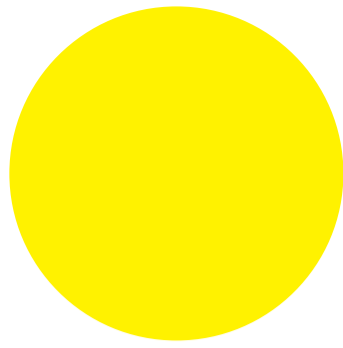


Iran enters into several monetary pacts as part of de-dollarization policy



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Pension harmonization plan and ensuing challenges

By Javad Nabovati
Economic affairs expert

**PERSPECTIVE
EXCLUSIVE**

Harmonizing retirees' pensions is recognized as one of the most significant challenges for Iran's social security system. With rising living costs and economic inequalities, there is a pressing need to ensure adequate livelihoods for retirees. The primary objective of this plan is to standardize the pensions of government, military, and social security retirees, which can be seen as an effective step towards achieving social justice and improving the living standards of this important stratum of society.

In the current economic conditions, pension harmonization has become an undeniable necessity. Retirees, as a vital part of the community, not only require adequate livelihoods but also have a substantial economic impact on society as a whole. With increasing living costs and inflation, neglecting retirees' pensions could lead to social and economic unrest. For example, the inability to meet basic

needs could result in growing dissatisfaction and potentially trigger social crises. Therefore, harmonizing pensions benefits not only the retirees but the entire society.

The rise in living costs, especially in recent years, has intensified the need to adjust retirees' pensions. Prices of goods and services are continually increasing, placing excruciating pressure on retirees. Pensions need to be regulated so that retirees can live with peace of mind. Proposed measures include meticulous planning to set pensions according to inflation rates and rising costs, establishing support and insurance systems to meet healthcare and livelihood needs, and encouraging retirees to engage in economic and social activities to enhance their living standards. By implementing such measures, the government can help retirees endure economic pressures and enjoy a better quality of life, contributing to a healthier and more stable society.

The pension harmonization plan aims to improve the economic and living conditions of the elderly stratum of society. It encompasses all retirees, including government, military, and social security retirees.

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New method for choosing Iran's cabinet line-up

EXCLUSIVE

On July 30, Iran's new President Masoud Pezeshkian will be officially inaugurated in a ceremony held in Parliament. Prior to this, the Leader will endorse Pezeshkian's presidency in a separate ceremony. According to the law, the president has 15 days after the inauguration to present his cabinet line-up to Parliament for a vote of confidence.

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Palestinians purposefully missing from normalization deals

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China-Iran, Iran-China container trains relaunched



China-Iran and Iran-China container trains were relaunched in the Aprin Dry Port, located in Islamshahr, southwestern Tehran on Sunday.

The formal ceremony was attended by Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) Mi'ad Salehi, the Deputy Ambassador of China, the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, and the Chargé d'Affaires of Turkmenistan, IRNA reported.

Salehi described Iran as a fast and safe way to transport consignments from China to the European Union. During the inauguration ceremony, the first phase of the China-Iran-Europe railway corridor was put into operation.

The container trains will travel via friendly and neighboring countries of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, bound for China, said Salehi.

The Chinese container train headed to Iran around 10 days ago, the RAI chief said, adding that the trains will be exchanged at the Incheh Boroun Border Terminal.

Iran enters into several monetary pacts as part of de-dollarization policy

Economic Desk

Iran's Acting president Mohammad Mokhber said on Sunday that the country has struck monetary agreements with several countries in line with its de-dollarization policy.

While initially encountering significant challenges in the current government's foreign interactions, we successfully negotiated monetary agreements with multiple countries. These agreements will play a crucial role in decreasing the dependency on dollar transactions in the country's economic activities, he told the annual meeting of the general assembly of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

"With the improvement of the country's regional and international interactions, a suitable ground has been created for attracting foreign investment in Iran, but the importance and necessity of this issue should not lead to neglecting the attraction of domestic investments," he said. Addressing the conference, CBI Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin referred to the country's five-percent growth rate in the past year, adding, "With the measures taken, the growth rate of liquidity, money supply, and monetary base has bounced back to long-term trends with a downward trajectory, and consumer and producer inflation has been controlled with a consistent decreasing trend."

"According to preliminary information from the Central Bank, the



Iran's Acting President Mohammad Mokhber addresses the annual meeting of the general assembly of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) in Tehran on July 21, 2024.
● ASGHAR KHAMSEH/IRNA

Gini coefficient reached its lowest level in the past decade at 0.3614 last year," Farzin said. He said that, "Foreign exchange market management has been carried out in a way that the lowest level of exchange rate fluctuations in recent years was recorded last year."

The CBI head also said that economic growth at constant prices excluding oil reached 3.6%, which after a period of low growth, shows the government's success in implementing economic programs.

Referring to the World Bank's report on the economic growth of regional countries in 2023, he stated, "The 5-percent economic growth of the country in the past year indicates the highest growth among regional countries, which despite shocks resulting from regional military and security developments, managed to achieve significant economic growth."

Farzin said the bank provided \$68.329 billion last year and \$19.794 billion from March 20 to July 13 this year, the required

foreign exchange for the country. Farzin said that the CBI supplied \$68.329 billion last year and \$19.794 billion from March 20 to July 13 this year, meeting the country's foreign exchange needs. "This allocation and provision of foreign exchange has been done in the shortest possible time with the coordination of relevant ministries and organizations, which made economic actors more confident to engage in their commercial and business activities," he added.

Pointing to the increasing trend of the country's foreign exchange reserves, Farzin said, "With monetary and banking diplomacy and increasing oil and gas revenues, both the quantity and quality of the country's foreign exchange reserves have increased, and contrary to incorrect criticisms and statements, the CBI has never used the country's foreign exchange reserves and currency distribution to regulate the exchange market, including in the current period."

Pension harmonization plan ...

The primary goal is to increase retirees' pensions to at least 90% of the current year's minimum wage compared to their initial pensions. The measure is particularly important for those who have faced greater financial difficulties in recent years. The plan is being pursued in various stages, with serious efforts being underway. The deputy for Insurance and the Social Security Organization has announced that new harmonization directives will be issued soon. It is expected that with the full implementation of this plan in the coming months, positive impacts on retirees' living conditions will be observed. Additionally, this initiative can help alleviate financial problems and improve the quality of life for this age group. However, insufficient funding could delay the implementation of the program and reduce service quality. Lack of adequate financial resources pressures project managers into making tough decisions that may ultimately prevent achieving the initial goals. Overcoming this challenge requires careful planning and transparency regarding available financial resources, as well as attracting investors and financial supporters. Bureaucracy is another serious obstacle in the path of pension harmonization. Complex administrative processes and the need to obtain multiple permits can take ample time and resources from executive teams. This issue not only negatively impacts project costs but can also affect team morale.

To improve sustainable development plans, establishing stable financial resources is crucial. These financial resources can be secured through innovative financial mechanisms such as social investments and leveraging local resources. For example, utilizing local capacities like small investors and local institutions can be beneficial. This approach not only helps finance projects but also reduces dependence on foreign aid. Furthermore, continuous and predictable funding enables institutions to execute their plans with greater confidence. Therefore, investing in sustainable projects and garnering financial support from the private sector can be an effective strategy in this context.

Chinese firms seek safe investment in Iran: *Envoy*

Economic Desk

Chinese Ambassador to Iran Cong Peiwu has announced that Chinese firms are interested to invest in Iran providing that a transparent and secure atmosphere is ensured.

In a meeting with the Iranian media delegation that recently traveled to China's Qinghai Province, the ambassador stated that Chinese companies are eager to invest in Iran, however, they seek a transparent and stable investment environment. The presence of these companies in Iran benefits not only China but also Iran, he added.

Peiwu also said that Iran's participation in Chinese ex-

hibitions is reaching record levels, and large Chinese companies are actively participating in various Iranian exhibitions, such as those focused on oil and auto parts.

The envoy emphasized the role of private companies, stating that during China's modernization process, the country's Open-Door policy is becoming more expansive, creating greater opportunities for the relations between the two countries. He added that for several consecutive years, China has been Iran's largest trading partner and is one of the most important destinations for Iranian exports. The volume of trade between China and Iran

exceeds the trade volume Iran has with all European countries combined.

Peiwu said that the comprehensive 25-year cooperation document between Iran and China could play a positive role in the relations of the two countries, a role that will become evident in the near future.

The two sides signed the landmark 25-year partnership agreement in March 2021 in a bid to strengthen their long-standing economic and political alliance.

The deal sets the outlines of Sino-Iranian cooperation in political, cultural, security, defense, regional, and international domains for the period in question.

Referring to the collabora-

tion between the two countries under this comprehensive strategic document, the ambassador said that Chinese President Xi Jinping, in his congratulatory message to Iran's newly elected President Massoud Pezeshkian, explicitly expressed a desire to work with Iran and deepen the comprehensive partnership between the two countries.

The Iranian president-elect welcomed this and outlined Iran's foreign policy, emphasizing that he cherishes the traditional friendship between the two countries. Peiwu commented on the fate of the 25-year agreement following Donald Trump's ascension to power in the United States, stating,

"We are always opposed to some Americans using China's relationship with Iran as a pretext during the electoral process."

He emphasized the need for strong confidence in facing external challenges and the importance of executing plans. The envoy believes that through joint efforts between China and the new government in Iran, a bright outlook for this program can be achieved.

Peiwu noted that cooperation between the two countries on regional and international issues has increased, allowing them to continue their collaboration within the frameworks of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS.

Parts of Iran-India deal on Chabahar Port made confidential: *Official*

Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization said parts of a new agreement with India to develop the southeastern port of Chabahar have been made confidential in a bid to avoid problems that could be caused by US sanctions. "The contract with the Indian operator is not confidential but we have made some of its aspects confidential," Ali Akbar Safaei told ILNA on Saturday.

Safaei made the comments days after a press conference where he refused to

publicize details about the future activities of the Indian operator in Chabahar, Press TV reported.

He said the possibility exists that India may come under pressure by the US if details of the contract on Chabahar are disclosed to the media. Iran and India signed a deal in May under which the India Ports Global (IPGL) company is allowed to develop and control Chabahar for 10 years.

Chabahar is located on Iran's coast along the Sea of Oman and is the country's only

ocean port.

It is regarded as a major trade link between the Indian Ocean and Afghanistan and landlocked countries in the Central Asia region.

India seeks to develop Chabahar as a rival to the Chinese-funded Pakistani Gwadar and Karachi ports.

The IPGL has already invested \$85m on gantry cranes in Chabahar under a previous agreement whereby it was supposed to provide some \$250m in investment.

That comes as the new agreement has raised the

value of investment by the Indian side to \$370m.

Iran has its own plants to develop other terminals in Chabahar while it has invest-

ed hundreds of millions on building a railway between the port and the provincial capital of Zahedan near the border with Afghanistan.



Torang Cave in Kerman Province achieves national heritage status



Iranica Desk

The Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicraft Organization of Kerman Province has announced the registration of five new natural sites on Iran's National Heritage List, one of which is Torang Cave in Baft. Located in the southwest of the city of Kerman, this cave is known for its unique natural beauty, characterized by its long pathways, limestone formations, and flowing water, which have earned it a special reputation within the province.

Situated near Torang village and a mountain of the same name, the entrance path to the cave winds through a mountainous area adorned with almond, pistachio, and wild fig trees. Although Torang Cave may not be as widely recognized as other famous caves in Iran, it stands out as the longest and most significant cave in Kerman Province, distinguished by its breathtaking landscapes and remarkable geological features. In fact, this cave holds the title of the highest cave in the province and boasts a stunning pool, making it one

of the most picturesque caves in the country.

The initial path to the cave is accessible and does not require any special skills; with a bit of hiking motivation, visitors can reach it. However, the entrance to the cave presents a challenging and rugged terrain that necessitates both daring spirit and mountaineering equipment. Upon entering the cave, those with the necessary climbing gear can explore its expansive interior. Without proper equipment, however, one may find themselves enveloped in abso-

lute darkness, navigating a labyrinth of winding passages that can be disorienting. This limestone cave features multiple chambers and corridors, showcasing a mesmerizing collection of stalactites, rock columns, and formations created from carbonate deposits. Within the depths of the cave lies a unique water pool, a sight that is hard to believe until witnessed firsthand. This pool is located at the end of one passage, and the route to reach it from other chambers is relatively easier. This accessibility makes this

area popular among locals and novice mountaineers. At the end of the stalactite hall, two openings lead to water-filled chambers. By traversing the opposite hall—known as Anahita Hall, the most significant section of the cave and a symbol of fertility and righteousness in ancient Iranian culture—we arrive at these chambers. Anahita Hall consists of three parts: the dry area that descends to the edge of the water with a depth of five meters, the left side containing a water-filled ravine known as Anahita Gorge, and the

right hall from which the Anahita River flows, entering the left passage. Inside the cave, the tranquil flow of water creates a serene atmosphere, allowing only the reflection of light off a smooth, transparent surface to reveal our presence. Now nationally registered, this beautiful cave is highly recommended for nature lovers and tourists alike. It is hoped that improvements in access and services will receive greater attention from local management.

● IRNA

Gonbad-e Baz, a testament to history and architecture in Natanz

Iranica Desk

Natanz, a picturesque city in Isfahan Province, is nestled in the foothills of the Karkas Mountain. Renowned for its rich historical heritage, Natanz is home to several captivating monuments, one of which is the Gonbad-e Baz, also known as the Hawk Dome. This remarkable

structure was inscribed on Iran's national heritage list in 1967 due to its distinctive architectural features.

Visitors can access Gonbad-e Baz via two routes: the main trail and an alternative path. The main trail, located to the north, is steep and only a short distance from Natanz. However, this route is relatively distant from the mountain peak, requiring a walk of about 1,200 meters to reach the dome. Unfortunately, it does not provide an extensive view of Natanz.

In contrast, the alternative route mean-

ders through the Qadamgah foothills, offering a more gentle ascent of approximately 900 meters while affording a panoramic view of Natanz.

The Gonbad-e Baz dates back to the Safavid era during the reign of Shah Abbas I, who faced significant challenges in constructing this building atop the Karkas Mountains. After the Islamic Revolution, restoration efforts began but were hampered by economic difficulties and the transportation of construction materials. Eventually, the restoration of Gonbad-e Baz was successfully completed in 2001.

A fascinating legend surrounds the dome's name, "Gonbad-e Baz," which translates to "Hawk Dome." It is said that Shah Abbas Safavid often hunted in the regions of Isfahan and Kashan, using birds of prey like hawks. Among these, he favored the hawk species. In 1593, during a journey from Isfahan to Qazvin, one of his hawks died. In memory of this beloved bird, Shah Abbas commissioned the dome to honor it and inter its remains within.

Architectural features

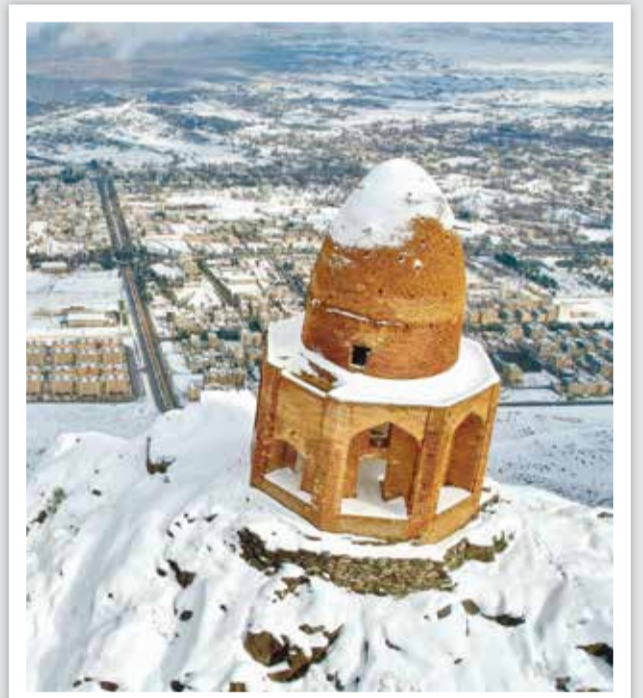
The Karkas Mountain, where the dome is situated, rises about 3,895 meters above sea level. The dome's foundation is constructed from local rubble stones, forming a circular base approximately 10 meters in

diameter and three meters high. The dome itself is octagonal, built with bricks and mortar. Each side of the octagon measures three meters, with a base diameter of 1.8 meters. Gonbad-e Baz is designed with eight portals, each measuring 100cm by 80cm, and extending 180cm in height. Above each door, there are vents that are 90cm high, leading to an external ivan (porch). The ivan dimensions are approximately two meters long, one meter wide, and three meters high, with brick flooring.

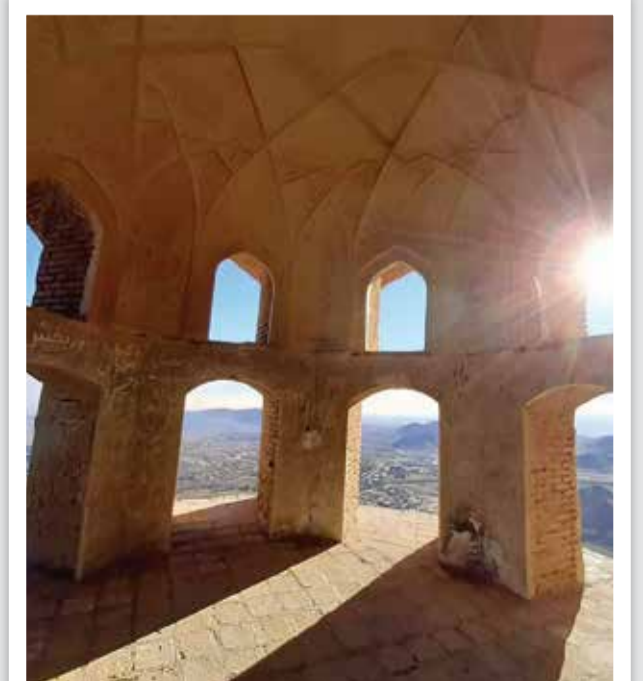
In the northwest corner of the structure, there is a dedicated portal with a staircase featuring 11 spiral steps, along with another staircase within one of the dome's pillars that connects the lower levels to the ivan above.

Remarkably, the Gonbad-e Baz is highly resistant to earthquakes. Despite numerous seismic events over the years, the dome has remained remarkably intact.

Constructing the Gonbad-e Baz on the rugged terrain of the mountain presented significant challenges. Today, this dome stands as one of Natanz's most striking tourist attractions. As one enters the city, the Gonbad-e Baz is the first structure that captures the eye, drawing visitors with its unique architectural beauty. To experience this landmark up close, a hike along the trail is a must.



● neshan.org



● neshan.org



● destinationiran.com

Dangerous push for Israeli-Saudi normalization

By Maria Fantappie and Vali Nasr
Scholars

OPINION

During his first three years in office, US President Joe Biden based his Middle East strategy on a single, straightforward project: normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Such a deal, Washington thought, would stabilize the tumultuous region and constrain an increasingly emboldened Iran. The United States would then be free to shift its resources away from the Middle East and toward Asia and Europe. The Arab world might even become part of an ambitious Eurasian trade corridor connecting the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea, an enterprise that could compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative.

By the fall of 2023, US officials seemed close to brokering an agreement. Saudi Arabia indicated it was ready to normalize ties with Israel if, in exchange, Washington would strike a security pact with Riyadh. The United States was prepared to grant the Saudis their wish. Although the pact would theoretically deepen the United States' regional commitments, American officials hoped that, thanks to a newly strong Israeli-Saudi relationship, Saudi Arabia would rarely need US military assistance.

Then came Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel. The assault, which killed roughly 1,200 people, shattered the notion that the Middle East's actors could simply ignore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When Israel responded by launching a devastating invasion of Gaza — one that, so far, has killed more than 39,000 Palestinians — it enraged the Arab world's citizens and cast Iran and its regional allies as frontline defenders of the Palestinian cause. Arab rulers were forced to change course. Saudi Arabia pulled back from the normalization agreement, insisting that Israel first accept Palestinian self-determination. Its neighbors also distanced themselves from Israel.



The illustration shows Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (L), US President Joe Biden (C), and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

American officials are aware that the facts on the ground have shifted, but they are still clinging on to their pre-October 7 vision. Despite the mass demonstrations, they are shuttling back and forth to Riyadh to peddle a deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia. In fact, US officials seem to think that an agreement is timelier than ever. American policymakers have suggested that Riyadh should normalize ties with Israel if the latter agrees to a cease-fire in Gaza. To Washington, Israeli-Saudi normalization remains the solution to the Middle East's ills.

But this view is, increasingly, a fallacy. Saudi Arabia will not establish relations with Israel in exchange for an end to the war. At this point, Riyadh will establish relations with Israel only if the Jewish "state" takes clear and irrevocable measures to create a Palestinian one. And Israeli officials have shown absolutely no interest in doing this.

If the United States still wants an Israeli-Saudi deal, it will have to lean hard on the Israelis to change their position. It needs to secure not only a cease-fire but also a positive, long-term plan for Gaza's future that ends in Palestinian statehood. It needs, in other words, to show Arab leaders that working more closely with Israel will not further inflame the region with conflicts that undermine their own credibility while strengthening Tehran and its partners. Otherwise, the United States is wasting its time by pushing for normalization — and jeopardizing the security of besieged Arab governments.

Won't back down

Since the war in Gaza began, the United States has had a decidedly mixed diplomatic record in the Middle East. On the one hand, Washington pulled Israel back from the brink of direct confrontation with Iran, after the two exchanged missile fire in April. It is now scrambling to prevent Israel and Hezbollah from entering into all-

out conflict. But when it comes to the heart of the matter — the fighting in Gaza itself — American diplomacy has achieved very little. Washington has failed to influence the conduct of the war; to secure a cease-fire, or to obtain any commitments from Israel about the future of Gaza or a Palestinian state. These failures jeopardize Washington's successes in other domains. So long as the fighting continues, for instance, Israel's standoff with Hezbollah will intensify. Shelling between the two has displaced tens of thousands of Israelis since the onset of the war in Gaza, and so Israel now views securing its northern border as part and parcel of its campaign to destroy Hamas. Such an escalation could invite Iran and its regional actors to intervene to assist their Lebanese partner.

It is not hard to see why the United States has failed to stop the bloodshed. US officials have been pressuring Arab states, particularly Egypt and Qatar, to secure Hamas's acquiescence for a cease-fire deal, but it has barely exercised its considerable leverage over Israel. Instead of threatening to curtail or end offensive aid, Washington's main approach has been to tell Israel that, should it stop fighting, it can have formal relations with Saudi Arabia. This is not a promise that the United States can deliver. The Saudis have refused to offer normalization in exchange for just a cease-fire, and it is unlikely that they will reconsider.

Even if Riyadh were to accept such a deal, there is no guarantee that Israel would consent. The country has rebuffed every call, whether from Wash-

ington or the UN, to end the conflict. It has considered pulling back its forces only temporarily, in order to free Israeli and foreign captives. Israel has proved so committed to the war that it has even jeopardized its ties to the Arab states with which it does have relations. Egypt and Jordan — which normalized ties with Israel in 1978 and 1994, respectively — have cooled diplomatic ties, put their military forces on alert, and warned that their peace treaties with Israel are at risk. Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, which both normalized ties in 2020, have reduced diplomatic contacts and business relations.

These moves have clear antecedents. Israel's conduct has inflamed the Arab world and threatened its stability. Egypt has seen mass domestic pro-

tests in support of Palestinians, and the country's leaders worry these demonstrations might turn against them. Cairo has, meanwhile, come under direct pressure from Israel, which violated the countries' 1978 agreement by seizing Gaza's Rafah border crossing. Israel did so without even giving Egyptian officials adequate notice. Other Arab governments that have relations with Israel, including Jordan and Morocco, have also witnessed large-scale street demonstrations. They fear that this popular outrage could eventually explode into an Arab Spring-type uprising or prompt a recrudescence of extremism and terrorism.

Israel's disregard for the interests of its Arab allies is explained, in part, by its all-out drive to destroy Hamas, but it also comes from a sense among Israeli officials that their country does not need regional peace treaties to be secure. Israel assumes that, if the need arises, Washington will control the behavior of Arab states. It also figures that these countries' anger toward Israel is balanced by their fear of Iran. When Tehran lobbed missiles and drones at Israel in April, for example, Jordan and the Persian Gulf monarchies cooperated with the United States to intercept nearly all of them. Israeli officials expect that, as escalation with Iran continues, the Persian Gulf monarchies will have no choice but to close ranks with Israel and the United States, and that Abu Dhabi and Riyadh will terminate their own normalization deals with Tehran.

But Israeli officials are mistaken. Although it is impossible to discern their exact motivations, Jordan and the Persian Gulf states likely helped down Iranian drones and missiles not to protect Israel but to prevent the larger war that would surely have ensued if Israel had been seriously hit. Since normalizing ties with Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have become more secure. (Before those deals,



Protesters wave Palestinian flags during a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Amman, Jordan, on October 20, 2023.

ANNIE SAKKAB/BLOOMBERG

Iranian-backed groups routinely struck both countries' territories.) They have no interest in reneging on their agreements, especially because their people do not see Iran as the enemy right now. Instead, their nemesis is Israel.

Deal or no deal

To overcome Arab governments' qualms about working more closely with an unchanged Israel, the United States could try to make its partners an offer they can't refuse. In exchange for increased Israeli-Saudi cooperation, for example, Washington might promise the Saudis not just a security pact but one in which Riyadh can maintain close ties to China. The United States could promise Amman that it will respond if Jordan is attacked by Iran, and that it will keep Palestinians from flooding across the Jordanian border. It could extend to Egypt additional economic support as well as guarantees that Israel will pull back from Rafah and desist from any actions that could

push Palestinians into the Sinai Peninsula.

But these promises would be financially and politically costly for the United States, which is already stretched thin, and they are still unlikely to have any effect. Arab governments would, no doubt, love more US support, but there is nothing that Washington can directly provide that would protect them from the rage of their citizens. There is only one workable path to greater Arab-Israeli cooperation, and it entails ending the war in Gaza and setting up a sovereign Palestinian state.

Washington must therefore stop focusing on how it can deliver normalized relations and start focusing on what will happen to Gaza in both the near and long term. In this, it has much work to do. The United States has not put forth a credible plan for the day after the conflict ends, risking anarchy and an endless humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip. In the absence of

US pressure, Gaza could even end up being indefinitely ruled by the Israel Defense Forces. The Israeli cabinet might then direct the IDF to gradually push Gaza's population into Egypt, opening the territory to Jewish settlers. Should that succeed, Israel could force Palestinians out of the West Bank as well. It may not even need the military to do so. Instead, it could simply defund an already enfeebled Palestinian Authority, rendering it unable to deliver services, and then let violent settlers run rampant. Until these scenarios are firmly off the table, no Arab state will agree to normalize relations with Israel.

To save the Palestinians and promote Arab-Israeli ties, the United States must promote an alternative pathway for Gaza's future. It can start by presenting a strategy for how Gaza can be reconstructed and how its security can be ensured. Such a plan must have buy-in from Arab states, which is essential to securing an intra-Pal-

estinian consensus that can keep the strip safe. But only Washington can pressure Israel into ending the war and accepting such a proposal, and only Washington can mediate between Israeli and Arab leaders over a security arrangement for Gaza. Arab states might be hesitant to work with Israel at all, but US leaders should remind them (and the Israelis) that no one benefits from continued turmoil, and that they have a shared interest in creating a sustainable post-war plan. The alternative, after all, is a forever war in Gaza and possibly the West Bank and Lebanon, which would destabilize the entire region.

After there is a viable plan for reconstructing Gaza, the United States can begin to work on its bigger mission: creating a Palestinian state. It must get Israel to recognize the Palestinians' right to self-determination, commit to creating a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and create a diplomatic track to realize it.

This process would have to begin with a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, one in which Israel agrees to end its occupation of Gaza and let a unified Palestinian Authority govern over both Gaza and the West Bank. Such commitments could be enough to win over the Saudis and other Arab governments and open the door to deeper connections.

To be sure, this process will be extremely difficult. Israel is governed by hard-right politicians who have disavowed Palestinian statehood; the gulf between them and Arab governments is massive. But the United States must still make a serious effort to bring these parties together. Until there is a clear path to a Palestinian state, the Middle East will be caught in a continuous cycle of conflict. There will be no hope for regional stability, and there will be little chance that Israel and Saudi Arabia can normalize relations.

The article first appeared on Foreign Affairs.

Don't be fooled

Push for normalization about US dominance

By Edward Hunt
Scholar

OPINION

While Israel continues its military siege of Gaza, the United States is trying to exploit the situation with the goal of strengthening US power in the Middle East. Rather than seeking a long-term solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, the United States is prioritizing its longstanding goal of normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. With such a deal, which would require calm in Gaza to bring Saudi Arabia on board, the United States would further marginalize the Palestinians while more tightly integrating Israel into its regional network of alliances and partnerships.

"I think we're at a point where the necessary agreements between the United States and Saudi Arabia are very well within reach," Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Congress last month.

US approach

For decades, the United States has dominated the Middle East. A key to US power has been the US-led network of alliances and partnerships that includes Israel and the Arab states. It enables the United States to station tens of thousands of soldiers across the Middle East and quickly surge additional forces into the area. "It's a vast strategic advantage," Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin explained in 2021, referring to the US-led network. "It is unmatched. It is unparalleled. And it is unrivaled."

Egypt and Jordan, both of which now receive extensive economic and military assistance. Most Arab states rejected such deals, insisting that there must first be a resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, but some of them changed their positions during the Trump administration. Under the Abraham Accords, several additional Arab states vowed to normalize relations with Israel. They entered into agreements with Israel, enticed by special deals with the United States.

US officials have been nearly unani-

the accords by including Saudi Arabia. President Biden had once promised to make Saudi Arabia into a pariah over its killing of a Washington Post columnist, but he wanted a deal even more, knowing that Saudi Arabia had dropped its longstanding insistence upon the establishment of a Palestinian state as a condition for normalization with Israel. Saudi leaders, it was reported, sought a deal that would merely keep open the possibility of a Palestinian state.

"We've been working — this goes back well before October 7 — working with Saudi Arabia and with Israel to pursue normalization between the two countries," Blinken acknowledged in May. "This would be a game changer."

One of the most striking things about US policy is that the Biden administration has not changed its approach since October 7. Not only has it continued its one-sided support of Israel, but it has moved forward with its plans to bring Saudi Arabia into the accords, even while indicating that the accords may have led to the current crisis.

"I'm convinced one of the reasons Hamas attacked when they did — and I have no proof of this; just my instinct tells me — is because of the progress we were making towards regional integration for Israel and regional integration overall," President Biden said on October 25, just weeks after the attack. "And we can't leave that work behind."

Purpose of US plans

As the Biden administration has chased its imperial ambitions, officials have insisted that relations between Israel and Palestine must change. Without a new arrangement, they say, the cycle of violence will continue. There will be what Blinken called "endless cycles of violence, destruction, death, and insecurity."

At a congressional hearing in May, State Department official Barbara Leaf called the status quo "terrible," especially for the Palestinians. They live "in a state of everything ranging from unhappiness to frustration to rage to despair to militancy," Leaf said. "It's a terrible recipe for militancy, for radicalization."



Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat (L) elbow bumps with an Emirati official ahead of boarding a plane leaving Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on September 1, 2020.
NIR ELIAS/AFP



US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken (front-R) speaks with the families of Israeli captives in Tel Aviv on May 1, 2024.
ODED BALILTY/AP

Although US officials have boasted of their power, their approach has been a major source of instability, especially as it concerns relations between Israel and the Arab states. Since the founding of Israel in 1948 and the Nakba for the Palestinians, many Arab states have refused to recognize Israel. Israel and the Arab states have fought several wars.

The international community has favored a two-state solution, which would create a state of Palestine alongside Israel, but the United States has effectively opposed it, even while rhetorically supporting it. Focused on maintaining its regional network, the United States has pursued bilateral deals with Arab states that are willing to establish peaceful relations with Israel. By the end of the twentieth century, the United States had played a central role in brokering deals with

mous in hailing the Abraham Accords as a great achievement, but critics have pointed out that the accords exclude the Palestinians. In Foreign Policy in Focus, John Feffer has warned that it would be unwise to wish away the Palestinians, especially if there is genuine interest in ending the "fratricide" that has been so destructive to Israelis and Palestinians.

Officials in Washington are aware of the criticisms. "It has been fashionable in some foreign policy circles to believe... that you could somehow achieve peace and stability and security by jumping over the Palestinian issue," Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) acknowledged last month.

Few officials have taken such concerns seriously, however. Before Hamas carried out its October 7 attack against Israel, the Biden administration had been trying to expand

In fact, the Biden administration has insisted that it supports a two-state solution. Its plans for normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, administration officials say, will eventually lead to the creation of a Palestinian state. They are even endorsing plans for a cease-fire in Gaza, a move that follows their acknowledgment that Saudi Arabia now requires a period of calm and a pathway to a Palestinian state to enter into a deal.

Still, the Biden administration has made it clear that it opposes the creation of a viable Palestinian state. As it has blocked efforts at the United Nations (UN) to establish a Palestinian state, it has worked to impose constraints on Palestine.

A major priority of the Biden administration is to limit Palestine's security. Administration officials insist that any future Palestinian state must be demilitarized.

"There are a number of types of two-state solutions," President Biden claimed earlier this year. "There's a number of countries that are members of the UN that... don't have their own militaries. Number of states that have limitations... And so, I think there's ways in which this could work."

The Biden administration is also requiring Israel to have a say in the creation of a Palestinian state. It demands that the Palestinians negotiate with the Israelis, despite the fact that the Israeli cabinet and the Israeli public oppose a two-state solution.

When Congress questioned Blinken last month about the administration's plans for normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, Blinken made note of another condition, which is that any deal would not result in the immediate establishment of a Palestinian state. In fact, Blinken indicated that the US vision of a longer pathway to a Palestinian state is not intended to fulfill the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

"The whole point of normalization but also the whole point of the establishment of a Palestinian state is to make sure that Israel's security is better ensured," Blinken said.

Indeed, the Biden administration remains focused on the goal of integrating Israel into the US-led network of alliances and partnerships in the Middle East, just as it had been trying to do before October 7. Rather than trying to achieve a two-state solution that could bring an end to what one US representative recently called "75 years of misery," the administration is working to take advantage of the current crisis for the purpose of strengthening US dominance, regardless of the consequences for the Palestinians.

"Despite the fact that we say those words" — two-state solution — "we have never addressed our policy to use our influence to make it happen," Senator Van Hollen acknowledged.

The article first appeared on Foreign Policy in Focus.

Iran to send 66 sportspersons to 2024 Paralympics



MEHR

Iran's National Paralympic Committee will send 66 athletes to the forthcoming 2024 Paralympic Games. The Iranian Para athletes will compete in 10 sports in Paris, according to Mehr News Agency. The Games will run from Aug. 28 to Sept. 8 in Paris and will host more than 4,000 athletes from around the world competing in 549 medal events. The first Paralympic Summer Games in the French capital will showcase 22 sports, including both individual and team sports. Previously in the 2020 Paralympic Games, Iran partook with 62 athletes and won 12 gold medals, 11 silvers, and one bronze.

Koushki joins Esteghlal

Alireza Kouhshki joined Esteghlal football team from Gol Gohar on Saturday. The 24-year-old midfielder has penned a two-year deal with the Blues, according to Tasnim News Agency. Koushki is Esteghlal's fifth signing in the transfer window.

Esteghlal has previously completed the signing of Milad Zakipour, Mohammad Hossein Eslami, Ramin Rezaeian and Saman Fallah. Also on Saturday, Farshid Samiei was named as Esteghlal football club's general manager.

Samiei was working as the club's acting president since parting ways with Ali Khatir on May 1.

He is a lawyer and has nearly two decades of experience in the role.

Under his leadership, Esteghlal has completed signing of Milad Zakipour, Saman Fallah, and Ramin Rezaeian so far.

Persepolis defender Hanonov signs for Sepahan: IPL



TASNIM

Persepolis' Tajik defender Vahdat Hanonov joined the Sepahan football club on Sunday.

The 23-year-old center back joined Persepolis from Istiklol in 2021 and played 29 matches for the Reds and scored a goal, wrote Tasnim News Agency.

He was frustrated with the lack of game time in Persepolis.

Hanonov is a member of the Tajikistan national football team and has played 35 times for the Crowns.

Wrestling Asian Youth Championship:

Iran Greco-Roman wrestlers crowned with nine medals

Sports Desk

The stunning performance of Iranian representatives at Greco-Roman Wrestling of Asian Youth Championships brought home six gold, one silver and a couple of bronze medals in Sri-racha, Thailand.

The Iranian squad bagged a total of nine medals to stand atop the team table with 206 points, followed by Kazakhstan, which tallied 185 points and Kyrgyzstan at the third place with 141 points.

At the end of the first day's competitions on Saturday, all five representatives of Iran won gold medals as Ali Ahmadi-Vafa in 55kg, Erfan Jarkani in 63kg, Alireza Abd-e Vali in 77kg, Mohammad Hadi Seydi in 87kg, and Abolfazl Fat'hi Tazangi in 130kg won the golds.

Ahmadi-Vafa thrashed Kazakh Arsen Zhuma 8-0 in a thrilling final showpiece to walk away with the ultimate prize of the 55kg-category contests, while Jarkani came out victorious 5-1 against Saudi Arabia's Munthir Jandu for the 63kg gold.



IRNA

A third gold medal for the Iranians came in the 77kg event, where Abd-e Vali outmuscled Ulan Muratbek Uulu of Kyrgyzstan 9-0 in the final. Seydi won another gold medal for Iran in 87kg final with an

8-0 victory over Kazakh Baglan Kuanysh while the fifth top prize was fetched by Fat'hi Tazangi in 130kg as the Iranian athlete bested Jokhar Uzarov from Kazakhstan in the final.

As second day of the contest

ended on Sunday, one more gold medal was snatched by Iran's Hamidreza Keshtkar in 97kg, while Ahmadreza Mohsennejad settled for the silver medal of 67kg and two bronzes were won by Ahoura Boveyri and Mo-

hammad Arjomand in 72kg and 82kg, respectively.

The sixth gold medal for Iran was drawn by Keshtkar as he defeated Kazakh wrestler Rakhmat Berzhanov 6-3 in the final game.

Pope hails unifying power of sport ahead of Olympics



AFP

Pope Francis hailed the unifying power of sport on Sunday ahead of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and repeated his call for a worldwide truce during the event.

"Sport has a great social strength, capable of peacefully

uniting people of different cultures," he said in St Peter's Square after his weekly Angelus prayer, ahead of the Olympics opening ceremony on Friday in Paris.

"I hope that this event can be a sign of the inclusive world that

we want to build and that the athletes, with their sporting testimony, be messengers of peace and effective models for young people in particular," the 87-year-old said.

"According to the ancient tradition, the Olympics are an occasion to establish a truce in wars, demonstrating a sincere desire for peace."

The Olympic Games run from July 26 to August 11, followed by the Paralympic Games from August 28 to September 8.

West's double standard

Meanwhile, IRNA wrote on Sunday that the West's double standard approach toward human rights and equality is once again in the spotlight amid France's refusal to ban Israeli athletes from participating in the Paris Olympics.

Calls have been growing on France to ban Israel's participation in the 2024 Summer Olympics - seen as a symbol of

global peace and friendship - over the regime's genocidal war on Gaza that has killed nearly 39,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, since early October.

But the government of Emmanuel Macron and the Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games have remained adamant, refusing to put the ban on Israeli participation. This comes while Russian and Belarusian athletes are treated in a different way over the war in Ukraine. Their athletes are barred from participating under their national flags and are only allowed to qualify as neutrals.

Western countries have taken a tough stance against Russia over the Ukraine war, which began after the same countries failed to address Moscow's security concerns over their military alliance NATO's expansion eastward. But the West has remained silent on the continued killing of civilians in

Gaza by the Israeli regime and has even tried to portray Israel as a victim of the war.

This blatant support, while being inhumane based on moral values, is considered unwise as it has had no benefits for Western governments but to draw global anger against them. The reason behind this support is probably related to Western politicians who achieve personal political gains by remaining loyal to Zionist lobbyists providing them with money and power.

With popular calls already getting louder in Western countries over the Israeli regime's conduct, these governments are better to realize that keeping support for the regime at the expense of silencing freedom-seeking voices is of no use for them, while adopting double standard approaches regarding international bodies will discredit these bodies and replace them with other organizations.

Azerbaijan rejects visa to Iran 3x3 women basketball team

The Iranian women's team was denied visa by Azerbaijan, leaving them out of the FIBA 3x3 Women's Series 2024.

The Iranian team will not be attending an international tournament, as their visa requests have been denied by the Azerbaijan Republic, reported Mehr News Agency.

Iran was scheduled to meet Germany's Düsseldorf ZOOS on July 20 in Pool B but the match was forced to forfeit.

This season of the FIBA 3x3

Women's Series features a marathon with 20 stops confirmed. The two-day event is being held in Quba, Azerbaijan.

The first stop of the 2024 season was held in Springfield, the US, on April 23-24, marking the first-ever Women's Series in the United States since the launch of the competition in 2019.

With a total of 20 events throughout this season and over 1.4 million USD in prize, the Women's Series is set to reach unprecedented heights.



MEHR

Leader calls for 'constructive interaction' between parliament, new gov't

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the success of the newly-elected President Masoud Pezeshkian in performing his duties is the success of all Iranians, calling for 'constructive interaction' between parliament and the new government. Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks during a meeting with members of the new Iranian Parliament in Tehran on Sunday. "My strong recommendation is the constructive interaction of the parliament with the new government. The success of the president and the new government is the success of all of us. Everyone should help the president to fulfill his duties towards the country," he said. The Leader noted that, "If the president succeeds in managing the country's affairs, improving the economy, advancing foreign relations and cultural issues, we all succeed. His victory is a victory for all of us." Ayatollah Khamenei further called on the Iranian legislature and administration, as well as officials, to

have a "united voice" in dealing with important issues to "disappoint" those seeking to sow discord among them. Meanwhile, the Leader urged the parliament to immediately give a vote of confidence to the cabinet that Pezeshkian will announce, saying, "The sooner the proposed cabinet is approved and the government starts working, the better for the country." The parliaments, he emphasized, can also play a role in both removing and neutralizing anti-Iran sanctions. After the meeting, Pezeshkian in a message posted on his X account appreciated the Leader's support for the government, calling the people's trust and the Leader's support as the government's greatest asset to achieve further successes ahead. Parliament's Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf also took to the X, saying that in response to the Leader's recommendation about constructive interaction between parliament with the new administration, parliament will do its utmost to



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks during a meeting with Iranian lawmakers in Tehran on July 21, 2024. [khamenei.ir](#)

help the government.

Gaza crisis

During the meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei also touched

upon the crisis in Gaza, saying that Gaza, which is enduring a genocidal Israeli war, is still the first and foremost issue of the Muslim world despite waning

enthusiasm.

The Leader called on Iranian lawmakers not to remain silent about Gaza because the issue is as important as it was in

the first days of the Israeli onslaught and it has even grown in importance.

"Day by day, the resistance increases the demonstration of its power. A great military, political, and economic apparatus like the US is fighting behind the usurping Zionist regime against a resistance group, but they have failed to bring Hamas to its knees," the Leader said.

Thus, he added, the US and Israel are taking their anger out on Gaza people, including children and women, and committing war crimes by bombing schools and hospitals in the besieged Palestinian territory.

"The people of the world are now judging against the evil usurping regime; The issue is not over and it is still ongoing."

Health ministry: Many victims still under rubble, on roads in Gaza

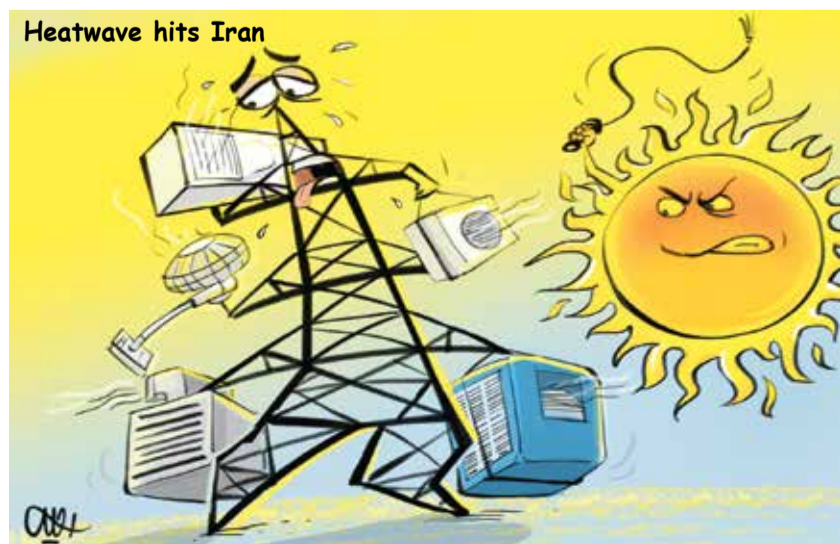


The Health Ministry in Gaza said many victims of Israel's genocidal war on Palestinian territory are still under rubble and on roads, with civil defense crews not able to reach them. The ministry said on Sunday at least 38,983 people have been killed in Israel's onslaught since October last year. Health Ministry said at least 64 people were

killed and 105 injured in Israeli attacks across Gaza in just 24 hours. Israeli attacks on areas of central Gaza in the past week have been focused on Nuseirat refugee camp, where dozens of people have been killed. "We hear the sounds of explosions in Nuseirat and we see the smoke rising from here in Deir el-Balah, the last refuge you can say and we are

being terrorized by the feeling tanks may roll here," Tamer Aburakan, a resident of Gaza City, now displaced in the central area of Deir el-Balah, told Reuters. "Where should we go next? The entire Gaza Strip is under fire and we are being hunted like deer in a forest. When is enough? When the war will ever end?" he said via a chat application.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Yemen vows 'huge' response to Israeli aggression on Hudaydah



International Desk

Yemen's Ansarullah movement promised "huge" retaliation against Israel on Sunday following the regime's deadly strike on the port of Hudaydah.

The Yemeni Armed Forces said earlier that they had targeted Israel's port city of Eilat with ballistic missiles as well as American and Israeli-owned vessels in the Red Sea.

The forces' spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Saree announced in a statement on Sunday that they carried out a specific military operation against important targets in the Umm al-Rashrash (Eilat) area "with a number of ballistic missiles and the operation has achieved its goals successfully."

Saree also said the naval and the missile units of Yemen's Armed Forces conducted a joint military operation targeting the American ship "Pumba" in the Red Sea with a number of ballistic missiles and drones.

Saree underlined that the Yemeni forces would continue their naval operations against Israeli, American, and British ships or those heading to Israeli ports until the regime's aggression stops and the siege on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip is lifted.

"The Yemeni armed forces confirm that the response to the Israeli aggression against our country is inevitably coming and will be huge and great," he asserted.

In Hudaydah, at least six people were killed and more than 80 wounded. Firefighters struggled to contain the massive blaze caused by the strike on Hudaydah, with a port employee saying fuel storage tanks and a power plant were still on fire on Sunday. Saudi Arabia urged restraint on Sunday in the wake of the Israeli strike.

The Israeli attack "aggravates the current tension in the region and halts the ongoing efforts to end the war in Gaza," the Saudi Foreign

Ministry said in a statement. It "called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to distance the region and its people from the dangers of war."

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kana'ani strongly condemned the Israeli attacks, warning that such aggression risks exacerbating the already dire situation in the region. Kana'ani noted that such dangerous adventurism on the part of Tel Aviv could escalate tensions and fuel the flames of war in the region. Israel said it carried out the attacks in response to hundreds of operations that Yemen's Armed Forces have been conducting against the occupied Palestinian territories and Israeli interests in support of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, who are enduring a genocidal Israeli-US war. In a daring attack on Friday, the Yemeni forces struck with drones an area near the US consular facility in Tel Aviv early on Friday, killing one person and injuring 10

A giant fire erupts at an oil storage facility following Israeli strikes in Yemen's port city of Hudaydah on July 20, 2024. [AFP](#)

others as the Israeli air defenses failed to intercept the unmanned aerial vehicle. Yemen has been targeting the occupied territories as well as Israeli ships and vessels affiliated with the regime since October 7, 2023 when Tel Aviv began a genocidal war against the Gaza Strip.

They have vowed to keep up their operations as long as the regime sustained the war and a simultaneous siege that it has been enforcing against the Palestinian territory. The Israeli onslaught on Gaza has so far resulted in 38,919 documented Palestinian fatalities, mostly women and children, in addition to 89,622 injuries.

Iranian artist Ramin Hosseinpour awarded at LA festival



national festivals. It recently won the Best Composer Award at the 26th edition of LA Sun Film Fest in Los Angeles, California, the US, the award for Best Animated Music Video in the latest edition of the HALO International Film Festival in Saint-Petersburg, Russia. It has also received prizes from the King Film Awards 2023 in London, the 2022 Vancouver Independent Film Festival Award, the 2022 Rome Music Video Award, the LA Music Video Awards 2022, One-Reeler Short Film Competition, International Music Video Underground, Munich Music Video Awards, Boden International Film Festival, High Tatra Film & Video Festival, Art Blocks International Film Festival, Europe Music Video Awards, Vegas Movie Awards, Accolade Competition, Europe Film Festival UK, Stockholm Gold Awards International Film Festival, Prague International Film Festival, International Izmir Short Film Festival, International Music Video Awards, and Zagreb Film Festival.

Iran's director Abbasi picked for Canadian festival's jury

Arts & Culture Desk

Asghar Abbasi, a renowned Iranian writer, producer, and director, was selected to evaluate the films at the upcoming Human International Film Festival in Toronto, Canada.

The festival, which focuses on environmental protection, will hold its closing ceremony on February 11.

Abbasi is known for his internationally acclaimed short films and has won numerous awards for his work both domestically and globally. This will be his second time serving as a juror at the Human International Film Festival, having previously been a juror at the festival back in 2020.

In addition to his international presence, Abbasi has also served as a juror for several domestic film festivals in Iran.



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian artist Ramin Hosseinpour added another accolade to his name, winning the award for Best Rock Music Video and Special Effects at the 30th Los Angeles Film and Music Video Festival in July 2024. Hosseinpour, a multi-talented creator, wrote, directed, and composed the music for 'Sculpture,' a video art piece that showcases his unique storytelling

and innovative visual style, Mehr News Agency reported. 'Sculpture,' also known as 'Sooratgar' in Persian, is a conceptual art piece that brings to life the stories of Rumi and Shams Tabrizi. The project highlights Hosseinpour's skills as an electric guitarist and singer as well. With a background in architecture, music, and cinema, Hosseinpour's work transcends traditional boundaries. He is

recognized as a designer, instructor, and author in architecture and as a poet, composer, arranger, and instrumentalist in music. In the world of cinema, he has made a name for himself as a writer, director, producer, and conceptual artist, succeeded in international platforms, including a renowned German magazine. Hosseinpour's video art has previously won awards at various inter-

New method for choosing Iran's cabinet line-up



By Hamideh Hosseini
Staff writer

PERSPECTIVE

On July 30, Iran's new President Masoud Pezeshkian will be officially inaugurated in a ceremony held in Parliament. Prior to this, the Leader will endorse Pezeshkian's presidency in a separate ceremony. According to the law, the president has 15 days after the inauguration to present his cabinet line-up to Parliament for a vote of confidence. Pezeshkian, who was himself a new phenomenon the presidential election, has now introduced a novel method for choosing his cabinet members. The procedure, which is said to be implemented to bring transparency to the minister-selection procedure, involves political and civil groups, university professors, and elites in the decision-making, and avoids the usual quota-seeking practices. The president-elect appointed Mohammad Javad Zarif, the

former foreign minister and a key figure in his election campaign, as the head of the "Advisory Council for Choosing Cabinet Members." Zarif, who had already played a positive role in Pezeshkian's election campaign, is now set to have another part in forming the cabinet. As per the new method, the Advisory Council is a 31-member committee that will oversee the process of introducing ministerial nominees by designated working groups and, after reviewing them, will forward the selected candidates to the president. In the designed chart for the minister-selection mechanism, five working groups have been set up, each responsible for reviewing the candidates for several ministries. The political, security, and defense working group is in charge of picking candidates for the Intelligence Ministry, Interior Ministry, Defense Ministry, Justice Ministry, Foreign Ministry, and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

The economic working group is tasked with looking for finance minister, minister of industry, mining and trade, the head of the Planning and Budget Organization, and the governor of the Central Bank. The infrastructure working group has to come up with a list containing the ministers of oil, energy, agriculture, communications, and roads and urban development. The cultural working group is responsible for choosing education minister, minister of science, research and technology, minister of culture and Islamic guidance, minister of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts, and minister of sports and youth. Finally, the social working group is in charge of introducing vice president for women and family affairs, minister of welfare, minister of health, the head of the Martyrs Foundation, the chair of the Department of Environment, and the president of Administrative and Recruitment Affairs Organization. This new approach by the president-elect is sure to

shake things up and keep everyone on their toes as they figure out how to pull their weight in the fresh take on cabinet formation. According to Zarif, the President's Office has called on civil societies and entities, prominent political figures, and even Pezeshkian's electoral rivals to put forward their preferred names to the five working groups. The working groups are tasked with reviewing the lists of nominees for each ministry based on predetermined scientific and expert criteria. Among the important qualifications for assessing the nominees, special points are awarded to candidates who are female, young, or from ethnic and minority backgrounds. "We are trying to make more use of ethnicities and groups who have had less presence in governments, as well as more youth and women. We also plan to make use of former ministers as advisors to the ministries. We are seeking to ensure that 60% of ministers are under the age of 50 and

that 60% do not have a ministerial background," Zarif has said. According to former foreign minister, the concessions to youth, women, and minorities are a form of "positive discrimination" aimed at reducing existing inequalities. However, four key criteria serve as red lines that the five working groups must consider when assessing potential ministers. If any of these four qualifications are missing, the candidate has no chance of becoming a minister. These four red lines are: a) adherence to the Constitution and higher-level documents, b) reputation for having a clean background, honesty, courage, and rationality, c) having a national perspective free from ethnic, religious, factional, and regional biases, and d) alignment and loyalty to the president's mottos and approach. The call for nominations to all groups and political figures, including electoral rivals, has sparked speculation about the possibility of Iran's next government being a coalition.

However, Zarif has emphasized that Pezeshkian's government will not be a coalition but a national unity government, and those who do not accept the president's discourse and policies will not be part of it. Under the new design, the working groups, after their specialized reviews, must nominate three to five candidates for each ministry or national organization to the Advisory Council. The council will then review these candidates and forward them to the president. According to Zarif, the process of evaluating and introducing candidates to the president will be completed by July 24 to give Pezeshkian time to assess the nominees. Nevertheless, it's important to note that the council is merely an advisory body to the president. Ultimately, the president has no legal obligation to accept the nominees put forward by the council. According to the law, the final decision regarding the presenting ministers to Parliament rests solely with the president.