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Magnificent Malek Mansion, a testament to Iran's renewed legacy

Iranica Desk

Throughout Iran, a rich tapestry of mansions and lordly houses from the Qajar period adorns the landscape. These architectural gems stand as a testament to the opulence and influence of their original owners, who were often affluent individuals or shrewd capitalists. The proprietors of these grand estates held sway over villages, or were astute merchants and entrepreneurs with substantial financial resources and extensive commercial networks, prompting them to erect these edifices for both business and social gatherings. Among these historical treasures is the Malek Mansion, a captivating tourist attraction nestled in Bushehr. Constructed during the Qajar era, this sprawling estate belonged to the renowned merchant Malik Al-Tajjar. Spanning over 4,000 square meters, the Malek Mansion

is a testament to the grandeur and vision of its creator. Following a visit to France, Malek Al-Tajjar drew inspiration from a French palace and the architectural motifs of Bushehr to fashion this magnificent residence. However, after Malek Al-Tajjar faced financial turmoil and subsequent bankruptcy, the property was acquired by a group of Englishmen for military purposes, serving as a military outpost for an extended period, IRNA wrote. In the early 2000s, Jafar Purkabgani, the governor of Bushehr, procured the estate from its heirs, ushering in a new chapter for the historic mansion. Subsequently, the Malek Mansion came under the custodianship of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization of Bushehr Province, ensuring its preservation and continued legacy as a cultural and historical landmark. The mansion is a complex architectural marvel, comprising several

distinct parts. The entrance serves as a grand introduction, offering an expansive and welcoming space that seamlessly links the urban surroundings to the estate. A majestic staircase leads from this area to the main building, setting the stage for the grandeur within. The platform, forming the second part of the monument, is intricately connected to the main building, again via a striking set of stairs. The entrance gate, considered the third part, encompasses the courtyard space, adorned with three pairs of columns leading to the main structure, featuring captivating ebony wood decorations with intricate metal ornaments. As the largest and most elaborate section, the main building stands as the fourth part of this architectural marvel, boasting two floors adorned with exquisite wall paintings. Moreover, the interconnected gardens, each separated by rows of

walls, offer a unique landscape, with distinct decorations and landscaping, creating a harmonious yet diverse outdoor space. This national monument, comprised of buildings and internal pavilions, was designed as a seasonal residence, catering to various conditions and needs. It encompasses a royal seat, multiple halls, a bathhouse, numerous rooms, and towers, all within its two-story expanse. While the main complex currently remains unoccupied, the pavilions and internal buildings previously served as housing for low-income individuals for several decades. Despite undergoing several renovations, the estate gradually fell into disrepair over time. However, in 2020, restoration work commenced, aiming to repurpose the mansion for residential and hospitality use, breathing new life into this beautiful and historically significant property.



IRNA

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Art of Khorjin-bafi in Hassanabad

Iranica Desk

Hassanabad, located 110 kilometers from Isfahan, is renowned for its historical significance and lush greenery amidst the desert. The city's residents have upheld traditional handicrafts, particularly *Khorjin-bafi* (saddlebag-weaving), for centuries. Hassanabad boasts a unique blend of traditional and modern elements, with many individuals maintaining a rural lifestyle and engaging in weav-

ing items such as kilims, rugs, towels, tablecloths, shawls, and *khorjin* in their homes. Ali Morad Sadeghi, an artist deeply involved in *khorjin-bafi* since 1989, collaborates with his wife and brother in this craft. He explained that *khorjins*, characterized by their geometric and angular designs, were originally utilized for transporting loads on pack animals and were also part of a bride's dowry. The intricate weaving process involves the use of warp and weft

threads, employing materials ranging from fabric and felt to wool and paper. While traditionally cotton threads were used, modern *khorjins* incorporate filament and polypropylene. Sadeghi described the *khorjin* as a knotless handwoven fabric, typically with a width of 30 to 90 centimeters, woven in a ribbed pattern. His workshop produces various types of *khorjin* for motorcycles, bicycles, and donkeys, showcasing the continued relevance of this traditional

craft in contemporary settings. He emphasized the significance of warp and weft threads in *khorjin* weaving, woven from fabric edges and remnants of felt, wool, and paper. Historically, cotton threads cultivated and processed in Hassanabad were used, and nomadic communities utilized goat hair and colored wool for weaving *khorjins*. However, these traditional methods are no longer common. The artist also highlighted that *khorjins* can be woven either hori-

zontally or vertically, akin to carpet weaving, utilizing either fixed and rotating looms, or a weaving machine. He noted that both the loom and the weaving machine are made of wood. Furthermore, he mentioned other essential tools used in *khorjin* weaving, such as *panjeh* or *daftin* for beating the wefts, and a wooden tool called *pahna*, with a needle on both sides, crucial for preserving the width of the *khorjin* and preventing the edges from curling during weaving.



fararu.com

Analyzing Israel's response to Hamas' October 7 attack

Palestinians will never give up national aspirations

Netanyahu straining world's patience



A demonstrator waves the Palestinian flag as he stands on the Neptune Fountain during a protest in support of Palestinians under the slogan 'Free Palestine' in Berlin, Germany, on November 4, 2023.

AFP

Possible explanations

With the focus here being on the extremely disproportional nature of the Israeli response to the Hamas attack, two explanations seem plausible, one of which is politico-ideological in nature and the other geostrategic.

The first is the long-held Israeli ultranationalists' desire (rooted in the biblical view of historical Palestine as the Promised Land) of taking possession or further control of the remaining Palestinian territories, for the realization of which far-right elements in the current Israeli coalition government led by Benjamin Netanyahu have been especially hard at work. The second is the Netanyahu government's interest in maintaining or expanding its control over the Palestinian territories' vast oil and gas resources. Let us start by taking a closer look at the first explanation.

In 2017, Bezalel Smotrich, the incumbent Israeli finance minister, published a propaganda piece titled "Israel's Decisive Plan," which is perhaps one of the most significant expressions of the Israeli ultranationalists' desire to take possession of the remaining Palestinian territories in recent times.

The core argument of the lengthy article is that the "two-state solution," a framework for the partition of historical Palestine originally put forward by the United Nations in 1947, must be replaced by a new plan, one that utilizes a "right-wing, Zionist, faith-based approach".

Thus, according to Smotrich, who has made no secret of his hatred for Palestinians and genocidal tendencies against them, Palestinians must give up their "national aspirations" in the Land of Israel and accept, as a result, one of three options: live as a part of Israeli society as a subordinate population without equal rights; voluntarily migrate to other countries (a suggestion made by early political-Zionist Theodore Herzl in his Diaries); or be killed if they choose to fight to realize their national ambitions.

Echoing Golda Meir, the fourth prime minister of Israel, Smotrich continues in the same article (and again in Paris this year) by rejecting the notion of Palestinian nationalism or nationhood altogether, presenting the "Palestinian people" as merely "a counter-movement to the Zionist movement". Theirs, he says, is a nationalism that simply does not exist absent the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

What Smotrich does not realize, however, is that the same can be said about Jewish nationalism.

According to Israeli-Palestinian conflict experts Rosemary and Herman Ruether, for example, "Jewish nationalism (Zionism) was shaped in response to an ethnically or racially exclusivist European nationalism and reproduced a similar racial-ethnic exclusivism of its own. Its plan for a Jewish state was for Jews only."

Interestingly, however, David Ben-Gurion (formerly

David Green), the secular founder of Israel and its first prime minister, like Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president, was under no illusion that Palestine had an Arab population of its own, who called Palestine their home and country.

In his book *The Jewish Paradox* (1978), Nahum Goldman, the head of the World Zionist Organization, quotes Ben-Gurion as saying to him: "If I were an Arab leader, I would never sign an agreement with Israel. It is normal; we have taken their country. It is true God promised it to us, but how could that interest them?"

"Our God is not theirs. There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They see but one thing: We have come and stolen their country. Why would they accept that?"

What is more, Rosemary and Herman Ruether remind us that prior to the systematic effort by the Nazis to exterminate Jews in Europe, "Zionism [that is, Jewish nationalism] remained a minority view among 19th- and early 20th-century Jews."

The American Jewish community, for example, "dominated by Reform Judaism, even reacted with outrage when Christian Zionists in 1891 appealed to president Harrison to support a renewed Jewish state in Palestine.... For these Reform Jews, Judaism was a universal religion of Jews who were citizens of many nations."

Thus, without denying the religious and historical

By Ramin Mirfakhraie
Sociologist

**OPINION
EXCLUSIVE**

On October 7, the Palestinian organization Hamas, which is headquartered in Gaza City and governs the Gaza Strip in the Palestinian territories, carried out a surprise attack by land, air, and sea on southern Israel.

According to Hamas officials, Operation Al-Aqsa Storm was in retaliation for Israel's hitherto violent raids and clashes with worshipers on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem, as well as to draw the world's attention to the dire conditions of Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, where Israelis in illegal settlements have been increasingly engaged in deadly attacks on Palestinians.

Soon after Hamas' deadly attack, which was unprecedented in terms of speed, coordination, and scope, as well as the number of Israelis killed and injured (as reported by Israeli officials; some accounts suggest, however, that this number also includes Israeli civilians who might have been killed by Israeli crossfire), the Israeli government declared war on Hamas.

This war, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry and Palestine Red Crescent Society, has so far led to massive civilian casualties in Gaza, including the deaths of thousands of children and the internal displacement of around 1.9 million Gazans across the Strip due to Israel's relentless bombardment of the besieged enclave.

Though both Hamas and the Israeli military have been accused of war crimes in this latest round of fighting, the horrific nature of Israel's military response in Gaza prompts us to ask: Why did Israel decide to respond so disproportionately to the Hamas attack, knowing that its military intervention might involve acts that would likely be viewed by the international community and judicial authorities as gross violations of the rules of war, formally known as international humanitarian law, and the human rights of Palestinian civilians?

significance of the region to Jews worldwide, it may be said that the establishment of Israel in Palestine was not just a state-building project, but also a nation-building project on the part of the political-Zionist movement in Europe, one that was hastened by Nazi anti-Semitism and facilitated by Britain through the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which was designed to protect British interests in Palestine vis-à-vis those of France and Russia.

But as Rosemary and Herman Ruether have noted, the British promised "only to facilitate a 'national home' for the Jews, not a 'Jewish state'." Nothing is said about Jewish rule in this 'home,' where Arabs "comprised more than 90% of the population" at the time.

Clearly, then, Smotrich's assertions with regard to Palestinian and Jewish nationalisms are highly distorted and historically flawed.

And his "right-wing, Zionist, faith-based approach," which the Netanyahu government seems to have happily adopted in this latest round of fighting, may plausibly be viewed as representing an attempt on the part of ultranationalists in Israel (particularly of the religious kind) to establish a moral basis for the kind of depraved violence that would be required for Israel to take possession or further control of the remaining Palestinian territories, an attempt that has so far elicited much opposition among Jewish and non-Jewish populations in and outside Israel since October 7.



The Leviathan gas field, located in the Mediterranean Sea, was estimated to hold enough gas to "meet Israel's domestic needs for 40 years" as of 2017.
● GETTY IMAGES

Control of resources

This brings us to the second of the two explanations mentioned above, with regard to Israel's disproportionate response to the Hamas attack; that is, the far-right Israeli government's interest in maintaining or expanding Israel's control over the Palestinian territories' oil and gas reservoirs in violation of international law.

According to a 2019 United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report, "Geologists and natural resources economists have confirmed that the Occupied Palestinian Territory lies above sizable reservoirs of oil and natural-gas wealth, in Area C of the occupied West Bank, and the Mediterranean coast off the Gaza Strip...."

"The exploitation of Palestinian natural resources, including oil and natural gas, by the occupying power imposes on the Palestinian people enormous costs that continue to esca-

late as the occupation remains in effect. This is not only contrary to international law, but also in violation of natural justice and moral law."

"To date, the real and opportunity costs of the occupation exclusively in the area of oil and natural gas have accumulated to tens, if not hundreds, of billions of dollars," the report continues.

Of course, Israel has tried, self-servingly and without regard for the livelihoods of the civilian population in Palestine, to defend its policy of not allowing Palestinians to exploit their own oil and gas reserves, as well as their share of these resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, by claiming that such exploitation will help strengthen Palestinian fighters.

However, the UNCTAD report warns that this sort of arrangement is not only illegal, but also can "potentially be a source of additional

conflict and violence if individual parties exploit these resources without due regard for the fair share of others".

Thus, the idea that Israel's extreme military response since October 7 may have been designed to secure further control over the occupied Palestinian territory's oil and gas resources is a plausible one to consider, especially when viewed in relation to the massive population dislocation that Israel has managed to bring about in Gaza.

As migration and war experts Nicholas Mincinski, Adam Lichtenheld, and Kelsey Norman have explained in their article, titled "Israel's mass displacement of Gazans fits [the] strategy of using migration as a tool of war," population dislocation has historically been used for "three strategic reasons in conflict," the second of which is "as a grab for territory and resources".



Undercover Israeli security personnel (R) and Israeli soldiers detain a wounded Palestinian protester during clashes near the Jewish settlement of Bet El, near the West Bank city of Ramallah, October 7, 2015.
● MOHAMAD TOROKMAN/REUTERS

Seeking a way forward

Where to, one may ask, from here?

The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict clearly shows that, no matter how hard they try, ultranationalists in Israel will never be able to force Palestinians to give up their national aspirations or lose their longing for independence.

As the UNCTAD report has correctly noted, the conditions that Israel has imposed on the occupied territories are not only unfair and inhumane, but also against international law.

To this, one must add, of course, the relative decline of Western economies and the US-led liberal order (in terms of the emergence of new geopolitical configurations), as well as the global discontent with the dire situation in the Palestinian territories, the combination of which is bound to limit what Israel and its allies can do in the region.

It would, therefore, do Israel well to consider ending its occupation of the Palestinian territories and arriving at a negotiated solution with the parties representing the Palestinian people, one that is genuine in nature and anchored in international law. And this, of course, requires a politically united front in Palestine, with a realistic strategy for peace.

If, on the other hand, the far-right government in Israel decides to escalate the present situa-

tion further, then it should carefully consider renowned sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein's prescient remarks, which were made in 2015 in relation to Benjamin Netanyahu's electoral victory in the same year:

"[Netanyahu's strategy] is straining the world's patience, and most critically, the patience of those who have been more or less faithful supporters of the Israeli government's positions.... There has been a worldwide transformation of the perception of Israel as a 'victim' to that of Israel as a 'persecutor'."

"This is a nightmare for the Zionist cause in Israel. It can only get worse for Israel. There may even come a point, perhaps still a few years from now, that the United States will no longer be willing to veto resolutions in the UN Security Council that are critical of Israel."

And indeed, it seems the United States is already at a point where it is finding it increasingly difficult to support Israel without paying a hefty price at home and abroad.

A good case in point here is how some Arab and Muslim-American groups and leaders in swing states have threatened to abandon President Joe Biden in the 2024 general election for his refusal to push for a cease-fire in Gaza, even though they realize that such a move might not be to their advantage.

Another case in point is the global anger that has been directed at the Biden administration for vetoing, on December 8, yet another UN Security Council resolution that called for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza.

Not surprisingly, however, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly on December 12 for the adoption of a non-binding resolution that demanded an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, further reflecting the lack of international support for the US position on the issue.

Additionally, one must pay attention to how the war in the region is also affecting social life in societies that claim to be free and democratic. In other words, will their governments be able to manage the domestic fallout of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in ways that would guarantee to their people their constitutional rights and freedoms? This remains to be seen. For now, people around the world should continue to call for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza and an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories as minimal conditions for the emergence of a viable solution to the decades-long conflict.

This article first appeared on [Countercurrents.org](https://www.countercurrents.org).

Palestinians have national identity, want sovereignty



By Dana El Kurd
International affairs expert

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

There are several types of justice claims that challenge the international order, such as recognition justice and historical injustice claims. When actors feel unrecognized in their sovereignty — either because they challenge the notion of state sovereignty or believe they have not been accepted as fully part of the state system — this can erode the international order and its legitimacy. Similarly, when groups feel there has been historic harm done to their ancestors that has not been fully rectified, this can be corrosive to the international order.

The Palestinian national cause is an injustice claim that fits both in certain ways: a case where injustice occurred in the past and is ongoing, thus making it both a historical and contemporary harm.

Moreover, Palestinians have a national identity and desire statehood. Their recognition justice claim is not on the basis of rejecting the concept of state sovereignty, but rather that state sovereignty has not yet been extended to them. Famously, and with a good deal of criticism, Yasser Arafat declared that the Palestinians were "not Red Indians," in an effort to demonstrate that the Palestinians were a unified people with a national sovereignty claim.

Despite this emphasis over the years, the United States and its allies have never taken Palestinian sovereignty claims seriously, instead trying to resolve the issue with diminished versions of recognition: at the most, self-governance and at the least, a marginally improved subsistence.

Now the US, actively espousing a liberal international order, has ignored the Palestine issue, and has eroded its own legitimacy across the global south as a result. This has sparked a great deal of backlash against the liberal international order on the part of Palestinians and their Arab/regional allies, as well as a bandwagoning in active pursuit of the erosion of an American-dominated world system. The result is the increased likelihood of conflict. Thus, ongoing injustice against Palestinians should be seen as corrosive to the international order, and should be addressed rather than dismissed.

Sovereignty isn't limited self-governance

The compounding tragedy of the United States refusing to apply the same principles across the globe is the fact that America is uniquely positioned to exert pressure, deescalate, and intervene in a political negotiation — given not only the scope of American power but also its ties to the parties involved. As Sarah Parkinson reminded readers in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, this is not outside the norm of American foreign policy: President Ronald Reagan, during Israel's bombardment of Lebanon, demanded the Israeli leadership stop shelling Beirut. This was later credited for the "moderation" of Israeli behavior by both Israeli and American media.

But by forfeiting that role and that leverage in their insistence on "bear hugging" Netanyahu, the Biden administration not only condemns thousands of Palestinians — and people in the broader region — to avoidable death, but also condemns the rest of the world since the guardrails for international conflict, however problematic and selectively applied, are completely removed. The actors empowered in this vacuum have no alternative vision for the world, except an order where might makes right.

Israeli government officials argue that the presence of Hamas in Gaza as a security concern cannot be tolerated. This is especially the case in the wake of the October 7 attack. Thus, they have repeatedly articulated that their objective is to eradicate Hamas entirely. But as analysts point out, a war of this scale and scope — and worse, the reoccupation of Gaza, which seems to be in progress — cannot accomplish the task of securing Israeli safety, or the goal of eradication.

Instead of continuing to ignore the Palestine factor, policymakers should address root causes of the ongoing violence, which includes the continued lack of a political future or sovereignty for Palestinians. It is important to note here that sovereignty does not mean simply limited self-governance, such as exists in pockets of the West Bank (as easily overturned as that self-governance might be). Sovereignty means people having actual control of their lives and their environment, and shaping a governance structure that reflects the people and is accountable to them.

Policymakers must address, head-on, Palestinian national claims for sovereignty and let go of the assumption that the status quo can persist, either through marginal improvements to Palestinian living conditions or extreme coercion. Such an assumption will not achieve security for anyone, including Israelis. Thus, nothing less than foregoing this assumption, and changing course, will begin to resolve this long-festering conflict — a conflict that has upended the dreams and lives of too many in this region for far too long.

The full article first appeared on the [Foreign Policy Research Institute](https://www.foreignpolicyresearchinstitute.org).

Djokovic wants to emulate Brady and play on into his 40s



● AP

REUTERS – Novak Djokovic has no plans to hang up his racket any time soon and is hoping he might be able to emulate American football great Tom Brady by extending his career well past his 40th birthday, the 36-year-old Serbian said on Tuesday.

Quarterback Brady played 23 seasons in the National Football League, winning seven Super Bowls with the New England Patriots and Tampa Bay Buccaneers before finally calling it quits at the age of 45 earlier this year.

World number one Djokovic, who is preparing for the start of his 22nd season as a professional, said he had already learned plenty from Brady.

“Tom Brady is a great example of a champion in his sport and someone that has had such a great career and longevity,” the 24-times Grand Slam champion told reporters in the Saudi capital.

“He has put a lot of hours and a lot of time into self-care, into recovery, into making sure that in a way every aspect of his body and mind is covered so that he can have a long-lasting, successful career.”

“I know him personally and I learned a lot from him, from his example, and hopefully I can have a career that goes up to 40 or maybe even beyond – let’s see.”

Brady was in Djokovic’s box at Roland Garros in June to watch his friend win the French Open, one of three Grand Slam trophies the Serbian captured in 2023 along with the Australian and U.S. Open titles.

“I feel great in my own body right now and I’ve been playing some really high-quality tennis,” Djokovic added.

“2023 was one of the best seasons I’ve had in my life and why stop while you’re still playing great? So I’ll keep going and take (each) year, one by one, and see how far I go.”

Djokovic will make his final preparations for a tilt at an 11th Australian Open title by representing his country in the United Cup in Perth and Sydney in the first week of the new year.

Countdown is on for Iran volleyball coach appointment



Former Iran skipper and world-class setter Saeed Ma’rouf is joined by three high-profile coaches in Belgian Vital Heynen and Italian duo Angelo Lorenzetti and Roberto Piazza in the list of candidates for the job.



● FIVB

Sports Desk

The long wait for the announcement of Iran’s new volleyball national team coach could come to an end within the next couple of weeks after the sport’s governing body in the country stepped up the pursuit of a replacement for Behrouz Ataei in recent days.

The job has been vacant since October, when Ataei stepped down following a 3-1 defeat against the Czech Republic midway through the FIVB Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Rio de Janeiro.

Rumors and speculations have been swirling over Iran’s bench in recent months but the Iranian Vol-

leyball Federation on Tuesday unveiled a final four-man shortlist for the post.

Former Iran skipper and world-class setter Saeed Ma’rouf is joined by three high-profile coaches in Belgian Vital Heynen and Italian duo Angelo Lorenzetti and Roberto Piazza in the list of candidates.

Widely regarded as a one of the best setters in the world for more than a decade, Ma’rouf will be looking to build on an illustrious playing career, if given the helm, though many believe that the role may come a bit too soon for the 38-year-old, who has had no coaching experience since retiring from the sport after the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

Heynen is probably the most exciting name on the list for the volleyball fans in Iran.

The 54-year-old Belgian led Germany to the bronze medal at the 2014 World Championships before his storied three-year spell on Poland’s bench inspired the European heavyweight to the world title in 2018, as well as a silver and a bronze at the Volleyball Nations League.

The Iranians, however, would best remember the Belgian for coaching the Poles in some entertaining encounters with their national side over the years – including a five-set thriller won by the Asian powerhouse in Tokyo.

Lorenzetti, meanwhile, is the latest coach to enter the fray after an online negotiation with Vahid Moradi, the caretaker of the federation, earlier this week.

An ex-head coach of the Italian under-21 team, Lorenzetti, 59, has spent the best part of his managerial career with the clubs in his home country – including Modena, Verona, Piacenza, and Trentino Itas.

The Italian steered Sir Sicoma Perugia to the Club World Champs crown earlier in December, thanks to a straight-set victory over Brazil’s Itambe Minas in the final in Bangalore, India.

Piazza, 64, the Netherlands’ coach in the Olympic qual-

ifiers, has also been approached by Iran but, like his fellow Italian, is committed to club duty with Allianz Milano in the Italian league, which could rule him out of contention for the job.

The new coach, whoever he might be, will be tasked with leading Iran to a place in next summer’s Paris Olympics – a daunting challenge following a disappointing run in October’s qualifiers, which saw the Asian giant finish second from bottom in the seven-team table.

With Germany, Brazil, Poland, Canada, USA, and Japan guaranteed an Olympic quota – courtesy of a top-two finish across the

qualification pools – and Egypt likely to take the African berth, the four remaining slots will be decided through the FIVB Men’s World Ranking by the end of the Volleyball Nations League preliminary round in June.

As it stands in the ranking, Italy (third), Argentina (sixth), Slovenia (seventh), and Serbia (ninth) are the favorites to qualify, with Iran lagging behind in the 15th place.

Iran will be back in Rio de Janeiro on May 21 for the VNL Week 1, before heading to Japan for the second week and concluding the preliminary phase with a Week 3 visit to Manila, the Philippines.

Persepolis, Sepahan handed back points by Appeal Committee



● RASOUL SHOJAEI/IRNA

Sports Desk

The Appeal Committee of the Iranian Football Federation overturned a Disciplinary Committee’s ruling to deduct points from Persian Gulf Pro League clubs Persepolis and Sepahan.

Sepahan had been ducked four points, with one taken away from the Tehran Reds’ tally, earlier in the season following a complaint by several fellow Iranian top-flight sides – namely Esteghlal, Tractor, Iralco, and Paykan – over the two sides breaching the federation’s new transfer rules, which obliged the clubs to adhere to a ‘budget cap’ when spending in the pre-season window and signing contract extensions with current players. Sepahan had been convicted of wrongdoing in the contracts for Reza Asadi – the league’s joint top scorer with eight strikes – and Iranian international keeper Payam Niazmand, as well as Kaveh Rezaei, Hadi Mohammadi, and Ehsan Pahlavan.

Persepolis, meanwhile, received the punishment for paying Giorgi Gvelesiani’s taxes as part of the deal with the Georgian center-back.

The Appeal Committee still upheld the hefty fines in the initial verdict but the head of the committee Alireza Salehi said later on Tuesday that “the results and points should be decided on the football pitch to protect the integrity of the game.” The decision moved Sepahan to the top of league table with 31 points – two clear of Esteghlal with a game in hand – while Persepolis closed the gap on its archrival to three points to stand in the third place.

Yahya Golmohammadi’s men could go level on points with the Tehran Blues should they walk away with a victory in today’s rescheduled fixture from matchday 11 against Nassaji Mazandaran at home. Sepahan will be looking to extend the gap at the top when playing away to Golgozar Sirjan.



Omid's absence from Iran causes concern for the extinction of the western population of Siberian cranes.

Omid's likely midway break

Glass half-full side of Siberian crane's absence from Miankaleh wetland

Social Desk

A specialized committee will decide the status of Roya, the mate chosen for the sole surviving western Siberian crane named Omid, announced the Director General of the Office of Wildlife Protection and Management of Iran's Department of the Environment (DoE).

Omid, who has been migrating alone from Siberia to Iran for 15 years, finally found his mate, Roya, last year, IRNA reported.

However, due to unsuitable conditions for the long journey to Siberia, Roya stayed behind while Omid embarked on the migration. Now, after a year of anticipation, there is still no news of Omid's return to Iran, causing concern for the extinction of the western population of Siberian cranes.

The Siberian crane population is divided into three main groups: eastern, western, and central. The central

population, which migrated to India, has already become extinct. The western population used to visit Iran, but now only Omid remains as the last male crane. If Omid were to perish, the Western population would face complete extinction. However, the eastern population, with around 3,000 cranes, still migrates to China.

Iran is particularly worried about the disappearance of the western flight path of Siberian cranes to the country with the potential loss of Omid. To address this concern, the DoE initiated negotiations with Belgium to bring a mate for Omid. Finally, on January 26, 2023, Omid's mate Roya arrived in Iran. Roya was carefully transported to Miankaleh wetland and placed in a specially prepared cage.

This year, despite autumn passing and winter arriving, there is no sign of Omid. The DoE official stated that the delayed arrival of Omid could be attributed to less

severe weather conditions this year.

"It is possible that Omid halted his journey midway, as these birds are influenced by climate factors. However, this perspective remains the optimistic side of the story," said Gholamreza Ebdali.

He also mentioned Omid's history of late arrivals in Iran, citing examples such as his arrival in December 2009 and instances when he did not come at all, possibly due to a lack of extreme cold temperatures.

Regarding the absence of tracking devices on Omid, Ebdali explained that the risk involved in capturing the last remaining crane prevented the installation of a tracker. Concerning Roya's condition, Ebdali assured the media that she was in good health and being kept in her cage.

"If Omid fails to return, a specialized committee will decide on Roya's future placement."

Plans to transform cultivation practices in Lake Urmia's watershed

Social Desk

Farming of three water-consuming crops, including apples, sugar beets, and alfalfa, will be discontinued in the watershed of Lake Urmia, as stated by the head of West Azarbaijan's provincial Department of the Environment (DoE).

"We are determined to implement this program as soon as possible to gradually revive the lake," said Saeed Shahand, as reported by Tasnim News Agen-

cy. Regarding the current situation of Lake Urmia, Shahand explained, "In the second stage of releasing water from Kani Sib Dam and Zab Tunnel towards Lake Urmia, last week, with the completion of Silveh Dam, the water flow from this location exceeded 10 cubic meters per second, entering the Godar River and eventually being discharged into Urmia Lake."

He further added, "In this manner, it is expected that 180 million cubic meters of water will enter

the lake."

Shahand emphasized that the DoE's responsibility in this matter is to prevent unauthorized water withdrawals along the transmission route.

"The Lake Urmia Restoration Headquarters' policy is to release water during the non-agricultural season when farmers do not rely on water collection," he stated.

Addressing the decrease in rainfall in the catchment area of Lake Urmia,

Shahand noted, "This year, it was predicted that we would have good rainfall, but unfortunately, this did not materialize."

Compared to last year, there has been a two percent decrease in rainfall and a 48 percent decrease compared to the long-term average. Despite these challenging conditions, the water release has taken place, and efforts are made to meet the maximum water needs of Lake Urmia.

Referring to the favorable

conditions of the satellite wetlands of Lake Urmia, Shahand highlighted, "We have approximately 11 satellite and seasonal wetlands in Lake Urmia, and fortunately, last year, the maximum water requirements of these wetlands were met."

"Despite the nationwide decrease in rainfall, we will continue with this process based on the decisions made this year," he added. "Our goal is to ensure that the satellite wetlands of Lake Urmia, which began filling up with water two weeks ago, remain in good condition."

Shahand mentioned that most of the hardware proj-

ects aimed at saving Lake Urmia are nearing completion, and all projects will be operational by the end of the year (mid-March 2024).

"Starting from next year, the headquarters' policy and plans will focus on agriculture. The provinces of East Azarbaijan, West Azarbaijan, and Kurdistan, which are within the watershed of Lake Urmia, are predominantly agriculture-oriented, greatly impacting the condition of the lake," the official explained.

Shahand further stated, "Persuasion, building a culture, training farmers, and promoting the use of modern irrigation and agricultural systems, as well as engaging farmers' participation, are on the agen-

da of the national headquarters. We hope that by employing these methods, we will be able to provide more water for the lake."

He clarified, "Another significant aspect is the modification of the cultivation pattern. Over the years, this pattern has shifted from planting grapes to apples and orchards with seed trees. Consequently, we have a plan to eliminate three water-consuming products, including apples, sugar beets, and alfalfa, and replace them with regionally compatible products that require less water."

If realized, this will be one of the most crucial and fundamental steps toward the revival of Lake Urmia.



Credit line allocated to boost Iran-Russia banking ties



Russia allocated a credit line to Iran during the visit of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Mohammadreza Farzin to Moscow.

Following Farzin's trip to Russia, with the aim of increasing monetary and banking cooperation between the two countries, and strengthening relations within the framework of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), a meeting was held between the directors of Sberbank of Russia and Bank Melli of Iran (BMI), based on which a credit line worth 6.5 billion rubles was created for Iran to import basic goods from Russia, IRNA reported.

In the meeting, which was attended by Farzin, directors from Sberbank of Russia and Bank Melli of Iran emphasized the opening of the 6.5-billion-ruble credit line between Iran and Russia. This credit line is supposed to become operational by Sberbank and BMI to finance the import of basic goods needed by Iran.

The credit is based on the brokerage agreements and contracts concluded between the two banks in a minimal form and as the beginning of banking operations.

It should be noted that the opening of this credit is the first important step in the direction of the development of cooperation between Iran and Russia after the signing of the free trade agreement between Iran and EAEU.

Iran and the member states of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Armenia, signed a free trade agreement (FTA) in a ceremony in St. Petersburg on Monday.

Also, following the consultations and creation of monetary and banking platforms and technical negotiations of the Central Bank of Iran, the first LC of Iran's banking network abroad was opened by Bank Sepah in Russia.

The value of this LC, which has been used since Wednesday (December 27), is €17 million, which will be used for imports under the condition of long-term payments.

This mutual and pioneering cooperation will represent the beginning of a new chapter of Iran's banking relations with other countries.

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Joint energy projects will serve Iran-Iraq interests: *Minister*



Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji on Wednesday said Iran and Iraq are the large holders of hydrocarbon reserves and joint projects in this sector will be in their interests.

He made the remarks in a meeting with a visiting Iraqi delegation headed by Oil Minister Hayan Abdel-Ghani, Shana reported. Owji said Iran and Iraq have a common stance on OPEC and OPEC+ policies, expressing his gratitude to Abdel-Ghani for supporting the alliance's production cuts aimed at stabilizing oil prices.

Strong historical and religious bonds exist between the two nations, said the minister, adding that Iran's 13th administration is seeking to expand relations with neighboring countries, particularly Iraq. Touching upon the stance

Iraq adopted in the recent OPEC+ meeting, Abdel-Ghani said the coalition's decision helped stabilize oil prices and was to the advantage of producers, consumers, and even investors.

He added Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani attaches great significance to the development of relations with Iran. Iranian companies can participate in different projects in Iraq, including joint fields development projects, the oil minister continued.

He referred to offshore and onshore exploration blocks as an area for Iranian knowledge-based companies' cooperation with Iraq. Investment in gas production and oil refinery projects is also among the potential fields for bilateral cooperation, he concluded.

Iran to become region's transit hub: *CAO*

Head of the Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) Mohammad Mohammadi-Bakhsh announced that the free trade agreement (FTA) between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) will provide Iran with a great opportunity to become the region's transit hub.

Referring to the signing of the free trade agreement between Iran and Eurasia, Mohammadi-Bakhsh said

in an interview with IRNA on Wednesday that the agreement would provide a great deal of potential for developing trade relations between these countries, IRNA reported.

Regarding Iran's potential in the technical, maintenance and training fields of aviation and airport infrastructure throughout the country, he said there is a great opportunity to develop air cooperation, which provides opportu-

nities for these countries to develop their transportation ties.

Iran and the EAEU signed an agreement to initiate free trade on Monday. Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Abbas Aliabadi and Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) Mikhail Myasnikov signed the agreement. Meanwhile, Iran's deputy minister of roads and urban development for

transportation affairs revealed a 37 percent increase in the transit of goods via Iranian territory in the first nine months of the current Iranian year (started March 21, 2023).

More than 11 million tons of products were transited from the country between March 21 and December 22, 2023, registering a 37 percent hike compared to the same period last year, Shahriar Afandizadeh said. He added that more than

three million tons of oil products were transited from the country in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, showing a 77.2 percent increase compared to the same period last year. In addition, over seven million tons of non-oil goods were transited from the country between March 21 and December 22, 2023, registering a 24.1 percent hike compared to last year's corre-

sponding period, the deputy roads minister added, according to Mehr news agency.

Giant steps have been taken in the transit sector of the country during the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi, he continued.

It is expected that the country will witness a considerable jump in the transit of goods in the coming years, Afandizadeh emphasized.

Cargo handling in Iran's southern ports tops 80m tons in nine months



The director general of Iran's Hormuzgan Ports and Maritime Department said that more than 80 million tons of commodities were loaded and unloaded from the southern ports during March 21-December 22, 2023.

Elaborating on the performance and activities of ports in the southern province, Hossein Abbasnejad noted that 80.089

million tons of oil and non-oil commodities were loaded and unloaded in ports of Hormuzgan Province in the first nine months of the current Iranian year, over 53 million tons of which are related to non-oil goods, IRNA reported.

In the period, more than 36 million tons of non-oil goods were loaded at the ports of this province, he

said, adding that over 17 million tons of non-oil goods have been unloaded from the provincial ports. He further pointed out that more than 29 million tons of non-oil goods were exported from the province in the first nine months of the current year, registering a 40 percent hike compared to last year's corresponding period.

Iran, Tajikistan discuss boosting economic ties

Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe hosted the 16th meeting of Iran-Tajikistan Joint Economic Committee on December 26 and 27.

Iranian Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian and Tajikistan Energy and Water Resources Minister Daler Juma co-chaired the two countries' Joint Economic Committee meeting, IRNA reported.

Meanwhile, the first specialized exhibition, "Made in Iran" is being held on the sidelines of this meeting.

The exhibition, aimed at introducing the capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in basic industries, with the presence of 30 top Iranian companies, is being held in Dushanbe during December 26-29. Iran and Tajikistan on November 8 signed a joint

statement and 18 cooperation documents and memoranda of understanding to deepen bilateral strategic relations.

The joint statement was signed between Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe. The documents and MoUs were inked by the Iranian and Tajik ministers in the

presence of the two presidents.

The documents pertained to a roadmap for the long-term bilateral trade and economic cooperation until 2030, mutual visa-free access, anti-drug trafficking operations, transportation, crisis management and the establishment of joint free economic zones, as well as inter-city cooperation in various fields.

