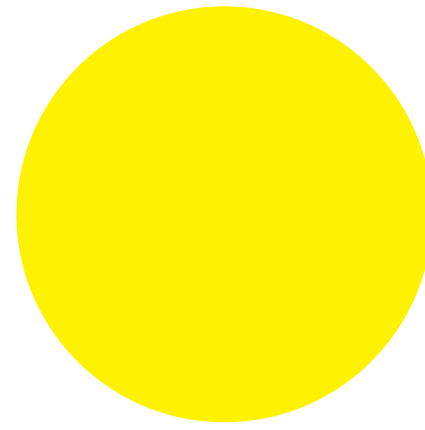


Demand for natural gas will increase by 36%:
Minister



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Iran Daily

A wake-up call to Israel's brutal nature

Hanif Ghaffari
Middle East
Affairs Expert

**EXCLUSIVE
OPINION**

The events on Thursday morning on al-Rashid Street in Gaza City shed even more light on the true colors of the Israeli regime. This regime zeroed in on civilians queuing up for humanitarian aid and food, killing over 100 people and injuring 1000 others. It's now crystal clear to everyone that the situation in the Gaza Strip is not just a conflict; it transcends into genocide and systematic brutality. Netanyahu and his hard-line cabinet are on a mission to render the Gaza Strip uninhabitable. The objectives of the Israeli regime surpass the previously disclosed and inhumane intentions.

Despite global condemnation of the barbaric act, the United States once again shot down a draft resolution denouncing the latest atrocity. While 14 Security Council members endorsed the move, the United States, a repeated blocker of cease-fire resolutions, vetoed the draft resolution. Previously, there were speculations that the Biden administration had diverged from the Republicans on Israel and Netanyahu and his cabinet, potentially pushing for a ceasefire and an end to the conflict. However, the reality points to the United States as the chief supporter and orchestrator of the Gaza war. Without American political and military backing for Israel, the conflict wouldn't have snowballed into genocide. Therefore, it is impossible separate Israel and the US in the Gaza war.

Another crucial aspect is the recurrent failure of the UN Security Council to broker a cease-fire or even censure Israel's atrocities. This highlights the inefficacy of the current United Nations framework, born out of post-World War II geopolitics and in favor of great powers, in finding a solution to end the Gaza conflict. Essentially, such a structure fails to deliver a cease-fire solution. Many nations worldwide advocate for a UN reform, echoing recent calls by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for restructuring. The Gaza war underscores the urgency for revamping this ineffective system.

Though the Israeli regime wields power on the battleground with US backing and tacit approval from other states, these heinous acts have laid bare the regime's true nature to global public opinion. The erosion of Israel's standing in the eyes of the public commenced from the war's onset, culminating in mass protests in major European and American cities denouncing Israel's acts. A survey by Harvard University in the US revealed that around 52% of young Americans support the replacement of the Israeli state with a Palestinian one.

All these events signify a growing awareness among global public opinion regarding the Gaza conflict and the ruthless nature of the Israeli regime—a nature in decline.

Iranians Vote in Parliamentary, Assembly of Experts Elections



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Demand for natural gas will increase by 36%: *Minister*



The demand for natural gas will increase by 36% by 2050, according to the forecasts stipulated in the Outlook of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji said on Friday. The minister, who made the remarks during his speech at the Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the 7th GECF Summit of Heads of State and Government in Algiers, the capital of Algeria, added that by 2025, the share of

natural gas in the world's energy basket is expected to exceed that of coal, Shana reported.

By 2040, natural gas along with renewables may improve air quality which is to become the main source of energy in the world, he noted adding replacing traditional fuels could provide a possible and cost-effective path for energy transition. Development of the gas industry and materialization of supply and demand security in the world demand establishment of global peace and depoliticization of trade energy, Owji said.

"Geopolitical tensions and the application of any unilateral or multilateral sanctions are in

contradiction with the principles and standards of international law and jeopardize the energy security of societies."

The geopolitical and regional developments that occurred in the last two years have shown that natural gas and its international trade are still considered a vital factor in the energy security of the human societies of the world, he noted.

The minister added that despite the steps taken to achieve environmental goals and liberalization of energy markets, whenever global energy security is jeopardized, energy policymakers give priority to ensuring their country's energy security over other goals.

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji speaks at the Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the 7th GECF Summit of Heads of State and Government in Algiers, the capital of Algeria on March 1, 2024.
● SHANA

Iran, Russia sign comprehensive health cooperation document

Iran and Russia inked an initial document on comprehensive health cooperation between the two countries.

The agreement, signed on Friday during the 17th Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission Cooperation, signifies a collaborative effort in various health-related

areas, IRNA wrote.

The agreement was signed by Mohammad-Hossein Niknam, a special aide to Iranian minister of health, and Sergei Glagolev, the Russian deputy health minister.

The accord results from extensive discussions between the two nations, covering diverse aspects

such as joint production of medicines and medical equipment, health research, integration of modern and digital technologies, medical education, academic collaboration, training health experts, and the management of both pandemic and non-pandemic diseases.

Arab musicians' songs about Gaza mirror public sympathy with Palestinians

Music has become a powerful tool for expression and solidarity in the Middle East as artists from various countries respond to the ongoing conflict in Gaza through their work. These songs, ranging in tone from defiant anthems praising Hamas to poignant ballads mourning the loss of life, are not only climbing the charts but also reigniting discussions on the Palestinian cause in Arab popular culture. Egyptian wedding singer Rudy and her songs lauding Hamas spokesman Abu Obaida have captured widespread attention, symbolizing the collective sentiment of resistance and frustration towards the support Israel receives from the US and Europe. Amidst a backdrop of devastating human tolls reported by both sides, the role of music in shaping public opinion and keeping the plight of Gaza in the global consciousness is undeniable.

From Cairo to Jordan, Arab

musicians are channeling their emotions into music that speaks volumes about the Palestinian cause. Rudy's performances at weddings have turned into venues of political expression, with her song about Abu Obaida resonating deeply among attendees. In Jordan, a collaboration among artists from different Arab nations resulted in a song dreaming of Palestinian return, garnering millions of views and sparking conversation on social media. These musical expressions reflect a broader sentiment of defiance against Israel's military actions and solidarity with the Palestinian people, underscored by recent polls indicating strong Arab support for the Palestinian cause and opposition to normalization efforts with Israel, bnnbreaking.com reported.

The surge in popularity for songs sympathizing with the Palestinians or encouraging Hamas is a testament to the significant role mu-



Musician, producer and singer Zeid Hamdan performs on stage, during an event where all proceeds go to families affected in Southern Lebanon, at Ked in Beirut, Lebanon, February 3, 2024.
● REUTERS

sic plays in shaping and reflecting public opinion. Artist such as Lebanese rapper Jaafar Touffar and Kuwaiti singer Humood Al Khuder are using their platforms to draw attention to the conflict and its wider implications. The imagery and lyrics in their work evoke powerful symbols of Palestinian resistance and resilience, from the keys to lost homes to the iconic

kuffiyah. Polls conducted in the region show a clear consensus viewing the conflict as a legitimate resistance against occupation, with a significant majority considering the US and Israel as the primary threats to regional security.

Despite the unlikely impact of their music on the political landscape or the decisions of Arab leaders, artists like Ghaliaa Chaker,

who participated in the collaborative song 'Returning' recorded in Jordan, aim to keep international attention focused on Gaza's plight. The collective effort of these musicians goes beyond entertainment or artistic expression; it is a call to action and a reminder of the ongoing human tragedy unfolding in Gaza. As Lebanese musician Zeid Hamdan aptly puts it, his performances are no longer about self-promotion but about spreading a message of urgency and solidarity. Through their art, these artists hope to ensure that the world continues to talk about and remember the situation in Gaza, keeping the flames of awareness and empathy alive.



Minister urges to introduce Iran's tourism spot during Nowruz

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ezzatollah Zarghami, addressed concerns about inadequate promotion of historical sites and tourist centers along travel routes.

Speaking at the 'Welcoming Nowruz and Blessed Ramadan' conference attended by ministry officials, Zarghami emphasized the need for improved communication and introduction of cultural and historical attractions, IRNA wrote.

Zarghami revealed an agreement with the Ministry of Roads to allocate 10 percent of roadside advertising boards to showcase tourism potentials, historical sites, and handicrafts.

He criticized the current state of information dissemination and underlined the importance of providing travelers with guidance on cultural and historical landmarks.

"As hosts to millions of domestic and foreign tourists, our goal is to help them relax and rejuvenate. Understanding how to interact with these individuals is crucial, especially during this time, which is also a period of relaxation for yourselves," Zarghami urged officials. Expressing concern about some mosques and roadside prayer spaces closing during non-prayer hours, Zarghami emphasized that these places should remain open, especially in tourist and cultural locations.

He also highlighted the significance of promoting handicraft sales during Nowruz, stating that cultural and historical sites serve as ideal places for showcasing and selling traditional crafts.

Russia and Iran negotiating oil, gas swap deals: *Novak*

Russia and Iran continue to negotiate oil and gas swap agreements, the Russian deputy prime minister announced.

"The issue is at the discussion stage as it is largely tied not only with the country with which swap is made, but also the logistics, transportation and

other issues. As we know there is a memorandum of understanding inked between Russia's Gazprom and the National Iranian Oil Company," Alexander Novak told reporters. Russian firms are still interested in participating in oil and gas projects in Iran, with the issue being devel-

oped and the conditions being analyzed, he added, according to TASS.

The parties also continue negotiating the potential creation of a joint electronic gas trading platform, Novak added.

Tehran and Moscow signed 19 cooperation documents during the closing cer-

emony of the 17th Joint Economic Commission between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation in Tehran.

The final document was signed by Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji and Alexander Novak, the commission co-chairs, and 18 others were inked by other

officials.

Iran's Deputy Oil Minister for Engineering, Research, and Technology Vahid-Reza Zeidifard and Russian Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorokin signed the document to cooperate in scientific and technical fields of the oil and gas industry.

Meybod Pigeon Tower, a testament to the ingenuity of ancient Persian civilization

In the heart of Iran's arid central plateau, nestled amidst the rugged mountains and sunbaked valleys of Yazd Province, stands a remarkable testament to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of ancient Persian civilization. This enigmatic structure, rising like a sentinel from the desert sands, has captivated travelers and historians alike for centuries, its purpose shrouded in mystery and its enduring presence a testament to the ingenuity of its builders.

The Meybod Pigeon Tower, also known as *Kabutar-Khaneh*, is one of the most impressive and well-preserved examples of a unique architectural form that once dotted the Iranian landscape. Constructed during the 16th century, this imposing cylindrical tower stands over 19 meters (62 feet) tall and boasts a diameter of around six meters at its base.



● wikipedia.org

Architectural ingenuity

What sets the Meybod Pigeon Tower apart from ordinary structures is its intricate design, meticulously crafted to serve as a functional home for thousands of pigeons. The tower's exterior is adorned with a series of intricately carved niches and small openings, each designed to provide nesting spaces for the feathered residents, amazingiran.media wrote.

Inside, the tower is divided into two distinct sections – an internal cylindrical structure surrounded by a narrow walkway. This walkway, accessible through a single entrance, allowed caretakers to move freely around the tower, tending to the pigeons and collecting their precious droppings, which were highly prized as a valuable source of fertilizer for the region's arid farmlands.

A sustainable solution

The construction of pigeon towers was an ingenious solution to the challenges posed by the harsh climate and limited resources of ancient Persia. In a region where water was scarce and arable land was precious, the pigeons' droppings, known as "pigeon guano," provided a rich source of nutrient-rich fertilizer, enabling farmers to cultivate crops in the otherwise unforgiving desert environment.

A symbiotic relationship

The symbiotic relationship between humans and pigeons was a cornerstone of this sustainable system. The towers offered the birds a safe and secure nesting environment, protected from predators and the elements. In return, the pigeons provided a consistent supply of valuable fertilizer, helping to sustain agricultural communities in the arid regions of central Iran.

A cultural icon

Beyond its practical functions, the Meybod Pigeon Tower has become a cultural icon, a symbol of the ingenuity and resilience of the Persian people. Its unique design and

enduring presence have captured the imaginations of travelers and scholars, inspiring countless works of art, literature, and academic study.

As you wander through the narrow streets of Meybod, a historic town renowned for its rich cultural heritage, the towering presence of the Pigeon Tower serves as a beacon, inviting you to explore the fascinating intersection of architecture, sustainability, and cultural identity that has shaped this remarkable region for centuries.

A journey through time

Meybod, the town where the iconic Pigeon Tower resides, is itself a hidden gem, an oasis of history and culture amidst the arid landscapes of central Iran. This ancient settlement, with roots stretching back over 1,500 years, has long been a crossroads for trade and cultural exchange, sitting astride the ancient Silk Road that connected the East and West.

As you wander through the labyrinth of narrow alleys and mud-brick buildings, you'll be transported back in time, immersed in a world that seems frozen in the past. The town's unique architecture, characterized by wind-catchers (*baadgirs*) and subterranean water channels (*qanats*), is a testament to the ingenious ways in which the local population adapted to the harsh desert environment.

A living museum

Meybod is more than just a historic town; it is a living museum, where centuries-old traditions continue to thrive and shape the daily lives of its residents. From the intricate art of pottery and tile-making to the age-old techniques of carpet weaving and traditional bread baking, the town is a vibrant tapestry of cultural heritage, woven together by the resilient spirit of its people.

As you explore the winding streets and ancient bazaars, you'll encounter local artisans plying their trade, carrying on the legacies passed down through generations. The air is

filled with the scent of spices and the rhythmic clatter of looms, reminding you that in Meybod, the past is very much alive in the present.

Preserving a legacy

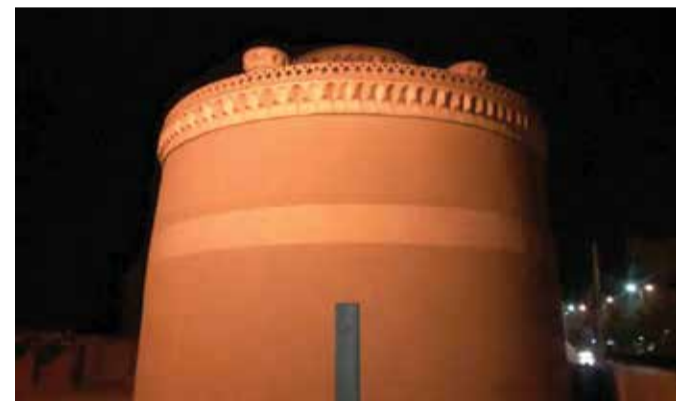
In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of preserving the unique cultural and architectural heritage of Meybod, including the iconic Pigeon Tower. Local authorities and international organizations have joined forces to safeguard these treasures, recognizing their significance as living monuments to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of ancient Persian civilization.

Efforts are underway to restore and maintain the Pigeon Tower, ensuring that this remarkable structure continues to stand as a beacon of inspiration for generations to come. Additionally, initiatives are in place to support and promote the town's traditional crafts and sustainable practices, ensuring that the rich cultural tapestry of Meybod remains vibrant and thriving.

Lessons for a sustainable future

As we grapple with the challenges of a rapidly changing world, the Meybod Pigeon Tower and the town's enduring traditions offer valuable lessons in sustainability and resilience. The ingenious ways in which the ancient Persians harnessed natural resources and worked in harmony with their environment serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of living in balance with nature.

By studying and learning from these time-honored practices, we can gain insights into how to build more sustainable communities, ones that prioritize environmental stewardship and the judicious use of resources. The Pigeon Tower and the town of Meybod stand as living examples of the profound wisdom and foresight of our ancestors, reminding us that the path to a sustainable future often lies in rediscovering and adapting the lessons of the past.



● wikipedia.org



● wikipedia.org



● IRNA



● IRNA

Outlining post-war Gaza principles, Netanyahu continues to defy Biden



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (L) walks alongside his extremist Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich before a cabinet meeting in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) on February 23, 2023.
● ALEX KOLOMOISKY/POOL

By Patsy Widakuswara
VOA's White House Bureau Chief
PERSPECTIVE

Post-war principles for Gaza outlined in a document Friday by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stand in stark contrast to Washington's vision for the war-torn territory, a sign of the deepening divide between his cabinet and the administration of US President Joe Biden.

The document, *The Day After Hamas Principles*, is the first official summary of Netanyahu's public positions on the war that Israel has waged in Gaza in response to Hamas' October 7 attack that killed 1,200 people in Israel and took more than 200 people captives.

It calls for civil governance by Israeli-appointed individuals in Gaza, bypassing any involvement from the Palestinian Authority and absent provisions for a pathway to Palestinian statehood.

By Robert Wright
Author

OPINION

As of this weekend, it's been exactly two years since Russia attacked Ukraine and exactly 20 weeks since Hamas attacked Israel. There are lots of differences between those two events and between the wars they've brought, but there's one important commonality: how President Biden has reacted. In both cases he has come to the aid of a friend in need and done so in a way that wasn't ultimately good for the friend. Biden is good at showing love and catastrophically bad at showing tough love. With both Ukraine and Israel, the US has massive leverage — by virtue of being a critical weapons supplier and also in other ways. And in both cases, Biden has refused to use the leverage to try to end wars that are now, at best, pointless exercises in carnage creation.

Biden's tough love deficit

In the case of Israel, that refusal is so well known as to require no elaboration. (Even the European Union's foreign minister has subjected Biden to borderline ridicule for calling Israel's conduct in Gaza "over the top" while keeping the weapons flowing.) What may require elaboration — given that Gazans are dying en masse and Israelis aren't — is my claim that Biden's blank check to Israel is bad for Israel.

It's hard to see how the slaughter being visited on Gaza won't come back to haunt Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Gazans — out of a total population of 2.1 million — now have close relatives who have been killed or maimed by Israel. That's enough hatred to fuel violence against Israelis for decades. Israel says all the killing is necessary so it can "eliminate" Hamas — as if (assuming such elimination is even possible) the specific brand under which hatred is converted into violence is the big issue.

Of course, there's a chance that Israel will insulate itself from much of this hatred — that the war will end with the ethnic cleansing of Gaza or with an Israeli occupation of Gaza so brutal as to suppress all resistance. And maybe Bibi Netanyahu would call both of these things a win.

And, actually, by the political calculus that has governed his career, they might be. After all, in one case, Israel would face something close to global ostracism and in the other case, intense and sustained international criticism, and in neither case would the Palestinian conflict be resolved. So, Israeli politicians who thrive on the country's sense of insecurity and of persecution — political assets Bibi has carefully cultivated for the past two

decades — would be sitting pretty, but Israel itself wouldn't be.

In the case of Ukraine, Biden's failure to use his leverage to push an American friend toward peace hasn't been a topic of much discussion. After all, only in the last few weeks, as battlefield momentum has clearly shifted toward Russia, has it occurred to many Americans that ending the war is in Ukraine's interest even if Russia continues to claim Ukrainian territory. And even now, a widespread assumption is that if only Congress will cough up the money for another round of weapons, all will be fine.

But all won't be fine. Ukraine will run out of soldiers long before Russia does, and Russia's industrial capacity means that its ongoing supply of weapons, unlike Ukraine's, is enduringly insulated from the unpredictable politics of other nations. Such basic asymmetries have been ob-

vious for a long time to the handful of American foreign policy elites who are capable of soberly assessing Russia-related phenomena. Fifteen months ago, Gen. Mark Milley, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Biden White House that Ukraine's battlefield position was unlikely to significantly improve and could deteriorate, so it was time to talk peace. Today, 15 months after Milley's warning, Ukraine's battlefield position is much more precarious and its negotiating position accordingly weaker. And there are now tens of thousands more dead Ukrainian soldiers, and tens of thousands more Ukrainian amputees, than there were when Milley tried to stop the bloodshed.

Milley's effort to inject reason into US foreign policy discourse was overcome by the usual suspects — the Michael McFauls and Anne Applebaums of the

world, zealous hawks who, notwithstanding their track records, have open invitations to America's dominant media platforms. Biden sided with them against Milley, agreeing that we had no right to question the judgment of Ukrainians — our friends, after all — who wanted to expel Russian troops from all Ukrainian territory at all costs. So, 15 months later, the Ukrainian "agency" is alive and well, even if many fewer Ukrainians are.

For better or worse (mostly worse), America's foreign policy is organized largely around the goal not just of keeping America a superpower, but of keeping it the world's dominant superpower. But what's the point of being a superpower if you don't use your power when it's really needed?

The full article first appeared on *Nonzero Newsletter*.



US President Joe Biden embraces Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (R) on different occasions in a show of solidarity.
● NONZERO

Without explicitly stating the role of the Israel Defense Forces, the plan potentially allows vast Israeli control over Gaza, including the establishment of an Israeli-controlled buffer zone along the border with Egypt, a move that would be seen by Palestinians as more occupation of their territory and could inflame tensions with Cairo.

Speaking from Buenos Aires, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken declined to specifically address Netanyahu's plan but underscored a core principle in the administration's vision for post-war Gaza.

"There should be no Israeli reoccupation of Gaza," he said. "The size of Gaza's territory should not be reduced."

The establishment of a buffer zone would in effect require an Israeli invasion of Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, where most Gazans currently seek safety.

"We wouldn't support those kinds of operations unless or until the Israelis had properly accounted for the safety and security of the more than 1 million people that are seeking refuge down there," national security communications adviser John Kirby told VOA during Friday's briefing, reiterating the administration's position on Israel's plans for a ground offensive in Rafah.

'Fundamentally at odds'

What Netanyahu has outlined is "fundamentally at odds with what the Biden administration has been urging," said Thomas Warrick, a non-resident senior

fellow at the Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative at the Atlantic Council.

Warrick said Netanyahu's plan "basically locks in the differences" he has had with President Joe Biden. "There needs to be further efforts to try to bridge this gap, perhaps with a different approach," he told VOA.

Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib, an American writer and political analyst from Gaza, said that Netanyahu's plan, if enacted, would amount to a permanent Israeli military occupation and create a series of "rump states" or cantons on remnants of Gaza's shrinking territory.

Even if enough Palestinians in Gaza agree to take part in such administrations, they lack the means to do so without full Israeli support, he told VOA.

"They'll be viewed as collaborators and subcontractors of the Israeli occupation, decimating any credibility or standing among the battered and beaten population and placing their lives and safety at grave risk."

Hamas lambasted the proposal during a press conference in the Lebanese capital, Beirut.

"Netanyahu is presenting ideas which he knows fully well will never succeed," spokesman Osama Hamdan said on Friday.

After holding power for 17 years, Netanyahu faces plummeting popularity amid an angry population that blames him for the security failures that allowed the Hamas attack. His incumbency depends on keeping intact his coalition, the most right-wing

and religiously conservative the country has ever seen.

"The current plan does not necessarily reflect what the long-term Israeli policy will be, but rather showcases what Netanyahu thinks he needs to do in order to advance a primary goal of his — political survival," said Nimrod Goren, senior fellow for Israeli affairs at the Middle East Institute. Given the widespread Israeli desire for new leadership, the eventual post-war plan may well be devised by the next cabinet, he told VOA.

Alkhatib said that the Israeli prime minister could also be bidding his time until the US presidential elections in November, which could fundamentally shift what's happening in Gaza.

The world will see either a second Biden term where the US will apply more pressure on Netanyahu, or a new Trump administration that would give Israel "complete free rein to do as it pleases in the Gaza Strip," Alkhatib predicted.

Biden increasingly impatient

Biden remains staunchly supportive of Israel, providing military and diplomatic aid. Last week, his administration vetoed an Arab-backed United Nations resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire, the third since Israel's military offensive began.

However, the US submitted its own draft resolution, calling for a temporary cease-fire in Gaza after a captive deal between Israel and Hamas is secured and oppos-



A local street market in Rafah is overcrowded with Palestinians displaced by the Israeli onslaught in the Gaza Strip on January 20, 2024.

ABED RAHIM KHATIB/DPA

ing Israel's ground offensive into Rafah without adequate civilian protection.

The US draft shows Biden's increasing impatience with Netanyahu, said Richard Gowan, UN director of the International Crisis Group.

"If I were looking at this from Israel's perspective, I would feel a little nervous because the signaling from the Biden administration is becoming marginally stronger,"

he told VOA. "It will continue to protect Israel at the UN, but its patience is not limitless."

Washington is hoping for a breakthrough in talks underway in Paris between top US, Israeli, Egyptian, and Qatari officials aimed at securing a temporary cease-fire in return for the release of captives held by Hamas.

The US is also working to defuse Israel-Hezbollah tensions along the Lebanese border to prevent

escalation to a full-fledged war in the region. "The success of these efforts is very much needed and could be assisted by some pause in fighting in Gaza," Goren said.

A cease-fire would bring welcome relief to Gaza, where more than 29,000 people have been killed in the bloodiest episode of the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The article first appeared on VOA.



By Norman Solomon
Co-founder of RootsAction

PERSPECTIVE

Days ago, when the United States cast the only vote in the UN Security Council against a resolution for a cease-fire in Gaza, it was yet another move by President Biden to serve as the main enabler for Israel's ongoing mass murder of Palestinian people. Since early October, nearly 30,000 have been killed by US weaponry and, increasingly, by hunger and disease. The cruelty and magnitude of the slaughter are repugnant to anyone who isn't somehow numb to the human agony.

Such numbing is widespread in the US. Some factors include ethnocentric, racial, and religious biases against Arabs and Muslims. The steep pro-Israel tilt of news media runs parallel to the slant of US government officials, with language that routinely conveys much lower regard for Palestinian lives than Israeli lives.

And while the credibility of the Israeli cabinet has tumbled, the brawny arms of the Israel lobby — notably AIPAC and Democratic Majority for Israel — still exert enormous leverage over the vast majority of Congress. Few legislators are willing to vote against the massive military aid that makes the carnage in Gaza possible.

Joe Biden's moral collapse on Gaza could help Donald Trump win

Why it's so hard to talk about Gaza

A chilling example is Sen. Chris Van Hollen, a Democrat from Maryland. On the night of February 12, he took to the Senate floor and condemned Israel in no uncertain terms. "Kids in Gaza are now dying from the deliberate withholding of food," he said. "In addition to the horror of that news, one other thing is true. That is a war crime. It is a textbook war crime. And that makes those who orchestrate it war criminals."

Watching the video from Van Hollen's impassioned speech, you might assume that he would vote against sending \$14 billion in further military aid to those "war criminals," but hours later, he did just the opposite. As journalist Ryan Grim noted, "The senator's speech pulsed with moral clarity — until it petered out into a stumbling rationale for his forthcoming yes vote." Only three senators in the Democratic caucus — Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Peter Welch and Bernie Sanders, both of Vermont — voted no. Sanders delivered a powerful speech calling for decency instead of further moral collapse from the top of the US government.

While the Senate deliberated, the White House again made clear that it wasn't serious about getting in the way of Israel's planned assault on the city of Rafah. That's where most of Gaza's 2.2 million surviving residents have taken unsafe refuge from the Orwellian-named Israel Defense Forces. An exchange at a White House news conference underscored that Biden is



The screengrab shows US Senator Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent, speaking on the floor of the US Senate on January 16, 2024, with photos displayed of children and civilians in Gaza.

US SENATE WEBCAST

determined to keep enabling Israel's continuous war crimes in Gaza. A reporter asked, "Has the president ever threatened to strip military assistance from Israel if they move ahead with a Rafah operation that does not take into consequence what happens with civilians?" National Security Council spokesman John Kirby replied, "We're going to continue to support Israel. They have a right to defend themselves against Hamas and we're going to continue to make sure they have the tools and the capabilities to do that."

Later, Politico summed it up: "The Biden administration is not planning to punish Israel if it launches a military campaign in Rafah without ensuring civilian safety." Citing interviews with three US officials, the article reported that "no reprimand plans are in the works, meaning Israeli forces could enter the city and harm

civilians without facing American consequences."

Biden continues to serve as an accomplice while mouthing platitudes of concern about the lives of civilians in Gaza. Month after month, he has done all he can to supply the Israeli military to the max.

Under an apt headline — "Biden Is Mad at Netanyahu? Spare Me." — Jack Mirkinson of The Nation wrote in mid-February: "In the real world, Biden and his legislative partners have continued to arm Israel; the Democratic leadership in the Senate actually brought people in on Super Bowl Sunday to take a vote on a bill that would, along with rearming Ukraine, send Israel another \$14.1 billion for what is euphemistically dubbed 'security assistance'."

Ever since October, protests and activism in many parts of the country have

challenged US support for Israel's military assault on Gaza. However, boosted by revulsion at Hamas's attack against Israeli civilians on October 7, the usual rationales for supporting Israel's violence against Palestinians have been hard at work.

In this election year, an additional factor looms large. The prospect of Donald Trump returning to power is all too real. And with Biden set to be the Democratic nominee, many individuals and groups are careful to avoid saying anything that might sound overly critical of the president they want to see re-elected.

Instead of candor, the routine choices have been euphemisms and silence. Morally and politically, that's a big mistake.

The electoral base that Biden will need to win this year's election is heavily against his support for Israel's war on Gaza. Polling shows that young people in particular are overwhelmingly opposed. Most have seen through the thin veneer of his weak pleas for Israel to not kill so many civilians.

No amount of evasion, silence, or doubletalk can make Biden's policies morally acceptable. But while the administration combines its PR hand-wringing with an endless flow of arms and military supplies, Biden apologists must resort to evasion and verbal gymnastics to defend the indefensible.

A better course of action would be actual candor about current realities: Biden's moral collapse is enabling the Israeli cabinet to continue, with impunity, its large-scale massacre of Palestinian people. In the process, Biden is increasing the chances that the Republican Party, led by fascist Donald Trump, will gain control of the White House in January.

The article first appeared on Salon.

Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships: Iranian boys shine with 16 medals



● IRSF

Sports Desk

Young Iranian swimmers finished their campaign at the Asian Age Group Aquatics Championships with an impressive 16 medals – including double golds – in the Filipino city of Capas.

On Thursday, Iranian diver Sam Vajer brought the curtain down on his glittering run at the event by scoring 339.8 points to grab the gold in the boys' board level 1m contest.

This was a fourth medal for the Iranian in Capas following a platform silver as well as the synchro board level bronze alongside Kiumars Aslani.

The Iranian duo then claimed the silver in the 3m synchronized springboard event with 233.64 points.

Aydin Nosrati was the other Iranian diving medalist, taking the board level 1m silver in the 13-14 age class.

Samyar Abdoli had won a first gold for the country in the competitions, thanks to a best time of 22.83 seconds in the 50m freestyle final of the over-18 age class.

Abdoli also teamed up with Homer Abbasi, Mehrshad Afghari, and Matin Sohran for a bronze in the 4X100m

freestyle relay final.

Mohammad-Mahdi Gholami was unfortunate to leave Capas without a gold but still enjoyed a prolific campaign with five medals in the 13-14 age category.

The Iranian boy had to settle for a couple of silvers in the 200m individual medley and 200m butterfly events, while taking the bronzes of the 50m backstroke and 100m backstroke contests.

Gholami was also part of the Iranian bronze-winning team – alongside Yashar Soleimani, Rayan Zare', and Shantia Nazari – in the 4X100m freestyle relay final.

Mohammad Qassemi and Ali Rashidpour added two silvers to Iran's medal haul in the 15-17 age group competitions.

Qassemi clocked 2:03.46 minutes in the 200m butterfly final, with Rashidpour finishing as the runner-up in the 50m butterfly event with 24.87 seconds.

Afghari and Soleimani, meanwhile, left the Philippines with the bronze medals of the 100m butterfly and 50m butterfly competitions respectively.

ASROMA.COM – Sardar Azmoun has won everyone over in AS Roma, thanks to his quality as a skillful, versatile forward on the pitch, as well as the kind, dignified personality off it.

He's slotted into the Giallorossi squad with ease and looks like someone he's been in Rome for years. And he wears a perennial smile. Even when he turns up for an interview, weary from the exertions of "a nice, long training session".

You seem to have settled into the group really well now. You're always joking around with everyone – both in real life and on social media.

Yes, I feel at home here. I get on well with everyone. In our dressing room we have World Cup winners and world-class players but everyone's down to earth. It's easy to get along with the others.

Against Torino you started your first game at the Olimpico. What was that like?

I looked at all those people at the stadium at 6:30 pm on a Monday and I wondered what job they have! But actually, I think the time is minor detail. We'd have had the same number of fans even if the match had been at 8 am.

Honestly, the fans here are incredible. They fill the stadium for every game, Inter, Torino or whoever, it makes no difference. They're always right behind us. All we can do is thank them and hope that they never stop.

They're so important to us.

What did the coach, Daniele De Rossi, ask you to do before the Torino game? He had plenty of praise for you afterwards.

When we look at the game with the match analyst, the boss gives us a few tactical pointers. It's up to us to take them on board and put them into practice during the game. It went well that time. We won the game and got the three points.

On the subject of match analysts, the Italian league is one of the most tactical around. You've played in Russia, Germany and now Serie A. What differences have you noticed between the various leagues?

Serie A and the Bundesliga are very competitive. There might be some differences in terms of physicality or speed, which is why some players might fare better in one or the other, but they're both top level.

Azmoun impressed by fans, 'sense of unity' in Roma



● asroma.com

You said you used to watch Roma games on TV in Iran when you were a boy. Apart from Francesco Totti and De Rossi, who were your favourite players?

Apart from Totti and De Rossi! Even my mum knows them and

she knows they were massive Roma legends. I liked Mirko Vucinic a lot too.

Any others?

My attention was always drawn to the strikers, as that's where I play.

[Edin] Dzeko and [Gabriel] Batistuta, although from different eras obviously, were two players I greatly admired.

And what's it like being coached by De Rossi, another Roma legend, as you said?

What surprises me most about De Rossi is that when you look at him from the outside, as a player, you saw a fighter, a battler who would spit blood on the pitch.

When you see him on a day-to-day basis, he's kind, polite, good-natured. It's nice to see and even better to have someone like that as a coach. He was the right choice. I also like the general feeling that's been created here.

What do you mean?

The sense of unity. The owners, Lina Souloukou and the management are always very close to the team. It helps a lot and makes it easier for us to obtain the results we're achieving now.

We saw [co-owner] Ryan Friedkin get off the bus at the Olimpico before the game against Feyenoord.

That's true but it happened other times as well, like against Torino. It's really nice. We want to keep going with the same spirit. We still have a lot of work to do, both in Serie A and in the Europa League. One step at a time, though. Starting with Monza on Saturday. We're preparing for it in training and that's all we're thinking about now.

Pogba 'heartbroken' by four-year doping ban



● GETTY IMAGES

THE GUARDIAN – The France and Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba has said he is "sad, shocked and heartbroken" after being handed a four-year ban from football for a doping offence that could signal the end of his career.

Pogba, who will be almost 35 when the ban ends, said he would appeal to the court of arbitration for sport over what he called an "incorrect" verdict and that the "full story" was not known.

The World Cup winner was provisionally suspended by Italy's national anti-doping body, Nado Italia, at a tribunal in September last year. Pogba tested positive for dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) – a banned substance that can raise testosterone – after Juventus's 3-0 league win at Udinese on 20 August, and a B sample confirmed the

positive result in October.

A Juventus spokesperson told the Guardian that "this morning we received the notice from the anti-doping agency that [Pogba] has been disqualified for four years". Pogba, who will be 31 in March, has a contract until 2026.

Pogba wrote on Instagram: "I have today been informed of the Tribunale Nazionale Antidoping's decision and believe the verdict is incorrect. I am sad, shocked and heartbroken that everything I have built in my professional playing career has been taken away from me. "When I am free of legal restrictions the full story will become clear, but I have never knowingly or deliberately taken any supplements that violate anti-doping regulations. "As a professional athlete I would never do anything to enhance my

performance by using banned substances and have never disrespected or cheated fellow athletes and supporters of any of the teams I have played for, or against. As a consequence of the decision announced today, I will appeal this before the court of arbitration for sport."

Pogba has endured a torrid second spell with Juventus since he returned to Italy on a free transfer from Manchester United in 2022, making only 12 appearances owing to knee and hamstring injuries. He had rejoined United, where he spent time in the academy and made his professional debut, from Juventus for a then world record €110m (£93.2m) in 2016.

Nado Italia said it was unable to comment on the case, citing Italian privacy laws.

Iranians vote in parliamentary, Assembly of Experts elections

National Desk

Iranians headed to the polling stations across the country on Friday to vote in elections for Parliament and the Assembly of Experts.

More than 61 million people, out of Iran's 85-million population, were eligible to choose 290 members of Parliament and 88 members of the Assembly of Experts.

A body with an eight-year mandate, the Assembly of Experts is in charge of overseeing the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, and is in a position of authority to either appoint or dismiss the Leader.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei cast his ballot at a polling station in Tehran in the first minutes of voting.

"Our dear nation should know that today the eyes of many people in the world, both individuals and politicians and those who hold prestigious national and political positions, are on Iran and you," Ayatollah Khamenei said. "They want to see what you are doing in this election and what will be the



People cast their votes at a polling station in Tehran, Iran, on March 1, 2024 during the parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections.
● SAJJAD SAFARI/IRAN DAILY

result of your election. Both our friends and people who are interested in the Iranian nation, as well as ill-wishers from all sides are observing the issues of our country and our beloved nation. Pay attention to this; make friends happy and disappoint ill-wishers." Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who also voted in

Tehran, hailed elections in the country as a national celebration and a symbol of unity. "The people's vote is decisive, [as] all sectors of the country are determined by the people's vote, and this is one of the honors of the Islamic Establishment," Raisi said. Candidates for Parliament are vetted by the country's

Constitutional Council. It has approved a total of 15,200 candidates, out of nearly 49,000 applicants, to run for seats in Parliament. A total of 144 candidates were also competing for the Assembly of Experts seats. Former president Hassan Rouhani, a current member of the assembly, was banned from standing

again in the election for the Assembly of Experts. The elections took place amid crippling international sanctions and mounting economic hardship in Iran, where inflation has hovered around 50 percent, and the rial has sharply declined against the dollar. The problems had caused concerns among the coun-

try's officials about the low participation of the people in the elections. Before the elections, Iranian officials, including Ayatollah Khamenei, had called on people to participate in the polls.

In a Wednesday meeting in Tehran, Ayatollah Khamenei said if the Iranian nation shows the world that they are present in 'decisive scenes,' they will save the country and contribute to Iran's progress. "Strong and fervent elections constitute one of the pillars of running the country properly," the Leader said. "If we can show the world that the nation is present in the country's critical and decisive scenes, we have saved and moved the country forward."

Iran's last parliamentary elections in 2020 had a voter turnout of 42.57 percent – the lowest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iran launches Pars-1 satellite into space



● REUTERS

Iran successfully put into orbit the domestically-built Pars-1 research-sensing satellite on Thursday.

The 134-kilogram satellite was launched by a Soyuz rocket from the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Russia's far eastern Amur region on Thursday, Press TV reported.

Equipped with three cameras, Pars-1 will scan Iran's topography from an orbit of 500 kilometers above the Earth's surface.

The satellite is designed and manufactured by the Iranian Space Research Center, with the cooperation of knowledge-based companies.

It receives data from ground sources in three spectral ranges of visible, short-wave infrared and thermal infrared.

Speaking on television, Iran's Minister of Communications and Information Technology Issa Zarepour said that the satellite will be added to the country's sensing satellites, and that its sent images and data will be used for multiple purposes.

Elaborating on the country's space program, he added that Iran has launched 12 satellites into space over the past 25 months.

"The country's space industry is rapidly advancing forward ... upgrading its place," Zarepour said.

Largest launch base in West Asia

Additionally in his remarks, the minister said that Iran is constructing West Asia's largest launch base in the country's south.

He also noted that the first satellite launch from the base will be carried out in the next Iranian calendar year (beginning on March 20), or at the latest by the end of President Ebrahim Raisi's term.

He pointed out that Iran decided to build the base as the country's current launch bases do not have the capability of injecting satellites at the right inclination for a sun-synchronous orbit.

Last month, Iran simultaneously put into orbit the Mahda research satellite, as well as the Keyhan-2 and Hatef-1 nanosatellites using the domestically-made Simorgh (Phoenix) carrier.

In the same month, the Aerospace Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) launched Soraya satellite into orbit using Qaem 100 satellite carrier. Despite sanctions imposed by Western countries in recent years, Iran has taken giant strides in the civilian space program. Iran is among the world's top 10 countries capable of developing and launching satellites.

Global anger as Israel kills over 100 Palestinians waiting for aid

International Desk

Reactions have poured in from all over the world after Israeli troops on Thursday opened fire on Palestinians at a food aid distribution site in northern Gaza, killing more than 100 people.

Gaza's Health Ministry called it a "massacre" and said 112 people were killed and more than 750 others wounded.

The Israeli military claimed a "stampede" occurred when thousands of Gazans surrounded the convoy of 38 aid trucks, leading to

dozens of deaths and injuries, including some who were run over.

However, an Israeli source acknowledged troops had opened fire on the crowd, believing it "posed a threat". Many countries have condemned the incident as "genocide and crime against humanity" and have called for investigation into the tragedy.

Iran lashed out at the US and the Europeans for their silence over the "genocide" in Gaza.

"More than 100 Palestinian citizens who were waiting in line to receive

humanitarian aid on al-Rashid Street in Gaza were martyred, more than 800 people were injured due to the barbaric attack by the Zionist regime," Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani wrote on X.

'Another crime'

Turkey accused Israel of committing "another crime against humanity". "The fact that Israel... this time targets innocent civilians in a queue for humanitarian aid, is evidence that (Israel) aims consciously and collectively to destroy the Palestinian people", the

Turkish Foreign Ministry said.

Colombia's President Gustavo Petro denounced what he called a "genocide" of the Palestinian people and suspended purchases of weapons from Israel, a key supplier of his country's security forces.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the incident and was "appalled by the tragic human toll of the conflict", his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

France's Foreign Ministry said "the fire by Israeli soldiers against civilians trying to access food is unjustifiable".

Writing on the social media platform X that Palestinian "civilians have been targeted by Israeli soldiers", French President Emmanuel Macron expressed his "strongest condemnation" of the killings.

Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares wrote on X, "The unacceptable nature of what happened in Gaza, with dozens of Palestinian civilians dead as they were waiting for food, underlines the urgency of a cease-fire".

EU decries 'carnage'

European Union foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell denounced the deaths as "totally unacceptable". "I am horrified by news of



yet another carnage among civilians in Gaza desperate for humanitarian aid," he said on X.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry condemned "in the strongest terms the heinous massacre committed by the Israeli occupation", calling for "urgent international action" to halt the fighting in Gaza. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry condemned the deaths and reiterated "the need to reach an immediate cease-fire".

China shocked

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Chinese Mao Ning said China was shocked by the incident and strongly condemned the killing of Palestinians during an aid delivery.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said her country was "horrified by today's catastrophe in Gaza and the ongoing human-



Men carry an injured Palestinian at Al-Shifa hospital after an early morning incident when residents rushed toward aid trucks in Gaza City on February 29, 2024.
● AFP

itarian crisis that has led to it".

US President Joe Biden – whose country provides billions of dollars in military aid to Israel – said Washington was checking "two competing versions" of the incident.

The United States blocked Algeria's request to the UN Security Council demanding the body to issue a statement blaming the Israeli army for the massacre carried out on Thursday.

The US was the only country out of 15 to not back Algeria's statement on the massacre in Al-Rashid Street.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran votes in key polls

Iranians headed to the polls on Friday nationwide to vote in two parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections.



◀ Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei casts his ballot at a polling station in Tehran on March 1, 2024. ● IRNA



◀ Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi casts his vote at Interior Ministry's polling station in Tehran on March 1, 2024. ● president.ir



◀ Qom ● ISNA



◀ Shiraz ● IRNA



● IRNA



◀ Shiraz ● IRNA



● ISNA



● IRNA



● ISNA



● ISNA



◀ Tehran ● ISNA



◀ Tehran ● IRNA